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## *Generous Grace*

**Acts 4:33-37**

**Keywords:** Acts 4, Giving, Grace, Tithing, Generosity

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**Sermon Summary:** Today we have the opportunity to watch a young, vibrant church instinctively act out their love for God and love for one another in a very simple and, yet, life altering manner. There are all sorts of way we can discuss and think about money, giving and such but the New Testament does it in a specific manner that we should carefully consider. Instead of talking about the amount, we instead find it speaking of the heart and the motive of giving. And that is what is reflected here in our passage. It is told in a story format but it reflects the heart and motive for a people filled with generosity.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. The beginnings of persecution has come and gone.
- B. The young church is now bursting at the seams with thousands of Jews who have turned from rejecting Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior.
- C. But what happened to Peter and John were merely the birth pangs of what was to come.
  1. They were released with a warning to stop preaching in the name of Jesus.
  2. The church was filled with thanksgiving for that release, but also all the more convinced that they had to be bold in preaching the good news of Jesus as the Messiah.
- D. This is a good time for everyone in the church.
  1. It is growing, there is a spirit of thanksgiving, there is apparent unity and even the persecution was not very serious.
  2. God is obviously at work and the Apostles are performing many miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  3. Lives are changed, relationships are healed, spiritual fervency is on the rise. It is a good time.
  4. But things are going to change and they will change rather rapidly. Sin is still in the hearts of the people.

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- E. But not today. Today we have the opportunity to watch a young, vibrant church instinctively act out their love for God and love for one another in a very simple and, yet, life altering manner.
  - 1. Read Acts 4:33-37.
  - 2. There are all sorts of way we can discuss and think about money, giving and such but the New Testament does it in a specific manner that we should carefully consider. Instead of talking about the amount, we instead find it speaking of the heart and the motive of giving.
  - 3. And that is what is reflected here in our passage. It is told in a story format but it reflects the heart and motive for a people filled with generosity.
- F. For those who remember and keep close to their hearts the grace of God shown to them, giving becomes second nature. This is because true giving is the result of grace poured out in the heart of the giver. It is merely the splash of the grace that was, and continues to be, poured out into their lives by God.
  - 1. We will approach this sermon very simply. First, we will let the story unfold. This will prepare us for the rest of the story next week, one that is not quite so cheery.
  - 2. Second, we will develop the theology behind this story to help us in our own conduct.

## **II. Generous Grace.**

- A. The first part of this story is what happened after Peter and John were freed by the religious leaders.
  - 1. We know they went back to the other apostles and core group to report what happened. We know that they then committed it all to the Lord in prayer and that God was working many amazing things through the apostles (30)
    - a. The Apostles were busy doing what they were supposed to do, preaching and teaching. They were assuring the people that they truly had seen Jesus risen and ascended into heaven (33a).
    - b. And as the people heard, believed and were both saved and encouraged we find grace, great and abundant grace, was upon the people.
  - 2. To understand grace and our response to it you need to understand this apostolic message preached in vs 33.

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- a. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Without it there is nothing “Christian.”
  - (1) The Christian faith is not a set of rules or morals.
  - (2) It is not a personal relationship with Jesus.
  - (3) It is not a series of activities and rituals.
  - (4) It is not a set of doctrine or teachings.
  - (5) It is not a belief.
- b. At its core it is about who Jesus is and what Jesus did.
  - (1) This is the message that is preached and it is the message that we are called to believe. But whether you believe it does not make it go away.
  - (2) The message is simply this: that Jesus is the promised One from the Old Testament. That He is God in human flesh. The one God-man.
  - (3) That He lived in perfect obedience to the law of God, doing what none of us can do, be sinless.
  - (4) That He came for the purpose of dying. Not in some empty act to show us how important we are; rather, it was to become our substitute. To die in our place.
- c. Why? It is sin.
  - (1) Sin is first and foremost in relation to God. Only secondarily is it in relation to one another.
  - (2) Sin is a quality or power that dominates this creation. We are described as being “under sin” and it is one of dominion. Because of this power that constantly presses upon us and in us, we commit sin. We sin because we were first sinners.
  - (3) So what is sin? It is anything opposed to the will of God or the character of God. Anything that is of greater joy or importance than God.
  - (4) “Sin may be then defined ultimately as *anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to,*

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*the holy character of the Creator” (Buswell, Theology, I.262).*

