

## Transcription of 17ID3038

Acts 4:23-37

"Fill Us Again To Overflowing!"

December 27, 2017

Let's open our Bibles this evening to Acts 4 as we continue our study, have communion as well. As we go through this report of the early church - one of the best books in the Bible if you really want to know what God wants to do with the church - you find it in its most pure form, the closest to the beginning, if you will, here in the book of Acts.

We mentioned to you that for the first couple of months, things went well. The church didn't have any opposition at all. The honeymoon, however, didn't last. And, as Peter went to pray one afternoon with John (in afternoon prayers) at the Temple, the Lord moved upon Peter to reach out to a man who had been lame all his life and had been over forty years old now. But he had sat there at the Temple, begging, for years, and yet this was the day that the Lord was going to minister to him. And Peter grabbed him. He said, "I don't have any money, but I'll give you what I have. Walk in the name of Jesus." And the Lord moved upon this man. He was healed. And, really, chapters 3, 4 and 5 surround that miracle. Everything that you find in these three chapters is kind of motivated, if you will, by that miracle. You can just imagine the excitement at the Temple. People came running. Peter preaches his second sermon there on the Temple grounds in Solomon's porch. And there're a lot of sermons in the Bible, certainly, that you can follow along with. But they're always the same. It is always Jesus' sacrifice, man's sin, our need for repentance, and then God's promise of forgiveness. In fact, verse 26 at the end of chapter 3 tells us that that's why Jesus came to begin with.

Well, as you might or may not imagine, the leadership in Jerusalem was very worried about these Christians. The church had been born. Thousands had been saved. It was a movement for sure, a revival under way. And as Peter began to preach, they were, we are told (early on in chapter 4), greatly disturbed at the message that Peter was preaching - that you could be forgiven of your sins, that you can get to heaven through the resurrection of Jesus. We mentioned to you that most of the leadership in the Jewish church at the time, the Sanhedrin, were Sadducees. They didn't believe in life after death at all. So not only did they not like the message, but it ran contrary to everything that they taught. So they, in the midst of Peter's preaching, arrest Peter, grab John. I don't know if they grabbed the fellow who was healed. He does show up the next morning. But they

grabbed them, they took them into custody. It was already evening time by then. It had been about 3:00 when he had begun to speak and minister and all. And so they kept them overnight. And then we read in the Scriptures (verse 4), even though his message was interrupted, five thousand, now, men plus women and children were calling themselves believers. So even the interruption didn't stop the work of God's Spirit in the lives of the people.

So they brought Peter and John out the next morning. They had a pretty thorny problem. The man that was healed - everyone knew. Peter and John were preaching a message that they couldn't believe in. They wanted to stop it in its tracks, but they didn't know how. There wasn't much they could do. The crowds were still pretty much with the believers. And so they put John and Peter out that morning, and they had discussions amongst themselves and said, "Look, we've got to put an end to this! But there's not much we can do. That guy's well. He's definitely healed. He's walking. So maybe we can just put the fear of God in them and threaten them with much worse if they don't stop preaching." And they kind of tried to strong-arm these believers standing in front of them, and they came out with a new rule - no more evangelism. "From now on, don't talk about Jesus at all." And Peter uses that as the occasion to preach one more time. And, beginning in verse 5 down through about verse 12, Peter stays on point, and he argues for the fact that it is in the name of Jesus who was dead and who is raised, who is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He just went right line by line, preaching the same thing he's been preaching but this time to these seventy elders of Israel, there in Jerusalem. And they took note of them, they'd been with Jesus, they were uneducated in their own eyes. They had no explanation for the man that was healed, but they finally just said, "You can't preach anymore." And Peter, very boldly, standing at the place Jesus stood several months earlier, said, "Well, you have to decide whether that's right or not, whether we have to listen to you or to the Lord. But we can only do what God tells us to do." And so we ended last week with those verses (down to verse 22), ending with the man over forty years old who had been healed, and he stood with them.

Well tonight we want to pick up the story and at least take ourselves down to the end of the chapter, chapter 4, as we now kind of just watch the fallout of the threats, of the healing, and of the response. Look, the church is not going to be having such an easy time of it from this day forward. And so tonight we pick up the story - Peter and John leave the antagonism of the Jewish leadership to head to the body of Christ. They go to church. They go back to their brethren, and

they ask the Lord to give them great boldness. We've entitled the message tonight "Fill Us Again To Overflowing" because that's exactly what they were wanting from the Lord.

