

13—Acts 4.32-37—Great Grace Upon Them All

- I. Introduction
 - a. People are not generous by nature. It is our nature to think it is better to receive than to give. Though I can't recall my own first words, I do know what my kids' first words were—MINE! They didn't need to be taught how to think this way. They/we are this way because that's who we are.
 - b. People who have been visited with God's amazing grace have a new nature. They do supernatural things like this passage describes. So, why preach this text? Well, because until Christ returns, we will battle the flesh. We need to be reminded, encouraged, or exhorted to be generous.
 - c. The only reason these people are like this is because great grace was upon them all! May that same grace be upon us too. Almost every letter in the NT begins with grace to you and most of them end the same way. It's not necessarily automatic.
- II. Main Point
 - a. The main point is simply that God's grace does amazing things to those who believe.
 - i. The place we see it so clearly is in the giving of resources to those who were in need among the believers and the continued speaking the gospel with great power.
- III. Outline
 - a. The why—Great grace was upon them
 - b. The how—they sold their property
 - c. A Specific Example—Barnabus, the son of encouragement (a contrasts)
 - d. Some practical helps on who and how to be generous
- IV. Exposition
 - a. The why is so important here. There at the end of verse 33 of this summary of early church life, we hear Luke telling us that great grace was upon them ALL.
 - i. We saw last week this wrestling over the threats of the rulers of Israel to stop them from speaking about Christ and the resurrection. However, the notable sign of the 40+ year old lame man who they had probably known for at least 20 years sitting at the Beautiful Gate was now **STANDING!**
 - ii. The church hears the report of the threats and with one voice they pray to the Absolute Ruler to look upon these threats and grant them boldness...freedom to keep on speaking the word of God.
 - iii. Therefore, God filled them with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the word even under threat!
 - iv. And here we are at one of Luke's summaries of what the formation of the church looked like. He did this same thing back in chapter 2 verses 42 through 47.
 - v. I think this summary describes what it looks like when great grace is upon the church while the next story in Acts 5 describes what it looks like when great fear is upon the church. Both are forming the church in some very unique ways.
 - vi. But why the emphasis on generosity among these new believers?
 1. First, I think Luke is writing exactly what happened. There's no need to think he singled out the fact that they had everything in common to challenge believers to give. He is simply telling the story of the acts of the Risen Lord Jesus in building his church.
 2. Secondly, I think this act of open-handedness often shows up as a clear sign that someone had been converted...had experienced the saving grace of God.
 - a. A few examples come to mind. If you compare, in Luke's Gospel, the rich young ruler with the rich tax collector named Zacchaeus I think you get a clear picture of one who experienced great grace and one who rejected great grace.
 - i. (Lk. 18:18) ¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

- ii. (Lk. 18:22-23) ²² Jesus...said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.
 - 1. Temporary riches were worth more than eternal riches in Christ.
 - 2. (Lk. 18:24-25) ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."
- iii. Now, when Zacchaeus who is rich receives mercy, notice what he does without Jesus saying a word about it.
 - 1. (Lk. 19:2) ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.
 - 2. (Lk. 19:8-10) ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."
 - a. This act revealed the work of grace in his life!
- b. As you might have noticed, if you have to tell someone to give then salvation hasn't happened. This generosity is the result of salvation not the means of salvation. It's no small wonder why Luke records the story of the healing of the blind beggar between the Rich Ruler and Zacchaeus.
 - i. One remained spiritual blind while the other had his eyes opened.
 - ii. Who was rich now?
- c. You might wonder, what about the poor? Isn't hard for them to enter the Kingdom too? Yes! It's all an act of sovereign grace. That's why disciples asked this question.
 - i. (Lk. 18:26-27) ²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."
 - ii. While the widow who gave all that she had (and I might add...both coins) is an amazing example, I think the churches in Macedonia helps us see the result of great grace upon a congregation for relief of the church in Jerusalem.
 - 1. (2 Cor. 8:1-5) We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
 - 2. Paul attributed this wealth of generosity from extreme poverty to God's generosity of grace to them!

3. They gave themselves first to the Lord and then they gave! The order is eternally important.
 4. Similar to last week, you have bold believers continuing to speak the gospel because they trust in the Sovereign Lord of all. Now, you see believers being generous because God has been generous to them!
 5. Our generosity says something about us. The grace of Christ causes us to open our hands and let go of our possessions because (Matt. 5:5) ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
 6. (Heb. 10:34) ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.
 7. As Luther said in his hymn, when God is your mighty fortress you can let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also!
- vii. I want to convince you or remind you that great grace being upon them all resulted in the giving freely of the gospel and the giving freely of their possessions to those in need among them.
1. Notice there in verse 32, the full number of those who believed are there. How many are there? At least 5000? Maybe even 10,000?
 - a. This is some if not all of the group that Peter and John reported the threats to. They are "their own." And these same ones do not count their possessions to be "their own." Amazing!
 - b. Is it not a miracle of grace that this many people have believed?
 - c. Is it not a miracle of grace that they all "were of one heart and soul"?
 - d. Is it not a miracle of grace that they say their own belongings were not their own?
 - e. Is it not a miracle of grace that they had everything in common?
 - i. This was the ideal way of a nation of people with God as their King! As God prepared Israel to enter the promised Land here's what he said-- (Deut. 15:4) ⁴ But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess
 - ii. This is what it was supposed to look like!
 - iii. No, this wasn't Communism. This wasn't a tyrant demanding that everyone give up their property.
 1. This was a group of people who had been transformed by God's amazing grace freely caring for their own!
 2. This is a picture of what eternal life will be. No one will have a need! The myriads of myriads and thousands upon thousands will be of one heart and soul and will have everything in common under the perfect rule and reign of King Jesus, forever!
- viii. But don't miss this—the Kingdom of God...the church that Jesus is building that looks like this only comes about by those who continue freely speaking the gospel. Faith comes by hearing and faith is the receiving of the gift of salvation!
1. Those who freely receive the gospel become those who freely share the gospel and share their belongings.

