

BE GENEROUS / Sunday, September 13, 2015

Unifying Topic: **SHARING ALL THINGS**

Lesson Text

I. **A Lesson In Generosity** Acts (4:34-37)

II. **A Lesson In Deception** (Acts 5:1-10)

The Main Thought: Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold. (Acts 4:34, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Although there are exceptions, most people are glad to share what they have with those in need. What enables people to give up what is theirs for the good of someone else? The early followers of Jesus shared everything with one another, and although some did not cooperate and were punished as a result, there was not a needy person among them.

Lesson Aim: To understand the sacrifices and rewards emanating from the early Christians' willingness to share their possessions with others.

Life Aim: To examine one's motivation for making sacrificial offerings that fit the larger community.

HISTORY:

Acts 4 Peter and John spoke to the crowd gathered around Solomon's colonnade in which the priest, the captain of the Temple came near, and the Sadducees seized them. After finally being released by the Sanhedrin, Peter and John returned to the other disciples reporting to them all that had occurred. When they heard their story, they lifted up their voices to God united with one accord; praising and praying (vv.23-28).

They desired three things from God: 1) to grant them the boldness to continue to preach His Word; 2) for Him to stretch forth His hand to heal; 3) and, that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. By the time they finished praying, God had answered their prayer. The place they were meeting in, began to shake. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly preached God's message. They went through a trial; had a prayer meeting, and came out in victory (vv.29-31).

There were thousands of believers with one heart and one soul walking in unity brought about by the Holy Spirit. They held nothing back from one another which meant that they had all things in common; no one was in want or was hungry, because if one had it, they gave to another. This was not because someone prodded them to do so, or gave them an ultimatum. Christ's physical body was not there, but they did as He had taught them. The filling of the Holy Spirit gave the apostles great power and great favor to be witnesses to others of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, for many of the Jews did not believe in life after death. The apostles had favor. Favor was twofold: 1) favor from the people outside the church because of the believers' unity and love. The common people were impressed. They were glad to do it. 2) And favor with God from whom all blessings flow. One question comes to my mind: "*Are you really filled with the Holy Spirit?*" because most of us are not cooperating with the Spirit (vv.32-33).

LESSON:

Acts 4:34-37 A Lesson In Generosity

4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,— The early church took care of all those who had a need. Four revealing facts show how obedient the early believers were. Can we be that obedient today? To give away what we really need? What a change in us and in the world there would be!

1. Fact 1: no one lacked; no one went without. The idea is that no family, no man, no woman, no child was neglected. No one was left without the necessities of life; no one had to face a day without food, clothing, or shelter that he needed to take care of himself or his family.
2. Fact 2: all repented of their hoarding and they gave everything beyond their own necessities. Some possessed lands they did not need, and sold them and gave the money to meet the needs of others. They had to have had land, meaning estates they did not use; extra possessions. Some possessed houses that were not essential to their necessities, so they sold them, and gave the money to meet the needs of others.

Who they sold them to, I do not know..

4:35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

3. Fact 3: the needy received only what they needed; only what their necessity was. Everyone who gave up jobs to work for God, at least had their necessities met. The money was laid at the apostles' feet and distributed by them as needed. This simple plan ensured that there would be no poverty in the church. There were three groups in these two verses. There were the rich, defined as anyone who owned anything. There were the apostles, the designated spiritual leaders. And there were the needy, defined as those too poor to own houses or land.

4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,—

4. Fact 4: one man in particular set a godly example—Barnabas. This is the first mention of Barnabas, the Levite, having no inheritance, but undoubtedly acquired land as individuals from the Island of Cyprus. He was "*Joses who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas.*" His name means "*Son of exhortation*"; "*Son of Consolation*" and "*Son of Encouragement.*"

4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Barnabas was one who had sold a field he owned, and brought the money, and willingly put it at the apostles' feet to be distributed to every man according as was needed. This is truly a lesson of generosity among the people.

Acts 5:1-10 A Lesson In Deception

5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,— Here we have another example of people who gave of their possessions. Ananias along with his wife Sapphira were "*professing members*" of the early church. They professed Christ. They had some property which they did not personally need for their own necessities. Therefore, they sold their property in order to help those who were desperately needing food, shelter, clothing, and the gospel.