Verse 23 says this, "And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them." So here're two interesting pictures. There's a company of people that are religious, that are driven by false doctrine, that had heard the gospel and seen the power of God's name, and they jailed these preachers, they threatened to hurt them if it continued. They said, "No more preaching or else." And then there's this other company, these other companions that we read about here, the church. You know the old adage "birds of a feather flock together"? That's biblically correct. Right? You go to find people that you gravitate to in terms of your belief and hope. John and Peter now head back to the church, and it's a completely different atmosphere. Don't you like when you come to church? It's so different than your job, isn't it, or at work or at school or sometimes in your family. It's so nice to be around Christians, isn't it, that share the same vision that you do. So here's the fellowship. And maybe you ask yourself - where do you run when the world starts leaning on you? Well these guys ran to church. They ran into a bunch of people who loved the Lord, who had great concern for the gospel, who were united in their purpose, were fundamentally standing, if you will, in the same place. And they loved the Lord and His work. And how good is it to gather together. These are the holidays, everybody's busy, but isn't it good to be in fellowship. I look forward to it. I really don't think that I would be able to survive it out in the world without the body of Christ. I don't think you could either. All week you kind of get beat up out there with these hostilities of the world that hates the Lord. And then you come to church, and you can worship and not have to question everything that you see, and the body is strengthened by it and all. And so here they are back to church. They gathered with their companions, and notice they gave a report to them of everything that they had heard and everything that they had said. So they went over the healing, they went over the prayer, they went over the preaching, they went over the salvation numbers and how they were growing, how they were told they couldn't preach in Jesus' name anymore, how Peter stood up to the guy and said, "Well, I don't know. We've just got to obey the Lord." And I don't know if the church was expecting this. Jesus had said to them (John 16:33), "In the world you're going to have tribulation." But at least up to this point, it had been all right. They probably remembered what Jesus had gone through, certainly. But things had turned rather quickly.

I remember when I first got saved. I think I got saved in 1972 or '73. It was fuzzy, those years. I thought after I got saved, in six months the whole world would get saved because I figured, "I'll just tell everyone, and they'll believe me, and that'll be the end of it." I was very optimistic for a while. And then you go out and begin to share your faith, and you realize, "Oh, it's not going to be as quick as I thought."

Well here they are mandated, the whole church - all five thousand men plus women and children - that the minute that they open their mouth is now. The minute they begin to preach Jesus now, they're breaking the law. And not only are they breaking the law, they're setting themselves for even sorer punishment, and these guys weren't exactly kind or restricted in their oversight. And so the decision is not in doubt. I think if you read the passage here, no one went, "What shall we do?" I think everyone agreed, "We can't do anything else but what the Lord has set before us." But they do realize that if this is going to work, God's going to have to fill them and use them.

And so, with one mind and with one accord, they begin to pray. And what they pray, I think, might surprise you. I don't know. If you haven't read ahead, what would you pray at this point? But we read in verse 24, "So when they heard that," (when the church heard the report), "they raised their voice to God with one accord" (they were in this together) "and said: 'Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.'" I think it is of great benefit to study, if you will, the prayers that you find in the Bible. We're going to start a series (a week from Sunday, after the New Year) on Psalms. And Psalms is a cool book because you get to listen in on (at least many of them) somebody else praying. It's kind of like you're sitting in their bedroom with them; they're on their knees, lookin' out the window towards Jerusalem, they're telling God all their problems, and you're goin', "Oh, I'm takin' notes." You get to see the big shots, the godly men, the folks that God so greatly used - praying. And you can take notes. There're a lot of prayers in the book of Acts, especially in the situations that the church finds itself in, and there's great benefit. But I'll tell you what. Most every prayer lines up with the pattern that Jesus established in the Lord's Prayer. We call it the Lord's Prayer. It's really the disciples' prayer. Right? It wasn't really meant to be prayed, "Our Father who art in heaven." I grew up Catholic, so we prayed that a lot. But Jesus didn't give it as a prayer. He gave it as an outline. Right? And all of the outlines, I think that you'll find, of these prayers in the book of Acts follow that pattern to a tee. And notice what the first words out of their