2. In other words, great grace was upon them all to freely speak the gospel and to freely give to those in need among them.
- b. Now, let's take a moment to see how they did this. By what means were they able to meet the needs among them?
 - i. It's interesting here in verse 34 literally says...there is no one who lacked in this community of believers.
 - ii. What is Luke trying to tell us? There should a "for" at the beginning of that sentence. (Acts 4:34)
³⁴ FOR, there was not a needy person among them
 1. He's saying this: "We know great grace is upon them all, for we saw it clearly by the way they were meeting needs."
 - a. In Acts 6, internal problems arise. The needs of the widows are not being met. This is a new threat that we will see later. But the continuation of people hearing and believing was seriously in jeopardy.
 - b. We need God's grace every day. If they had willfully watched their brothers and sisters starving among them then God's continued grace upon them wouldn't have been very evident.
 - iii. The second "for" in the middle of verse 34 describes the means of grace which no one lacked among them.
 1. (Acts 4:34-35) for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.
 - a. God's grace upon them all doesn't mean he rained down cash from heaven like manna.
 - b. No...grace causes us to do that which is unnatural to us.
 - c. Some among them—obviously not all—had lands and houses that could be sold at their discretion. Whether they were inherited properties or whatever we are not told. But it was theirs to do with as they saw fit.
 - i. They sold them for the purpose of providing for those among them who had needs.
 - iv. So, what did they do with the money?
 1. The repeated phrase is—they laid it at the apostles' feet.
 2. So, early on the apostles were tasked with this ministry in addition to what they were already doing. Later we will see in Acts 6 this is given over to the first deacons to take care of.
 3. But for now, they take the money and distribute it to each as any had need.
 4. The money was now at the discretion of the apostles to give to those among them.
- c. Now, we get more than an idea of freely giving. Sometimes we can talk about doing something and really like the idea of it but never really do it. Here, Luke gives us a name—Barnabus.
 - i. His real name was Joseph. As is with many whom experience God's grace, the apostles give him a new name—son of encouragement.
 - ii. He was a Levite who under normal circumstances, could not own property under the law. It seems the covenant community has changed a lot.
 - iii. His family was from Cyprus. Where the field was is uncertain. But it says in verse 37 that he sold a field that belonged to him. The apostles were not forcing him to sell. He freely sold it and freely brought the money to the apostles for distribution to any who had need.
 - iv. Where not given the reason why there were believers among them who had needs.
 1. I can imagine that committing to follow Christ caused lots of problems for those who lived in and around Jerusalem.

2. Jesus promised the allegiance to would divide families. That means the family farm was no longer an option. The family fishing business was no longer an option. Tax collecting and following Jesus could no longer work together.
 3. Surely, as we know, many poor, lame, and blind found salvation too.
 4. Thieves were converted. Remember what Paul said in (Eph. 4:28) ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.
- d. How do we practically work these things out in our day?
- i. You might be wondering if we are responsible for every need in the world? This text is only talking about needs within the full number of those who believed.
 1. It seems clear from scripture that we are most responsible for those nearest to us.
 - a. The circle is: Family. Church family. Community. And beyond.
 - i. Notice this: (1 Tim. 5:8) ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
 - ii. Additionally, (2 Thess. 3:10-12) ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.
 - iii. Young widows are not be enrolled but should marry and no be idle.
 2. The poor are much harder sometimes.
 - a. I give everyone a fair listen. Even when I have been taken advantage of, I try not to bring that with me into the conversation.
 - b. I try to meet apparent needs instead of just giving money. However, there are times when that is appropriate too.
 - c. Be discerning. Listen. Give. Ultimately, you are not responsible for what they do with it. Do your best and trust the Lord.

V. Response

- a. I want to end with this. (Rom. 8:32) ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - i. There is a logical argument that seeks to work from the greater to the lesser. That's what Paul is doing in Romans 8:32.
 - ii. If God the Father gave the greatest of gifts in the giving of His only, begotten Son then why would He not give us lesser things? The answer is, He will graciously give us all things.
- b. If you have never tasted the grace of God in Christ, I would like to urge you to come and see that the Lord is good. Open you hand and let go of the lesser and temporary things and lay hold of the greatest gift ever offered. Come, repent of your sins and trust in him, and you will have no lack.