

In our study in Acts, to date, we have read about the events surrounding the beginnings of the church. Once the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, the gospel message spread throughout Jerusalem and thousands of people turned to faith in Jesus Christ, in order to be saved. In chapters two, three, and four, Luke gives us an example of the kinds of things God did through the Apostles, in order to grow His kingdom among the Jews in Jerusalem. In Jesus name, Peter pronounced the healing of a man over forty years old, year old who had never been able to walk. This gave him two opportunities to preach the gospel: first to the eyewitnesses of the miracle, and then to the religious and political leaders of Jerusalem.

Our passage last time focused on the prayer of the church, after the authorities released Peter, and John. The heart of their request was that God would allow them to speak the word of God with great boldness, and that God would work signs, and wonders, to make their testimonies effective in reaching others for Christ.

In tonight's passage, Luke moves from the subject of spread of the gospel, to the heart, and character, of those who were being saved. In these verses, we gain insight in how to do a heart check in the church today. Let's read together Acts 4:32-37.

Luke begins by telling us that all of the believers were of one heart and mind. This is a primary indicator of a healthy church. When everyone in the church has their heart set on Jesus and His will, and when we all have our minds set in agreement about what God has for us to do, and how to do it, there is peace within the fellowship, and health within the body.

From my perspective, this is generally the case here at Hickory Hammock Baptist Church, and it makes serving here, as a pastor, a real joy. It has been many years now since I have had tightness in my chest at comments made in one of our quarterly business meetings. I have been in situations where a church business meeting became someone's platform to exalt themselves, or to force some agenda against the will of the leadership or the church at large. I have been in business meetings where people tried to, pick a fight, and hurt other people's feelings, rather than working out their differences privately. Praise God that we do not have any of that here.

There are times in any church where there will be misunderstandings, or disagreements, on some issue. When such things happen, we need to pray, and talk about it, talk in the love of Christ. If, for example, you believe in your spirit that the church is about to make a mistake by some action, we need to consider, and understand, your insight. The Holy Spirit just may be using you to protect the whole body. On the other hand, one person's feelings about an issue, does not necessitate a change in course, when the greater majority of the people in the church sense the leadership of the Holy Spirit to continue in the planned direction. In matters of uncertainty, the body of believers needs to look to the leadership of the church, because they are the shepherds of the flock.

The concept of being of one heart, and mind, points to a spiritual connection between the individual members of the church. We all share in the love of Christ and are led by the same Holy Spirit. We are brothers and sisters in the family of God. If we always want to do God's will, and we always want to bless one another, if we can set aside our pride, for the good of other people, and the church, the spiritual connection we enjoy will keep us from giving the devil a foothold, so that we can continue to be useful to God, in advancing His kingdom.

The bible says that the people in the church shared everything they had. There are many other passages of scripture that speak of sharing with the less fortunate, feeding the hungry,

clothing the needy, and other missions activities, but the context of this passage is that the members of the body shared with one another as the special needs of members became known. Just as the individual believers were connected spiritually, there was also a sense that they were connected materially.

In our culture today, there is a subculture, with an entitlement attitude, that looks at churches as an extension of a government agency. When they see a full parking lot, they develop a mindset that this church must have a lot of money; therefore they should give me some of it, because I have a need. Whenever someone fills out a benevolence application, we have to carefully, and prayerfully, review their information, make some calls, and rely upon the Holy Spirit as to whether or not we can help. Sometimes we don't have the money. Sometimes there is a concern that if we give them the money; we will only be propping up a godless lifestyle.

Whatever resources God gives us, we must use wisely to reinvest in His kingdom, and our charity needs to begin at home. We bring our tithes and offerings to the Lord, pool our resources, and invest them where we find the greatest needs. Some of our benevolent activities are provided for in our budget. We set money aside to support missions and other ministries that God has placed upon our hearts. All the ministries of the church that come out of the general fund are supported by our member's tithes. Sometimes there are needs that arise within the body and people give generously, and usually anonymously, an amount above their tithe, as they are able. People volunteering their time and talents take care of many of the physical needs of our church, and its grounds. We tithe, bring our offerings, give, and sacrifice for one another because of the spiritual bond between us, and the love of Christ we have for one another.

Verse 33 tells us that with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. Verse 33 is a direct answer to the prayer of verse 29. The people of the church asked for great boldness to share the word of God, in the power of God, and He answered their prayers.