mouths were. After they heard all of the information and what they were facing, they start with the words, "Lord, You are God." Now this isn't the normal word in the Bible for "Lord." This is the absolute word for despot. It's a pretty strong word. It literally means an absolute ruler. It is something that a slave owner would take as a title, someone with unrestricted power. This isn't the kind of word "Lord" that you find throughout the Bible. This is a very different one. This speaks of His sovereignty, if you will. He's in charge of everything. He's able to do what He desires, without limitation. There's no successful opposition to your Lord. Is that right? He can do whatever He likes, in any manner that He likes. So notice that, as they begin to pray facing certainly the most extreme opposition that they've had to date - and it's pretty serious, I think, in what they had been told - they begin praying by reminding themselves who it is that they were serving. Right? They fill their thoughts with this: He's sovereign, God's in charge. And I don't know who they're sending out to pitch on the other team. Our God wins. It doesn't matter who they send out. No matter who makes the threats, no matter the Sanhedrin, the big shot high priest at this time, it doesn't matter because we serve a God who is the despot. He's the absolute ruler over all. Look, the Sanhedrin was to be feared, they were powerful, they gave orders, they wielded power, they made threats, they could prohibit you from doing certain things in their attempts to silence the church. But they were, indeed, subject to a Higher Power, a Higher Power, the Lord Himself. I think it is needful, when you begin to pray, to follow the example, "Our Father who art in heaven." It's pretty good. If your Father's in heaven, you're in good shape, aren't you? Our father who is in Pittsburgh doesn't help. (Laughing) Or our father who's in the clink. That doesn't help either. But our Father in heaven. Now we've got somethin'. Now we've got somethin'. And so they begin by, in prayer, convincing themselves of God's power and majesty. I hear people pray sometimes, and I wonder if they're really convinced that God is all-powerful. They're hesitating, they don't believe in His unlimited capacity, they pray with great consternation, if you will. But, look, the threats of these men to God's church is like a 2-year-old with a plastic hammer threatening the local blacksmith. You know? I mean, it's not a fair fight. And they realized that. As much as they're under the gun, so to speak, and under pressure, it's not really comparable, is it? Their God is a Despot in a good sense. He's the absolute Ruler over all. And the early church knew who they were speaking to, and it gave them great boldness. If you want to know who God uses in the early church, it is people who are convinced of who they're serving, who He is, and what He has done. Notice that the greatness of who He is, they call Him the great Creator of all. "You're the One who made heaven and earth. You made everything." Imagine

thinking to yourself, "I'm talking, right now, to the Creator of all that I see." I think I'm in pretty good ..... But people like dropping names sometimes, "Oh, you know who I know? You know who I met one time? You know who I was on the plane with?" Great. I know the Creator! Top that, buddy. I know the One who made everything! On a personal basis. That's pretty cool. And before they ever consider the difficulty they're in, they want to remind themselves of who they're serving. Jeremiah would write, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You." Isn't that a great verse? Jeremiah 32:17. You can put it right in the margin, right next to the verse.

Even now, whatever problem that you face tonight - that you're praying about - should shrink considerably if you consider who is involved. I remember, as a kid, I was always afraid to sleep with all the lights out. Were you like that or just me? Anyway, my dad and mom would always leave a light on, and there'd be stuff under the bed and stuff in the closet, and I'd hear noises that weren't there. And I'm sure monsters were out to get me. But as a little kid, I remember, terrified. Until we went on vacation. And because we were on a budget, we always - when we were on vacation - the kids slept in the same room as our parents; I never worried about the dark then because dad was in the room. I just went to sleep. He can get the guy in the closet. I don't care. (Laughing) And it was different.

And I thought, "Well, that's kind of what they're saying. 'Lord, You're the One who's in charge of everything! So we're not really sweatin' these complaints and these threats.' " Look, it's all about good perspective when you pray. All things are possible with Him. He's the One who spoke the world into existence. It was that very understanding of Jesus and who He was that caused the centurion (in Matthew 8) to say to the Lord, "I'm not even worthy that You come to my house. But You can just say the word because I realize You're in charge of this area. You speak, and it happens. I'm in authority. I know how that works, and You're always in authority. You're the most authoritative. Whatever You say goes."

So they start their prayer, hearing the reports, reminding themselves that they're serving a God who is absolutely in charge, and He has absolute power. They go on, and they said, verse 25, " 'who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: "Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ." ' " Not only is He the Almighty sovereign God of Creation, He's also

the all-knowing God. In fact, they go to this next portion, and they quote a psalm, Psalm 2, written by David 1,000 years earlier. He's not just a powerful God who's in charge, He knows everything. He even talked in that psalm about the opposition of the world to the LORD and to His Son. God knew it, God knows it, He's not surprised. You get into trouble, you think, "Man, I wonder.....I didn't see this comin'." Yeah, but He did. That's the God that you serve. He knows, doesn't He? And it helped the early church to face these very strong difficulties. Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm. It'll find its complete fulfillment at Jesus' Second Coming. But the early church saw portions already being fulfilled in the hatred that they met from the world against Jesus and against His people or, if you will, against John and Peter and the lame man that very day.