- (5) The effects separate us from God. Sin makes us now rebels before God. It enslaves us to itself as our master rather than God as our Master. The consequences is death.
- d. This is why Jesus came to die. To be that substitute for us. The bible says that the soul that sins must die. And we have all sinned so we must all die.
  - (1) Unless One who had no sin would die in our place. And that is what Jesus, the God-man, did.
  - (2) But the resurrection is what is most important for in it we find the certainty that Jesus’ death accomplished what it was to accomplish.
  - (3) The resurrection tells us that God accepted Jesus Christ’s death. That there is something greater than this world. That the promise is true that Jesus gave that all who hope in Him alone shall be raised from the dead as well.
  - (4) That is what it means to be a Christian. To share in the hope and certainty that Jesus is our perfect Substitute who took our sin and died our death on our behalf. That He rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and that He is coming again to save those who hope in Him and to judge those who do not.
- e. So this is what is happening in our passage. Vs 33 is simply a testimony that the teaching of the Church. The Apostles had one core message—Jesus is the Lord and it is because Jesus rose from the dead.
3. Thousands of Jews were now believing and following Jesus. And as this took place they found themselves changed. They had a different outlook and a different set of values. And the rest of the book of Acts is going to unfold this.
4. What I want you to notice in the last part of vs 33. “. . . and abundant/great grace was upon them all.”
  - a. Grace is understood by us as undeserved favor and kindness by God. It is the essence of why God saves anyone. None deserve it, none can earn it. And no one is worthy of it. God shows us infinite and eternal grace.

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- b. Grace is how we are saved and forgiven. “By grace you are saved. . .”
  - c. But grace is also how a Christian lives and grows into maturity.
  - d. Both of these are what we find in front of us here in vss 33-37.
- B. We start with a pleasant image of the generosity that comes from people walking in true fellowship and love for God and one another.
- 1. This grace is evident in generosity and genuine concern for the needs of believers. Note the fulness of what is seen in vs 34.
    - a. Not one needy. “all.”
    - b. What do we do, then, as recipients of God’s grace? Beloved we give.
      - (1) God gave us His Son. God gave us His Holy Spirit. God has given us every spiritual blessing. God’s grace is seen in giving.
      - (2) And the same is for this young church. There were genuine needs that many were experiencing and those who has the ability to help, did so.
      - (3) The way this passage is constructed it indicates that there was a gradual liquidation of assets by those who had them.
      - (4) Not some sort of communism or communal cult. The decision to divest of property was not in the hands of the Apostles, but in the hands of the owners.
      - (5) The amount they gave for the needs of the other believers was also up to them. They could give some or all of it.
    - c. Understand that poverty was a very real issue for the early church.
      - (1) Many in this new entity called the church did not even have a home. These were travelers from distant lands who had come to celebrate the Day of Pentecost.
        - (a) They heard the message of Jesus Christ by Peter and believed.
        - (b) Now they were staying because they needed to learn. And this put a great need and burden upon everyone.

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- (2) But you also had many who simply suffered because they were now following Jesus as the Christ.
  - (a) People stopped buying your wares. People would not hire your services.
  - (b) This created real division in the households. The family unit was much more defined than in the American culture.
  - (c) In light of the coming Christmas celebration consider the meaning of Matthew 10:32-38.
  - (d) This division is not caused by your foolish choices in life. It is caused by the new orientation you had. Jesus is now Lord. He is your hope and priority. You follow Him and that means that everything changes.
  - (e) So in Acts you have people who will no longer go to the Temple to sacrifice. They are telling everyone in their home that Jesus really is the Promised One they were waiting for.
  - (f) And it created division and this created financial problems for many in the Church.
  - (g) But the church responded to this challenge in an incredible expression of generosity that was costly.
2. This act of giving was done in a very public manner (35a).
  - a. They lay the money at the feet of the Apostles.
  - b. This was likely done at the temple area known as Solomon's portico or porch (5:12). The church would gather there throughout the week to be taught and to continue to evangelize the other Jews coming to the temple.
  - c. A common misconception is that giving must be private and no one is to know what you give. This is usually because of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:3-4, "*But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*"

