

Beulah Baptist Church
Rev. Jerry D. Black, Pastor

Sunday School Lesson for November 22, 2020
Rev. Mark A. Seals, M.Div., Instructor/Teacher

Lesson: Sharing Love

Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

I. *Aim for Change / Learning Objectives...*

By the end of the lesson, we will...

Learning Objectives:

- A. *EXPLORE* the Jerusalem church’s practice and witness of communal sharing,
- B. *REPENT* f any idolatrous attachment to material goods, and
- C. *CREATE* a plan to increase our giving for the common good.

Unifying Principle—Sharing Love in Truth. In every community, there are people who have less than they need to maintain healthy lives. How can we best meet the needs of everyone in our communities? As the first believers in Jesus shared everything in common, the needs of everyone were satisfied.

Key Verse— “Acts 4:32 *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*”

People Places and Times

Barnabas. Barnabas means “son of encouragement” in Aramaic. This was the name given by the apostles to Joses, a Levite from Cyprus. Barnabas was an early convert to Christianity. His character and faith soon brought him into a position of leadership in the church. When Paul was first converted, many of the believers were afraid to accept him. Barnabas eased their fears by speaking to the church on behalf of the apostle. Barnabas was one of Paul’s companions during the early part of his ministry.

Levite. The Levites were the priestly tribe of Israel. All of Israel’s priests are descended from this tribe. However, there is a fundamental difference between priests and Levites. All priests come from the tribe of Levi; however, not all Levites can become priests. They must be descendants of Aaron. Priests are consecrated and were the only ones that could minister at the altar and enter into the holy places. Levites were purified and were set aside to help the priests in performing their duties.

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II. Background

In Acts 4:32-37, the focus of the narrative in Acts shifts from a focus on Peter and John to a focus on the new Christ-following community. At this point in the story, Peter and John have just been released from the custody of the Sanhedrin and they have told the community of faith about God's faithfulness to them in the midst of political persecution. This then sets the context for what is recounted in these verses, specifically the fact that the believers shared all they had with each other. As we witness the generosity of the community of faith, we also witness the heightened stakes of the first years of the Church in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. In each of these narratives, the reader is encouraged to consider the fact that the communal life to which Christ calls those in union with Him is a radical one.

The Lesson At-A-Glance...

1. Gospel Generosity (Acts 4:32-37)
2. Holiness vs. Hypocrisy (5:1-11)

III. In Depth with More Light on the Text

1. Gospel Generosity (Acts 4:32-37)

Acts 4 begins with the imprisonment of Peter and John. This is typical of what the new Christians would face. Following the death of Jesus, the early Christians were persecuted and often treated as outcasts from their Jewish community and family. Despite the persecution, the church community is described as a Spirit-filled, praying, loving and united community. That unity is shown economically through the sharing of goods. In the first few years of the church, followers of Christ voluntarily sought to meet one another's needs because they recognized that they were, in a real sense, united with one another in their faith in Christ. The giving is not merely a one-on-one meeting of needs but a giving to a common pool under the authoritative wisdom of the apostles, who would then distribute according to need. This reveals both the generosity of this community and their trust in their Christ-ordained leadership. The context of this early church community is important to keep in mind here. Most importantly, they are a model of sacrificial giving. They give because their identities are rooted in the sacrificial giving of their Lord, Jesus Christ. As Jesus graciously gave His life for the forgiveness of sins and as Jesus graciously took on human flesh in order to save humanity, so also the community of faith is encouraged to give sacrificially to one another and to those in need. In those terms, this is not a suggestion, but rather an imperative. If the church is to be the body of Christ, they must exhibit the sacrificial love that Christ showed and commanded.

How should today's church view the actions of the early church? Are we supposed to live communally now?

2. Holiness vs. Hypocrisy (5:1-11)

In the Garden of Eden, sin was met by expulsion. In the wilderness after their emancipation and exodus, when the covenant people of God grumbled against their Redeemer, they were punished with wandering until the resistant generation died. At these pivotal moments in the history of God's covenant community, the stakes are extremely high and it is a constant biblical theme that the Spirit of God holds His community to a high standard. After a beautiful example of gospel generosity, we are given a terrifying

account of heinous hypocrisy. Ananias and Sapphira are not struck dead for mere stinginess. After all, contributing one's goods to the apostles was a purely voluntary act. Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead because they lie to the apostles and the One from whom the apostles received their authority, the Spirit of Christ. Peter explains this (Acts 5:3), reminding Ananias that there was no obligation to give. Ananias lied in order to appear generous. This hurt the faith community and the Holy Spirit would not let that stand. The text ends with the first reference to "the church" (Gk. ekklesia) in the book of Acts. From this point forward, this is the term used to describe the people of God, placing them in continuity with God's Old Testament ekklesia, the Israelites. God's standards do not change throughout the Scriptures, but the resources that He has given His people have increased. The greatest of those gifts have been the giving of His own Son and His own Spirit.

What prompted Ananias and Sapphira to lie? Do we see such hypocrisy in the church today?

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Liberating Lesson & Application for Activation—see Sunday School book...

Vocabulary Words You Should Know...

Church (v. 11) ekklesia (Gk.)—The people of God gathered as a convened assembly

Scripture Memory Verse...

John 12:3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.