Here's the lesson, though - it's not a big surprise to God when things come into your life that you weren't ready for or you weren't planning for. The world's opposition to the Lord is very well-documented. The Lord foresaw it, He predicted it, He foretold it. He knows it! So I think it's pretty good to know that you serve a God who's never caught off-guard. You'll never hear these words from Him, "Oh, no!" Or, "Oh, My goodness!" Or, "Dear God! Oh, wait, I'm God." (Laughing) Never find that happening because He knows. He knows.

Verse 27, " 'For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.' " Not only did God know it would be this way, He very much controlled what was happening. These are pretty good things to learn about God as you go to pray. He knew what was coming His way. They'd seen Jesus face it. They saw the opposition come from every direction - it came from Pilate, it came from Herod, it came from the Gentiles, it came from the Jews, it came from the religious rulers. Yet they realized God, and through all of it, was in charge, that He was totally in charge. Notice (in verse 28) they rested in the fact that Jesus had suffered at the will of God, the determined purposes of God, that the will of God could have easily put an end to that, but He allowed it to take place because they needed to be saved and that one day He said He would come to rule. He even said (John 16:2), "Look, there's coming a day when they're going to drag you into the synagogues, and they're going to try to kill you, and they're going to think that they're serving Me. It's coming." And they realized that they had been warned about that. Notice that before they ever got to their petition, and they haven't gotten to it yet, they comforted themselves with the knowledge of God. That's

real important. And I think as you go to pray, and I know we pray sometimes without thinking much, but verse 24, "You've made," and verse 25, "You've spoken," and verse 28, "You've determined." One success of the early church was their concept of God was spot on. Right? They knew God well. They didn't just fill their heads. They lived their lives in the understanding that He knew beforehand, His will was His own, He presides over history, every minute detail doesn't escape Him, if you will. And every step He can oversee and take care of and accomplish His work.

The purpose of prayer, at least from a primary standpoint, is to bring you to a place where you can look through God's eyes at your life because that brings you where He wants you to be. You see your life through His eyes - the situations you face, the difficulties you face. It's one thing to have your head filled with information. It's another thing to see things clearly as the Lord has done His work. It's very important that we can see through His eyes. Sometimes we are unable to trust the Lord because we don't know Him well, and so unbelief kind of takes over. We, on the one hand, know the truth about God, but somehow we're not living it, we're not walking it out. I remember that Psalm 78:41 passage where it says, "Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." Or in His own hometown (there in Matthew 13:58), "He didn't do many miraculous works there because the people were mired in unbelief." So that's the battle - what I know about God and what I will act upon in knowing Him. It's important.

So finally, verse 29, they get to their request. They've just now spoken about that, "He's the sovereign Lord, that He's the Creator, that He's all-powerful, that He's all-knowing, that He's written it in His book. We've watched Jesus go through it. We see He has purposes." Verse 29, their request, " 'Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.' " Their first concern was the danger that they faced. "Lord, listen to what they're threatening to do to us now." I mean, the Sanhedrin - ruthless. Look at the way they killed Jesus (or thought they had). The threat is real; this isn't made up threats. They had seen to it that Jesus was crucified. I can easily imagine the disciples thinking, "I wonder if we're going to be next. How are they going to kill us? Stone us? Crucify us? Chop off our heads, beat us to death?" There was certainly no denying the possibility that God, who was sovereign, might have that for their life because they'd been with Jesus. They couldn't walk away from this prayer saying, "Yeah, I think we're going

