

Acts 4:32-5:11

One Heart and Soul – United in Christ

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Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need

Introduction

In my home we have a basket that collects printer paper that has been used on one side but where the other side is still available for drawing or making a quick note. This scrap paper stash is also the go to supply for paper when the kids settle into a paper airplane construction frenzy. Who doesn't like making paper airplanes? My kids have a book that has detailed instructions on how to make any number of paper airplanes. Some of the designs are simple and easy to follow but others get quite complicated.

It happens every once in awhile that one of my children will stop through my in-home office with a paper airplane in one hand and the paper airplane construction instruction book in the other. The paper airplane will often look a little off: with wings a little short, or fuselage a little tall, and tell-tale signs of multiple fold lines that have been smoothed out and adjusted. They will approach my desk and ask if I can help make the design they have been attempting to make. You see they recognize that what they have and what is displayed on the page is different, not only does it look different, it doesn't fly well at all. The attempt to get to the end result without going through the steps always results in something less than the ideal. It just doesn't fly.

This is similar to the passage we have before us today and the results of living either as fully embracing of Christ's design for his church or attempting to just have the appearance of doing so. In the first, we see the believers as being of one heart and soul, giving grounds for the testimony of the apostles to be proclaimed about the resurrection of the Christ, and every need within the community to be met. But tragically in the second we see ruin comes upon the couple, Ananias and Sapphira, when they want to participate in the Christian community, the church, on their own terms. They are brought to immediate judgement and death. Their recorded testimony is tragically like the improperly folded piece of paper that has the resemblance of a paper airplane, the end result of trying to appear like a fully devoted member of the body of Christ is ruin.

I don't want any of us to get to comfortable as this message is getting started. Because if we reflect upon our church and our participation within in it I don't think we can say with confidence we are one heart and soul with one another. I mean fully one heart and soul. I don't think we can say that everything we have is not counted as our own. I'm not saying we are not compassionate towards one another, but the truth is we still have needs that go unmet. Peter accused Ananias of allowing Satan to fill his heart to lie. I don't believe we are filled with Satan as believers in Christ, but I do believe we have been compromised as a church by Satan's lies. The church is made up of individuals, and each individual is battling sin and deception. As this happens in the community our ability to be of one heart and soul is jeopardized. The answer to our problem remains the same. What was it that the apostles were giving testimony to? The resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Church when our whole devotion is to following Christ because of what he has done, our lives are no longer consumed with how to preserve something for ourselves. We give up on trying to maintain appearances. The truth is: **Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need.**

Where Grace Abounds (vv32-37)

1.v32a *"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul,..."*

a. We are talking about believers, this ideal picture, where grace abounds is in the church. To state the obvious the church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ.

i. When we consider the phrase that they were of one heart and soul we can't help but think of life and vitality. This is unity at its finest.

b.v32b *"...and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own..."*

i. Maybe this is difficult for us to grasp in the United States of America. We are so conditioned to make it on our own, that the idea of sharing is something we teach to our children but don't always model as adults.

ii. However, I want us to ask a question of ourselves. A quick survey if you will. Who here has something in their possession that belongs to another member of this local church? A book, a tool, a vehicle, a saddle..., baby items. Maybe it has been given to you with no expectation of having it returned.

c.v32c *"...but they had everything in common."*

i. Here the idea is advanced even further. Who are we talking about? The believers, the members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem. They are said to have had everything in common.

1. When you are of one heart and soul this is not strange.

2. It sounds somewhat strange to us because I believe we fail at the first point, not completely, but corruption is present which hinders us.

a. Satan's lies.

b. Our own sin.

d.v33 *"...with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection..."*

i. Within this ideal environment that is being explained in these verses we see what the church is concentrated on being fed from – teaching and testimony about the resurrection of Jesus from the apostles.

ii. It was by grace the Christ came and died for the sinners and in focusing upon what Christ did they were recipients of great grace.

1. They were focused upon Christ: **Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met their gravest need.**

e.v34 *"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners..."*

i. If you embrace the most fundamental aspect of Christianity, that Jesus lived the perfect sinless life, went to the cross on our behalf as an atonement for sin, died upon that cross, suffering the full wrath of God, being put into the grave, - and then raising to glorious life on the third day. The resurrection of Jesus!

ii. If he conquered the grave and through faith in him allows his followers to conquer the grave, then we don't need to be concerned with preserving our own life – he has met our gravest need!

f.v35 *"...and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."*

i. This wasn't everyone sold everything. This wasn't all becoming equally poor. It was a practical recognition of seeing what needs were present and then taking that recognition to the point of action.