5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But their profession was just that, profession only, a false profession. They tried to fake their commitment. They tried to deceive the church. Ananias and Sapphira had apparently not learned the lesson that there is no such thing as secret sin. Their sin was— "*holding back.*" Holding back or keeping back was fivefold.

1. Keeping back is partial commitment. Ananias with Sapphira kept back part of the money that so many desperately needed. They refused to give everything beyond their own necessities. They hoarded and chose to hang on to part of the world.
2. Keeping back is deception. It's deceiving the church. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the church to think they were fellow believers. They wanted the privilege and the honor; the acceptance and the fellowship of believers without paying the price of commitment and loyalty to Christ and His church. They wanted to be included and become part of the church fellowship, but they did not want it enough to totally commit themselves to Christ and His mission. So they tried to deceive the church. They became pretenders (hypocrites, liars).

5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?— When Peter confronted Ananias with whether or not Satan had filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, he could only know this by the Spirit of God.

3. Keeping back is allowing Satan to fill the heart instead of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Person who stirs sin; He is not the Person who arouses a person to hoard and keep back. The Holy Spirit stirs love—love that cares and ministers. Satan's strategy is to get us to believe his lie that we can keep back and hoard and still be acceptable to God.
4. Keeping back is lying to the Holy Spirit. Ananias had let Satan tell him what to do. He had promised to give all the money to God. Because he did not do this, he had lied to the Holy Spirit.

5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou

conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. What belonged to Ananias was indeed his to give. Therefore, after selling the land, he could do what he wanted with the money. Since he chose to give it to the church in the same manner that Barnabas had given, he should not have attempted to lie to God and his servants by claiming that he had given his all.

5. Keeping back is acting against and lying to God Himself. A person who keeps back is saying that he does not have to be honest with God; that he can lie to God. A person mocks God by keeping back. A person cuts the heart of God when keeping back. A person distrusts God when keeping back.

No one could know these sins had filled Ananias' heart, not by what he did, not without God revealing it to Peter that the sin had filled and completely possessed Ananias. It seemed like, Ananias was lying unto men, but he was really lying to God. It is said that his heart was completely occupied and possessed by Satan.

5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. As Peter confronted Ananias with these words, Ananias immediately fell down; not to pray or to worship; but he fell down and was struck dead for his sin against God. The people learned that death can be the consequence of sin. "*Great fear*" was the response that came upon the people to this manifestation of God's presence. This great fear involved both a reverent awe and a healthy fear of God's displeasure of sin and discipline of that sin.

5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. The young men prepared him for burial. The Jews did not embalm, but customarily buried the dead the same day, especially someone who died by divine judgment.

5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. Unaware of what had just occurred to her husband 3 hours earlier, Sapphira came before Peter and the other disciples.

5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. A similar question was asked Sapphira concerning the selling of their land they possessed.

5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. The question from Peter is: How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Ananias as head of the household was responsible for his wife. He led his wife to follow right along with him; he caused her to lie. She came right along and agreed with her husband. He had an opportunity to lead his wife in righteousness. Because she had conspired with her husband to test the Spirit of God, and attempted to increase her image in the eyes of the other believers, Peter knew that together they tempted (trying to escape detection of) the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, he predicted her doom—"the same feet of those who carried out her husband, would also carry out her."

5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. Peter informed Sapphira of her impending death before it happened. As predicted, she also fell down and died at the apostle's feet; so did her husband. The young men came in, found her dead, and carried her out and buried her by her husband.

SUMMARY:

There were two lessons being illustrated here: the generosity of Barnabas and the deception of Ananias and Sapphira. None of the believers lacked what they needed because they were of one heart and one mind. All who possessed houses or lands were willing to sell them for the needs of others. They began to lay all the proceeds at the apostles' feet. Distribution to others was given as each had need. The example of Joses, called Barnabas, Son of Encouragement, by the apostles. He was a Levite of the country of Cyprus. He sold land, and laid the money at the apostles' feet (4:34-37).

A husband and wife by the name of Ananias and Sapphira sold their possession (land) to help those in need. They tried to mislead the apostles, and test the Holy Spirit, acting as if they were giving the entire proceeds to them. Peter confronted them one at a time, finding them guilty of lying against the Holy Spirit. They both fell dead, bringing great fear upon all (5:1-10).