to escape hardship," or, "He's going to keep us safe." They weren't praying for safe; they were praying for boldness. "We want to accomplish the will of God. Grant to Your servants." The word is "*doulos*." It means those who have chosen to be slaves or bond slaves. "Grant to us, that we with boldness can continue to speak Your word." Even though, to them, there was great danger from the Sanhedrin, understand this - from the early church's standpoint, the greatest fear was not the Sanhedrin; it was that somehow they would stop obeying the Lord because of fear of the Sanhedrin. "Lord, just give us boldness. We don't want to disappoint You as these guys point their fingers at us and make threats." They didn't ask the Lord to cause the Sanhedrin to disappear. They didn't ask God to destroy them. That's what I would have been praying for. None of that. Right? They just asked God, in light of everything that they knew about Him, to help them master their fear and give them boldness to keep doing what is right. "Lord, help us to preach the Word. Help us to stick with it. And not only that. Keep giving us power." The early church was surrounded by that ministry of healing and signs and wonders - like this lame man - that had caused this whole problem to begin with. But their corporate prayer was, "Give us more not less. The very thing that's gotten us into hot water, give us more of that. It's going to be harder, but yet Your will is going to be accomplished." So, "We desire whatever Your will is. We want to be bold to do what You've asked us to do." For the first time in the book of Acts, there's a price to pay. They didn't pray for freedom from persecution. They prayed for boldness in the face of it. I remember Spurgeon saying in one of his sermons, "I don't ask the Lord for a lighter load. I ask the Lord for a stronger back." And I think that's really what you see here as well. They didn't pray for a change of rulers, they didn't pray for a change of laws, anything that would have made their path easier. They just said, "Jesus, be glorified. Have Your way. Give us boldness." And the natural question becomes - how do you stop guys like this? And the answer is you can't. Oh, you can throw 'em in jail, you can threaten 'em, you can put 'em to death (as they're going to do to Stephen here in a couple of weeks). But you're not going to be able to stop the work because there's nothing in their lives that would cause them to turn away from the Lord. And I think to myself - man, Lord, raise some people up like this today, who are not so moved by the world's opinion as much as they're moved by the promises of God. The world needs to hear what Jesus can do, what He has done in your life. And these miracles and these signs - they were all an integral part of the early church's ministry because they confirmed that the Word that was preached was right. God, do glorious things in our midst.

We read in verse 31, "And when they had prayed," (and that's a short request, isn't it? One verse and then two verses - verses 29 and 30 is their request, that's it; everything else was a set up for themselves to realize who they were speaking to) "the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." God's response to this prayer was immediate. As He had filled them on the day of Pentecost, He now fills them again. If you think about refilling or infilling yet again, it's true. It's kind of like the Lord fills you up, pours you out, and fills you up again. He empowers them to do the very things He had called them to do - to boldly preach. Usually people pray when they're shaken up. Here, they're shaken up as a result of praying. But the Holy Spirit made them unshakeable. He gave to them power. The Lord heard their prayers, and He enabled them immediately. What an answer! How we need that power of God in our lives. I love the response. These guys were not taking no for an answer. They weren't backing down. They weren't, by the way, offensive. But they were on the offense, weren't they?

Now, beginning in verse 32 (and verse 33 is kind of a testimony to the prayers of the saints) and through the end of the chapter, Luke does something that he does about a half a dozen times in the book of Acts. He stops. He stops the narrative to kind of just give you a general update. "Here's what the early church was doing, here's what was going on, here's a picture of what happened last month," and he'll kind of pull back to give you a fuller picture. And he does that here in terms of what the Lord was doing in the church, the love of the body, the support together. It also sets up what we will see next week. We're going to start off next year with Ananias and Sapphira. Can you imagine? It's going to be our starting point. But by the time that we get to the end of chapter 5, these guys will be rearrested. All of the apostles look like maybe they were grabbed. They'll be put on trial. If it wasn't for Gamaliel's advice, these guys might have been killed. So all of this around this miracle that happened over in Solomon's porch area of the Temple.

Well here's verse 32, a look back to church life. It says, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." Now, I want you to think this through with me for just a minute because it's easy to get the wrong impression. You might think that nobody owned anything. That's not true. We'll read that in verse 4 of chapter 5, where Peter will say to Ananias, "Hey, as long as it belonged to you, you were free to do with it what you wanted." Or back in chapter 2:44-45 as well. It is, here, a comment about the attitude of

