

The Church Continues to Thrive

Text: Acts 4:32-37

Introduction:

Following their arrest, and having been severely threatened by the Sanhedrin (the religious leaders, making up the highest court in Israel---which condemned The Lord), the Apostles Peter and John return to their brethren and report to them all that has happened. Then, together, they lift up their voices in prayer before God, seeking His empowerment and grace, so that they might continue to boldly and faithfully proclaim salvation in the Blessed Name of Jesus the Christ! And the Lord answered their prayer by shaking the place, and filling all of them with the Holy Spirit, so that they might continue to speak the Word of God boldly! They were equipped to carry God's life saving message of power.

And furthermore, this "filling of the Spirit," continued to affect their lives, individually and collectively, setting that glorious pattern of unity and self-sacrifice that we have already witnessed, and which we will continue to witness this morning, in the remainder of this chapter. Opposition has come, and will increase, but with the Spirit's vital help, the church pushes forward and thrives for the glory of God, and His Christ!

I. The Church Continues to thrive

Notice again then, brethren, those critical elements contained in the faithful and prosperous church:

I- In the inner man, the people had one heart and one soul. In other words, brethren, again, they were united in purpose! Christ was their glory, their hope...their very lives! They were of one heart...how can you be so sure of that? Because they all had a common object upon which their hearts and attention were fixed. They didn't have to line up and compare notes, seeking to discover some common ground upon which they could all meet. The object of their focus was unmistakable embedded within them. The object was a Person, a Person with a will and a desire; a Person building a kingdom; a Person who had redeemed them from the penalty and power of their sins; a Person whom they loved and upon whom their affections rested; their common object was Christ! They were set on building His kingdom, for His glory...indeed, they were equally jealous unto this end! And so, with their common focus being on Christ, they were all united in heart and soul unto the end of glorifying this Christ, in the proclamation of His Gospel. They were bent on "making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Triune God, and teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded them!" Testifying to the glorious resurrection of the risen Savior, who has entered our finite world to rescue sinners from their indwelling curse, that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit, was their common mission.

And brethren, because this was their common bond; the common union of their inner man, it manifested itself outwardly in the profoundest of ways! It gave them a new

outlook on life, on possessions and material things. The things they once coveted and lived for; the pearls they once drooled over and sought after, were now of little value to them, because they found the Pearl of Greatest Value in Christ!

2- And so, we are told that their common oneness of heart and soul, led them to the place where, no one said "that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (vs. 32b). They weren't holding on to this world or anything in it. And so, they were not "possession" minded. The word "mine" became a foreign concept, as they began to use their resources in such a way that would help sustain life in the present, while preparing *for* and looking forward to their real home in glory. And because of this attitude, they were able to manifest the love of Christ in a very effective and undeniable way.

3- And furthermore then, brethren, it was within this context of prayer, unity of heart, and self-denial that we are told in verse 33, "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of The Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all."

The Word of God; the Gospel, was proclaimed with great boldness and power, Holy Spirit generated power, unto the conversion of the lost. And great grace was upon them all. God was pleased to deposit an abundant measure of His grace, upon a people, who were sold out for His glory! God redeemed them in Christ; He gave them new, sanctified, worthy desires in Christ, and He met those desires with His treasured grace! They were growing and prospering in grace! They were empowered for the task at hand! The church was thriving! The Word was going forth with great power, and God was paving the road for a growing and vibrant church.

4- [Read verse 34]. No one lacked. Everyone supported each other; those who had an abundance, helped those who were without, and God blessed them all! Their needs were being met, so that they could concentrate on the work at hand, having their fundamental and most basic needs met.

Those who had real estate and lands; those who once invested all of their hopes and dreams in the dissatisfying "here and now," sold their assets, and took the proceeds from those sales, and laid them at the apostles feet, to be distributed according to the needs of the church. They invested in sustaining a vibrant church, with their hearts fixed on the ultimate goal at hand. The vision they shared led them to such love and self-sacrifice.

Brethren, such was the "life pattern" for the church in her infancy; in her most, "to be coveted" state! So vital and precious was this unity of spirit, that when the threat of penetrating it, came about, the perpetrators were immediately killed! [We will see this next time, Lord willing].

II. The Introduction of an Important Character

And then we are introduced to an important character in the Book of Acts, who plays an important role, in the laying of the foundation of Christ's church. [Read vs. 36-37]

Here, for the first time, we meet Barnabas, whose original name was "Joses" (Joseph). In fact, the apostles named him "Barnabas," because it was descriptive of

his personality and giftedness. Barnabas means, "son of encouragement." Joseph, excelled in the gift of encouragement, so much so, that the apostles changed his name to fit the description of how he was best known, among the brethren. And as we move on, to see the actions of Barnabas in the chapters ahead, we will better understand why this name fit him so well. But note for now, brethren, that this dear brother was a tremendous asset to the church, not merely because of his teaching/preaching gifts, but because he was especially graced with the ability to build others up in the faith.

Indeed, it takes a unique and gifted person to excel in this way. He has to often fix his gaze on others, which means he has little time to fix his gaze on himself. He has to study people, to understand their hurts, sorrows, disappointments, fears and doubts, and he has to be read to carefully and accurately apply the Word of God to each wound, so that the people of God, unhindered, will be able to press forward in Christ. He has to be patient, willing to bear and endure the ongoing trials of others with them, so that he might help them find courage and strength to move on. Most everyone is discouraged at some point in their Christian walk (and most face discouragement on many occasions), and so, a doctor of encouragement, is a crucial and vital asset to any church. When everyone was afraid of Saul (the former persecutor), and doubted his sincerity in the faith, he needed a Barnabas to take the risk of embracing him, and to bring him into the fold. When the new born churches among the gentiles, were being attacked in all manner of ways, they needed a Barnabas to encourage them onward in Christ. When Paul had given up on John Mark, Mark needed a Barnabas to give him another chance on the mission field.

Brethren, while some excel in the gift of encouragement, we are yet, all called to encourage one another in the faith, even daily. We need each other, especially in this regard, because discouragement impedes our progress in grace, doesn't it?

We are also told that Barnabas was a Levite, who was originally from Cyprus. This gave him advantages, both in his having a priestly heritage, and in his connection with Cyprus, a gentile region, through which he and the Apostle Paul would later travel in their missionary journey together.

Finally, we find Barnabas presented to us, as an example of one who had owned land, which he had sold, that he might lay the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. Barnabas, who later was ordained and set apart unto the mission field with Paul, set the example first, for all that he would later preach to others. Pastors/leaders are not above the laypeople! Barnabas was a proven man of God, who evidenced that his heart was with Christ and not in this world. He walked the walk!

Barnabas will also *positively* serve to parallel the *negative* example of Ananias and Sapphira, who are brought out in the text that follows. And both will provide a pattern for the two opposing views, which reveal the consequences to come about, in accordance with how people relate to Christ's church. Are you for or against Christ? Are you for or against His church? Do you live in support of the Apple of His eye or not? How do you relate to the Bridegroom and His Bride? Consequences for such choices are given in Acts (Ex: Herod).

Conclusive Words

- 1- Regarding the Unity of heart/soul
- 2- Regarding our attitude toward this world, and possessions
- 3- Regarding church leadership, as reflected in Barnabas

Amen!!!