1. John Stott: "Although in fact and in law they continued to own their goods, yet in heart and mind they cultivated an attitude so radical that they thought of their possessions as being available to help their needy sisters and brothers."

ii. v36 "Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,..."

1. Here we are introduced to the venerable Barnabas. The apostles called this man Joseph, by a name that means son of encouragement – the name we know him by through the rest of the book of Acts.

2. v37 "...sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money..."

a. His introduction is a historical point of reference, real detail of what this ideal situation in the church looked like, carried out to completion.

b. This was characteristic of being of one heart and soul in the early church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks similarly in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He writes,

i. "A sign has been given the powerless have here and now received a plot of earth for they have the church and its fellowship its goods its brothers and sisters in the midst of persecutions even to the length of the cross."

Transition: This section at the end of chapter 4 verses 32-37 describes in detail what life was like **Where Grace Abounds**, it is much like what we studied in **Acts 2:42-47**. But what has taken place between chapter 2 and now this description of the believers in chapter 4? They have started coming under attack, Peter and John were thrown in prison, placed on trial before the ruling counsel. The believers were being attacked from those outside the church. No doubt those attacks being instigated by Satan. The attacks were not having the effect desired by our enemy, so what we will see next is an attack from within and how God tenaciously guards his church from this type of attack.

Where Greed Abounds (vv1-11)

i. v1a "But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira,..."

g. These two are being put in direct contrast to Barnabas. They are being presented as the exact opposite of living in accordance with the truth **Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need**. What we will witness from these two is that they felt it necessary to meet their own needs. Causing us to question if they had trusted Jesus to meet their gravest need.

i. v1b-2 "...sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept..."

1. As Luke records this we are so close to v32 "no one said that any of the things belonged to him" that when we read "he kept back for himself some of the proceeds..."

2. We should immediately be questioning what is happening here? This is different!

3. v3 "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...'" Peter recognizes this is the work of Satan. It does not absolve Ananias of the wrong doing.

ii. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “By making his offer on his own terms he alters the whole position. For discipleship can tolerate no conditions which might come between Jesus and our obedience to him.”

h. Here in the passage before us we even have recorded a series of questions, questions asked by Peter, that help us understand the full embracing of the deception Ananias took in this deed.

i. Peter says, **v4a** “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?”

1. It was not required for individuals to sell their belongings. It was okay to have things that remained ones own.

ii. **v4b** “And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?”

1. If something was to be sold, the proceeds even still remained as a belonging of the one who sold the good. So, ownership is clearly not the problem.

iii. **v4c** “Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?”

1. The deed is a misleading, a deception that had taken place. Somehow Ananias thought he would bring the proceeds of this sale, keep back some for himself, and yet lead the apostles on to believe that what was brought was the whole amount.

2. The meeting of needs within the body by selling goods and property would have been well known, and God would have been praised for such acts. Ananias wanted full recognition for the good deed and he also wanted to keep some of the money, because after all who couldn't use a little extra money.

b.v4d “You have not lied to man but to God.”

i. For those of us gathered here, I hope that what we are working through is a serious reminder that our lives are fully known to God. We are not able to say one thing and think another. We are not able to act one way in secret and another way in public. We are to be a people known for our integrity.

c.v5 “When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great...”

i. The offense against God, the attempted deception of the Holy Spirit was brought to immediate judgment. The offense brought immediate death! God acted to protect his church. **Are we similarly zealous for the purity of the church?**

ii. This is a challenging passage of Scripture. I want to show you another similar instance from the book of Acts that will help ground us more firmly in our understanding of what is happening here.

1. Acts 8:9–24

2. What is different between the recorded offenses? The offense of Ananias and the offense of Simon?

a. Don't you see that Simon was at a place of ignorance when he was making his request, that from his ignorance he was challenged to repent – and he did! When Simon was confronted he sought repentance and he lived.

b.Ananias had predetermined to carry out his act of wrongdoing. He did so with the knowledge of his wife Sapphira. He knowingly went ahead with his act, expecting nothing ill to come of it. I believe he thought it would turn out for the best. Accolades for a good deed, and some extra money for his own needs. However, when confronted, he fell down dead!

i.v6 *"The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him."*

d.vv7-8 *"After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing..."*

i.In comes Sapphira, she has every chance to come clean. Instead what happens, she holds to the story that her and Ananias had come up with.

e.v9a *"But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit..."*

i.In my study of this passage I look at this couple, this husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, and I cannot help but think of the marriages that are represented here in this church. You know we hold marriage in a high position, because Scripture holds it in a high position. God has given us a wonderful gift with the joining together of a man and a woman in a life long covenantal relationship.