the church being a selfless bunch of saints. Now understand that in Jerusalem there were thousands of people who didn't live there. They came as a result of the Passover; and then Pentecost, they were there for the celebration. Some of them stayed for a while because they'd gotten saved, and they wanted to learn. This isn't the normal way that the Lord provides, if you will, where everybody just kind of sells everything and holds everything in common. It's not a commune. The Bible doesn't teach communes. In the 70's, Calvary Chapel had six houses that people just lived in, they crashed in. You know? And then there'd be groups from the house that'd go fishing, and everybody'd eat fish. It was the hippie life. It's not biblical in that sense. However, in the early church, you do find a selflessness in terms of the spiritual nature of the people so that there isn't this carnality that so often you find today. The early church found freedom in Jesus from carnality, and it showed in the way that they handled what they had, if you will. They placed greater value on the spiritual than on the material. And stewardship is an interesting concept because stewardship says everything you have belongs to God. Do you believe that? And everything you have, God gives you. But you're responsible for everything He gives you, and when you're done, He's going to take it back. You're not going to take it with you. He doesn't go, "I'll just pass that off to the next person. You get out of the way now." Right? So stewardship is interesting because, on the one hand, you have to provide for your family, you have to plan for the future, you have to occupy until Jesus comes. On the other hand, we're told to tithe, to give to those in need, to be ready in every way to help those who are hurting. So we have to have the right priorities. I would hate to die with a million dollars in the bank while there's a million people lost. I'd rather spend the money before I died making sure they heard the gospel. I think that'd be out of balance. Right? Because that's a stewardship issue.

So the early church invested in souls, took care of one another, and, in love, put their money where their heart was, if you will. But this isn't the ideal. This was survival. In fact, if you read ahead you'll find that when Paul gets in ministry, he's forever collecting money from Gentile churches to bring it to the poor in Jerusalem because these folks either didn't go home or they were forever struggling there. It was impoverished. They were saints amongst very religious organizations, and they couldn't do very well. It isn't the plan. It's just the result and the response to what was taking place at the time. So, I do believe every local church should take care of its own people. I also don't believe that there should be any fund drives or pressure or rules. I mean, this was all voluntary, it was limited to the local body, it was the work of God's Spirit. These guys, Ananias and

Sapphira - their big problem was they tried to pretend they were somebody that they weren't. They wanted glory without sacrifice, and God called them on it. So there are a lot of movements in churches today, unfortunately, to compromise essential doctrines for the sake of unity. "Let's all get together. We'll just have one church." I saw on TV the other day, "Well, we're gonna talk about Christmas." They had a priest and a rabbi and a Christian woman pastor and a Muslim lady. And they're all, "We'll just get along." We can't get along! We can't. Spiritually, we cannot get along. There's only one Jesus, and pretty much 90% of those people on the panel didn't believe in Him. So you can't sacrifice truth for the sake of unity. Paul said to the Ephesians in chapter 4:15, "Speak the truth in love." You need the truth, and you need love. Right? But it's not lovely to say to somebody, "Whatever you believe, you'll be fine" - when you know better or you know otherwise. That's not gonna be helpful. But it was the answer for the body now. There was a growing, there was a need, and people sacrificed themselves and what they had for the sake of others.

Verse 33, "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all." That's the answer to the prayers that we just finished reading. Despite the orders from the Sanhedrin, they continued to be great testimony to the love of Jesus. And I think it's inserted here to tell us on the sureness of the love and support in the body, God's work continued, and the people were getting saved. The world's a lonely place, and the excuse for the lost sometimes is that if they come to church, there're just a bunch of hypocrites there. But I don't think you find them here. They came and went, "Wow, this is the real deal!" Right? Shouldn't unbelievers walk in here and see you're the real deal? You would want them to see that, wouldn't you?

Well back to the verse 32 topic, verse 34 says, "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." So, by this love at work, no one had lack. Some people sold what they had. I like the accountability. Notice that the apostles were responsible to investigate the need - not just give it away, "Oh, we've got need, just write a check." No, they checked it out. They wanted to be sure nobody was in need because they were lazy or undisciplined or overextended. We have such great opportunities to send food or helps and personal involvement in the lives of people, and we see them get saved. But notice that it's voluntary. It's willful from the heart. And I should tell you - right now, all of the attacks are

coming from without, "Don't preach or you'll die." In chapter 5, the attack comes from within - two people who raised themselves up. In chapter 6, it's the Hellenists versus the Hebrews. The Hellenists were Hebrews, but they grew up outside of Israel so they brought weird customs and practices and food (tastes) and ways of worship, and they didn't get along. In chapter 7, they kill Stephen. I mean, there're a lot of attacks coming from every side in the next three chapters, if you will. But for now, there is a sweetness though there is some pressure from without.