The church today should do the same thing, and ask the Lord for boldness. We need to be bold in our witness. We need to be bold in our biblical stands. The opposition we face today is certainly no worse than the opposition the early church faced. But when we consistently pray for the right things in accordance with God's will, He not only answers our prayers, but also pours out His grace upon us.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. When we live in God's favor, we live in His protection and provision. If God is for us, who can stand against us? When we please God with our lives, and our actions, the Holy Spirit becomes more powerful within us. We live with a sense of God's presence, and this improves the overall quality of our lives. The unmistakable presence of the Spirit gives us new boldness, and we are better equipped for kingdom work.

The bible records that sometimes the members of the early church would sell houses, and land, and give it to the Apostles. They then distributed the resources to anyone who had need. From time to time I am made aware of large, and generous, offerings to the church that come from such sales, or when people come into a large sum of money from some other source. Without exception, the giver wants to remain anonymous, and their gift becomes a great blessing to the church and to the people who will benefit from the gift.

There have been a handful of times when people have offered to give with strings attached. One man said he would give the church a lot of money, if we would make me a deacon in the church. No thank you. I will make a donation to the church if you will hang a plaque in the foyer in memory of my mother, for everyone to see, until Jesus comes. I will buy a new church pew if you will put our family's name on the pew. Thank you for your kind offer, but no thanks.

Our tithes and offerings must come from a pure heart. The Lord loves a cheerful and gracious giver. It is not as though God needs our money in order to accomplish His purposes, but when we worship God with our tithes and offerings, when we put God ahead of our wealth, or personal agendas, He is pleased. He blesses, and multiplies, our resources. Everything we ever hope to have comes from God as He provides for our needs. One of the main ways that God provides for His church is through the tithes and offerings of its committed members.

Once the money was laid at the Apostle's feet, it was then distributed according to the need. With the money God provides to His church, He provides the materials to do whatever He has in mind for us to do. But, I don't know of any Bible teaching, Christ centered, New Testament church, who has unlimited resources to do everything they might like to do.

Early in our marriage, I told Debby that she could have anything she wanted, she just couldn't have everything she wanted. As Church Administrator I go by that philosophy when it comes to how we use the money God gives us. We have to pay our bills, including payroll. We have to live up to all of our commitments, lest we lose our testimony in our community and among our creditors. That new fangled electro-mechanical widget might be the greatest thing since sliced bread, and it sure would be nice to have it, but if the money is not there, maybe God doesn't think we need it right now, and if God thinks we need it, He will provide in His own time.

The Apostles represent the leadership in the church today. They had to oversee the money that was given, in order for it to be distributed properly. This responsibility, in our church, falls to the pastors, the budget committee, the financial oversight committee, the financial secretary, and ministry directors. In other words, when it comes to the day-to-day expenditures, the church family needs to trust the church leadership to do what is right, and according to God's will.

Of course there must be accountability, so we have many checks and balances, and quarterly audits, to insure there are no improprieties. The church family receives a financial report each month, and we go over the finances in our quarterly business meetings. Your pastors are careful, in our dealings, not to do anything that would even raise a question in anyone's mind about our integrity, so that you can have confidence that the Lord's money is going to the Lord's work.

In verse 36, Luke introduces us to a man named Joseph, who is also called Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. Barnabas becomes a key player in the early church. The bible says that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. It says that he brought a good number of people to the Lord. After Paul's conversion, Barnabas brought him to the Apostles. When word reached Jerusalem that Gentiles were being saved, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul, to bring him back to Antioch, in order to minister with him in the church. When a famine hit in Jerusalem, Barnabas carried an offering to the elders to give them relief. The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas, and Paul, and sent them on missionary journeys.

While Paul becomes the center of focus in much of Acts, Barnabas was always in the background doing the work of God, in Jesus' name. We see nothing in his character that suggests he wished to draw attention to himself, he was just a man of God, using his gifts and talents in answer to God's calling upon his life. Evangelists often model their lives, and ministries, after Paul, but for most of us, Barnabas is our example.

The idea for each of us is to allow God to develop us, and use us, in what ever way He sees fit. Barnabas was not in competition with Paul, he supported Paul, and encouraged him. All

the while he was doing the same things as his partner in ministry, but stayed more in the background. He didn't care about recognition, he was just happy to be in the Lord's service, and do whatever he could to help advance the kingdom.

May it be so with all of us. Let us continue to love, and support, one another. We give our tithes, and offerings, through the church, to advance the Kingdom of God. We sacrifice from the excess of God's blessings, so that we may be a blessing to others. We seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that we can live together in God's love, and grace.

If there is anyone here who has not yet surrendered their life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, I encourage you to confess, and repent, of your sins to God, and then invite Jesus into your heart as Savior, and Lord. Then we will welcome you into the family of God, and invite you to join this body of believers, as we seek to advance the Kingdom of God.