1.But the relationship is in no way is to be superior to the relationship we have with God. It should be an impossibility for believers joined together in marriage, I'm talking husband and wife, brother and sister in Christ, children of God.

2.It should be impossible for two believers to be equally deceived into doing that which is contrary to God's commands. We are to help each other maintain a high and pure standing before the sight of God. This is one of the great benefits of marriage. This is what Peter is questioning with this woman, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?"

3.Let me ask, are you on the verge of doing this very thing in your marriage? Wives, are you going along with something your husband is doing that is contrary to God's clear commands, because you are trusting him over God? Husbands, are you failing to lead your wife by going along with something she is doing that is contrary to God's clear commands, because of your fear of standing up to her?

ii.vv9b-10 *"Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at..."*

1.God carries out swift judgement. It is obvious from this text that God is zealous for the purity of his church.

iii.v11 *"And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who..."*

1.This verse speaks of this great fear that came upon the whole church, it is the same fear that is spoken about in **v5** when Ananias fell down dead. To help explain this type of fear I will enlist the help of Hopeful and Christian from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. We pick up with their discourse first with Hopeful:

a."Christian – True or right fear is discovered by three things: 1) By its rise; it is caused by saving convictions for sin. 2) It driveth the soul to lay fast hold of Christ for salvation. 3) It begetteth and continueth in the soul a great reverence of God, his Word, and ways, keeping it tender, and making it afraid to turn from them, to the right hand or to the left, to anything

that may dishonor God, break its peace, grieve the Spirit, or cause the enemy to speak reproachfully.”

2. This quote from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the type of reverent fear that comes upon the church and those who became familiar with what happened with Ananias and Sapphira.

3. This type of fear is in many ways absent today within Christianity. It is definitely absent in the secular culture surrounding the church.

a. Speaking of the church, reminds me that the term here in [v11](#) *ekklesia*, translated church, is the first time it is used in the book of Acts.

i. Prior to its use here it is only found in the gospel of Matthew in chapter 16 once and chapter 18 twice, those uses are by the Lord in speaking of building his church and protecting its purity.

ii. Of course, after this point in the book of Acts and throughout the rest of the New Testament it is used in abundance.

Transition: In the next section we will see that “None of the rest dared to join...and more than ever believers were added to the Lord.” We started out in our study with the believers being of one heart and soul, we have just covered a section where some who were presumed to be part of the church were put to death by God which brings us to our conclusion where we must ask some difficult questions.

Conclusion

What type of faith do you have? Is it a faith in Jesus that is predicated on your own set of terms? Terms that when all is going alright for you are worth keeping, but when it starts to get tough are breakable? If we approach our relationship with Christ in that manner then we can expect our church to be of little value. It will be a church like one of those paper airplanes my kids bring to me that look kind of like the picture, but they just don’t fly. If, however we hold fast to the truth that **Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need**. Then our church will trend towards that which is seen in Acts 2 and as studied here in Acts 4. A church where we will be one heart and soul. A church where we will not count anything as our own, but as any has need we will work together to see those needs met. It will be easy to do so because we will rest firm in the fact that through the resurrection **Jesus Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need**. All other needs are trivial in comparison with our gravest need. To be in such a church will be fearful to those who would just want a place to be for the fun of it, but it will pose no barrier whatsoever to those Christ has called to himself for we will soar with wings like eagles, we will run and not be weary, we will walk and not grow faint ([Is 40:31](#)).

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Family

Table Talk



May 13, 2018

GOD'S TRUTH

Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need!

Family Discussion

1. Maybe you have noticed the extremely poor, even homeless ones around the city, but where are the poor and needy in the Church? How does God meet the spiritual needs of all people? How does a reflection upon Christ burial preparation reveal his heart for meeting the greatest need of all?
2. In the passage we studied through Sunday, it was apparent that the people who believed in Jesus for salvation cared deeply for one another. How has the community of believers that you are part of shared in such ways as to meet needs in your family? Have you been able to do the same for others? If so, what has been your motivation for meeting those needs?
3. Talk together about the God's truth: Christ conquered the grave and in so doing met our gravest need. If the primary point of our faith is Christ's resurrection - how are we then able to live Christ-like in the church? What impact does living this way have on the watching world?

Key Verse

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."
Acts 4:32-33 9 (ESV)

TABLE READING



Lead your kids into God's Word...

1. Matthew 26:6-13, Deuteronomy 15:4, Acts 4:32-35
2. John 13:1-20, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4
3. Acts 4:32-33, Hebrews 4:14-16, Revelation 12:10-11

Scripture Memory: Acts 4:33

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)