Well, Luke concludes this portion with two verses at the end of the chapter to kind of highlight what was going on, and he mentions a guy named Joses who's also named Barnabas by the apostles. Translated, it means "Son of Encouragement." He was a priest or a Levite from Greece (from Cyprus), and he sold some land, and he brought the money, and he laid it down at the disciples' feet. He concludes with one example of one guy who was doing what was really a blessing to everyone. And his name is cool. He's called Barnabas. I think we all get tired of people who complain. I know I do. I don't think you ever get tired of people that encourage you. "Man, you were a blessing to me. Oh, I've been praying for you. Oh, it's just nice to see you." Oh, you just suck that all in. "Talk to me more." You can watch those people. They have fifty people hangin' around with 'em. And here's a man who had a tremendous gift of encouragement. He's sensitive, he's an encourager, he's not filled with himself. His name is Barnabas. The word "Barnabas" is the "Son of Encouragement," "*parakletos*." It's the word that's used for the Holy Spirit, one who comes alongside to help. Not an apostle, everyday kind of believer, finds no rank in the early church. We don't see him running around with Jesus in the gospels. There's not much written about Barnabas in the Bible - only twenty-nine verses in all cover his life. But at every place that he's mentioned, he's involved like a turning point in the life of the church. You run into Barnabas, stuff happens, and it's always a good thing that happens, it's always directed towards the Lord. You may be in the church tonight and feel like you're not getting much attention or exposure, but I'll guarantee you, guys like Barnabas have a lot to look forward to in the kingdom because, though they're outside of the people's perusal, if you will, they're right on God's radar. His original name was Joses, means exalted; but his nickname was Barnabas, comforter, encourager. What's your nickname? We used to have them in school. I got called "four eyes" a lot because I had glasses when I was 4. Or "slick" - guy had hair. "Butterfingers" - you can't hang on to anything. Most nicknames aren't that kind, really. I mean, you may adopt them. "Well, I've always been 'Butterfingers.'" But this is a pretty cool one,

isn't it? But, I think most nicknames find a basis in experience or in observation. So, here was a guy, the "Son of Comfort," a Jew of the Dispersion from Cyprus, a Hellenist, if you will. (It's important when we get to the next chapter). He was a Levite - his family handled the holy things in the Temple. But he had a reputation (before we meet him here), and his reputation was this guy would always encourage you. He's a guy you'd like to hang out with. Well, at some point in this whole scenario, he's one of the fellows that owns some land in town, thinks he should sell it, takes the profits (not for himself but to help others) and, moved by the Holy Spirit, his wallet shows him to be redeemed in the wallet as well. He serves the Lord quietly, but people just go, "Man, that's just the way Barnabas is."

In chapter 9 of Acts, when we get there several years from now (Laughing), you might remember that notorious Saul got saved. And because he had killed Christians and run around and done such horrible things, when he showed up in Jerusalem with, "Hey, I got saved," there was lots of apprehension and lots of skepticism about his salvation. You can just imagine. I imagine the church saying, when Paul said, "Hey, I'd like to meet with you guys," they said, "Yeah, go ahead and meet us over there, we'll be right there," and they all went runnin' because this guy was a crook. He would lock you up. He would tear up families. He stood there and was consenting to Stephen's death (Acts 8:1). There was great fear and great mistrust, and rightfully so. No doubt there were people in the church that had lost family members because of Saul. They hated him. And yet, if you go read Acts 9, there's a guy that comes along in kind of a suit of armor, shiny, quiet. He comes to the rescue of Saul. Barnabas. He goes to meet with Saul at the coffee shop. Nobody else was going to meet with Saul. Everybody's hidin'. But Barnabas goes, "I'll go see him." And, "Hey, how you doin', Saul? High five." And against public opinion and risking his own well-being, he went to meet with him, and he learned that he was indeed a man of God. So it says in verse 27 in that chapter that he actually took Paul by the hand. He dragged him to where the apostles were hiding. I think it's great. (Sound of knocking) "It's Barnabas and Saul." "What'd you bring him here for?!" "Oh, he's cool." "What do you mean, 'he's cool'? You're an idiot!" (Laughing) You can imagine how that went. Right? But the result was glorious. In fact, you read in verse 28 and 29 of that chapter (chapter 9), that he went out and began to dispute with the Hellenists about the love of Jesus and who He was. And that was Barnabas' gang - the Hellenists - but Paul went to minister to them. I don't know if you've ever had a hard time fitting in somewhere and wonder what God has for you. All you need is a Barnabas, you know? Or be one. Pull people along with you - not to your clique but just to fellowship with God, encourage them.

So he was always quick to encourage. Slow to criticize. Great to stand with you and support you. He risked failure (because that could have been a bad deal). He risked loss of reputation, credibility. But he lived out the "love believes all things" verse (1 Corinthians 13:7). Barnabas. Cool guy. Cool guy.