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- (1) That passage is not a treatise on giving. It is a treatise on seeking to be seen as righteous and religious in the sight of others.
  - (2) In the verse just prior, Jesus speaks of the hypocrites who sound a trumpet before they give and the purpose is so that they can be honored before the people.
- d. In reality, the New Testament consistently indicates that giving is part of the worship and it is visible for the most part to the people. Most definitely it was here in the early church.
3. The distribution of the funds was not a private affair, but the task of the Apostles (35b).
  - a. Giving was quite public. But so was the distribution of that money.
  - b. It also was not private, where someone would quietly give another person a sum of money. Rather it was the task of the Apostles to distribute it. It appears they would give the money to others to purchase food and necessary items that then was given to those in need.
  - c. This situation rapidly grew into a problem as the numbers grew and so we have the story in Acts 6.
4. We then have a specific example of Barnabas (36-37).
  - a. Again we see that this is not done in some private, hidden manner. Luke had no problem reporting on both the good actions and the sinful actions within the church.
  - b. Barnabas was not his actual name; rather, it was Joseph, which was the second most popular name for Jewish males in Israel at that time. The first was Simon. Barnabas was a nickname.
  - c. He was a Levite, which means he may have worked at the Temple in some way. Only those of the tribe of Levi could do this.
  - d. However, he was also from Cyprus, which would mean that he was part of the Jews who had been taken out of Israel during the many occupations by the various nations over their history.
  - e. What is more important here is that Barnabas is introduced here but will become a key individual in the spread of the good news throughout the Gentile world. He brings Saul, who became Paul,

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to the Apostles after he was converted to Jesus Christ. He became a consistent companion of Paul's.

- f. And so here we find that this man was wealthy enough to have extra land and he sold it for the care of the other believers. And this little story sets up the next story of Ananias and Sapphira, which we will see next time.
- C. What we see in this story is the nature of how God's grace to us, when rightly understood, motivates generosity. The Apostle Paul teaches this in a more formal manner in 2 Corinthians 8-9.
1. 8:1-4 churches of Macedonia were giving out of their poverty. Well beyond what would be considered wise.
  2. 8-9 he then doesn't command but he defines it in the gracious work of Jesus that abounded in their riches through forgiveness.
  3. 10-15 he reminds them that they started out being generous with their commitments, so now he challenges them to be faithful to accomplish it.
  4. 16-23 he explains that Titus is involved in the gathering of the money promised from the various church.
  5. 8:24-9:5 then lays it on thick. Notice the fear that covetousness is on his mind (23c).
  6. 9:6-11 shows again his thinking. God blesses a heart of generosity. And generosity is, by its very definition, generous. It is not hedging your bets. But it is not generous to intend to give and then not follow through.
    - a. Note in vs 11 the purpose Paul gives for the Corinthian believers to be enriched.
    - b. What is the purpose of raises? Why does God enrich us?
    - c. We say, "a little bit more" but God says that as you give (10) He will multiply your funds to be all the more generous.
    - d. We wait until we feel we have enough but we ought to give out of a heart of generosity and wait upon Go to refill as He decides. This is the idea of storing treasure in eternity or here.
  7. 12-14 then brings us to the heart of the issue. As we give it is not merely to help the needs of other believers. It is ultimately about worship.
    - a. This is what is meant by "overflowing through many thanksgivings to God" in vs 12.



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- b. The one who gives and the one who receives both end up giving thanks to God for the opportunity.
  - c. And our giving and generosity becomes evidence of your faith and hope in the gospel.
  - d. For most of us, we will be the givers for we have the means to give. For others it is the opportunity to pray for us for that is all they have.
8. 9:15 brings it to its fitting end. It is not Paul thanking the Corinthians for their generosity. It is giving thanks to God for His generosity.

### III. Conclusion.

- A. We have in this passage a reminder that we do not exist alone or in a vacuum.
  - 1. We are vitally connected to one another not through a common heritage, language or national identity.
  - 2. Rather it is our interconnectedness through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have this fellowship, this sharing in the Holy Spirit. We share in our common faith.
- B. This brings us the challenge that we are truly responsible for one another.
  - 1. And this ought to move us to seek to share and support our brothers and sisters as we hear of their need.
  - 2. Beloved, we can give for many reasons and we can withhold for many reasons. But the bible says that a thankful heart that is fully aware of the generosity of God towards you and I compels us to be generous as well.
- C. Next week we will see two people who give the external appearance to be generous like Barnabas and many others. But their heart was covetous and the result was disastrous.
- D. Consider the gospel. Consider the riches of God's grace towards you. And then reflect on whether you reflect that in your own generosity.

### Benediction

**May you go in the love of the Father resting in the fulness of His grace. May you walk in hope through the rich calling in which you have in Jesus Christ our Lord. May your power not be found in you but through the presence of the Holy Spirit. And may we all continue to grow together in true unity.**