In chapter 11 of Acts, the saints that have been scattered by the killing of Stephen, and everyone's running in directions (those from some of the Gentiles at the same time that Peter is preaching in Cornelius' house to the Gentiles), they'd gone and began to preach in their own towns. And this place named Antioch is having a huge revival, and so the church decides they will send a guy to see how that's going, and they send Mr. Comforter, Mr. Encourager, Barnabas, who gets a travel bag, and he sticks "Antioch or Bust" on it, and he shows up. And now understand this is very different than Jerusalem. The whole thing's just not the same. But the love of Jesus is the same. And as he shows up, he begins to talk to new believers, and he leads people to the Lord, and God begins to do this wonderful work, and it's like he's encouraging people, "Read your Bibles, and let's pray." And God's working. It's amazing to me that he now is running a town of believers, if you will. But you read the description of the ministry there, and he's there by himself, and revival breaks out, and God begins to use him. It would be a great time to start the "Barnabas Association" or the Barnabas-on-TV guy. He was so popular. But as he began to minister to them, he realized that he didn't have what it took to teach them. And so he taught them for a while, and then he went, "I'll be back," and he leaves Antioch, and he goes to find Paul, who has kind of retired from view. We don't know how long he was gone, but he was gone for quite a while. And he said, "I've got to get Paul because that guy can teach!" So, denying himself, "Son of Encouragement," he goes way out of his way to get Paul. He drags Paul back to Antioch, and for the next year or so, without any kind of personal ambition, he watches the church mature under Paul's leadership. And he takes a step backwards. You don't even read much about Barnabas. You just begin to read about Paul. But I'll tell you what. Antioch would not have done very good without Barnabas. Who does God use? People that are willing to step out of the limelight, I guess, and be a supporting voice. It's hard to find team players, even in the church. And yet what a contrast. The very first major revival amongst the Gentiles is in Antioch, and you scarcely read the name Barnabas; you read the name Paul a lot.

You remember in Acts - before we quit here, I'm on a roll now, I'm going right for this - 13, the first missionary trip came out of Antioch, and they picked two guys

to send. Who did they send? They sent Paul, they sent Barnabas. And they planted a bunch of churches. A couple of chapters later, several years later, when Paul and Barnabas are back in church, and they get ready to go again, Paul said, "Let's go again," and Barnabas said, "Well, let's take John Mark" (happened to be a kid who went with them, kind of bailed out early because he was young and afraid and who knows what else). But John Mark was Barnabas' nephew through his mother, Mary. They used to host the church in Jerusalem. And so Barnabas says, "I'd like to take this guy because I'd like to encourage him. He'll be fine." And Paul said, "He's a quitter. I hate him." All right, it doesn't say he hates him. (Laughing) He just said, "I'm not takin' him." But you get the idea, right? There wasn't any love lost between the two. And Barnabas says, rather than going back to all those churches that he planted, tens of churches - significantly his work, he said, "I'll just hang out with John Mark," and he took him back to Greece, back to Cyprus. And Paul went out with Silas. And so you begin to argue in your mind. He had a place in all of these churches planted, all of the investment, all life and limb, and years on the road, and he loses the opportunity to go back to these wonderful churches because he loved one kid enough to make sure that he made it. Encourager. Pretty cool work of God in the man's life. Paul does not forget his debt to Barnabas, but it doesn't show up early. You have to go to the last letter that Paul ever wrote - 2 Timothy 4:11. He mentions him in Philemon, too, but it's also a prison letter. And he sends a note, and he says, "Bring Mark here. He would be really useful to me in the ministry." Now Paul's about ready to get killed, but he realizes that John Mark made it, and he made it because of Barnabas. "Bring him here, and let God use him." So, thanks to Barnabas' sacrifice, John Mark gets a second chance.

And so the fellowship of the church was doing pretty good. They were redemptive and not selfish and not narrow-minded. God uses these kinds of guys. God would like to do the same thing today. The church ought to be a great place to plant yourself, don't you think? We need to gather. We need to pray. We need to encourage one another, especially as the world just gets worse around us. There shouldn't be a lot of division in the church. I know there is. There always is. Unfortunately, Satan's greatest work is to turn people against each other. But if we could unite in the Lord and stand against the devil, I think there's a lot that could get done.

Next week, we will join Ananias and Sapphira. So read ahead as the attacks go from without to within. I think we'll probably look at all of about ten or eleven verses.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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