

Great Grace *Acts 4:32-37*

Good morning.

In the C.S. Lewis book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Mr. Beaver said, “*Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion.*”

"Ooh," said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man.

Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"..."

Safe?" said Mr. Beaver, "Who said anything about safe?

'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

We serve a **Great** God, who loves us, and gave Himself for us.

Because we belong to Him, He offers us **Great** power and grace if we surrender to Him and allow Him to live in and through us.

Please open your Bibles to *Acts 4* as we continue that study.

As we have studied *Acts 3* and *4*, we have learned about many **Great** things that happened on a day in the life of Peter and John.

It all started with Peter and John heading to the Temple during the hour of prayer and they happened upon a lame man who was begging for money at the gate, who had a **Great** ailment.

Peter, instead of a handout, offered the lame man an introduction to our **Great** God and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the man received healing from his life-long ailment.

The man followed Peter and John to Solomon's porch and the crowd was **greatly** amazed by his healing, so Peter preached to them how the **Great** healing was performed by Jesus.

Peter also preached to the crowd how they could obtain a **Great** salvation in the name of Jesus as he reminded them about the **Great** plan of God, throughout Israel's history.

Peter and John were arrested and gave a **Great** defense in front of the religious leaders.

The religious leaders then warned Peter and John with **Great** threats, not to preach Jesus anymore, and then released them.

After being released, the Disciples got together and prayed, the place where they prayed was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God with **Great** boldness.

Today, we will see how the move of God's Spirit created unity, peace, supply, and how **Great** grace was given to the believers.

I. A great number of believers had sharing hearts.

Read *Acts 4:32*

Now the multitude of those who believed.

After all the great things that happened, many receive Christ, as **Multitude** means a **great** number. *Who are all of these people?*

In *Acts 2:41* we learned how 3,000 people came to Christ after Peter's first sermon and then in *Acts 4:4*, 5,000 more came to Christ when Peter preached about the healing of the lame man.

Guzik said in *Acts 4:21*, 2,000 more came to Christ, so along with the 120 disciples in the upper room waiting for Pentecost, there were now thousands of members of the Early Church.

And all those who believed *were of one heart and one soul*.

Being of *one heart and one soul* tells us these early believers were interested in the same things, believed the same things, and were completely unified as if they were one body in Christ.

These Christians were knit together, not only with their beliefs, but they were actually of *one heart and one soul*.

This unity in the body of Christ can only happen by the Holy Spirit and notice the effect it had on these early Christians; they began believing people were more important than possessions.

Notice, “*Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*”

This is very similar to what happened when the Holy Spirit fell on the original 120 at Pentecost. *Acts 2:44 Now all who believed were together and had all things in common. NKJV*

We learned several weeks ago that most of these early followers were hated by their families and communities, so they were **excommunicated** by their synagogues for accepting Christ.

The early followers were also hated by the Romans for refusing to worship the emperor as a god so, for these early followers, Christianity was not a religion or even a duty...

The early followers believed in Jesus with all of their being, and they were hungry for more of the LORD.

The early followers didn't entangle themselves with things of this world, so it was easy for most of them to sell off their worldly possessions to help other followers.

Today, we are fortunate enough not to be under that same obligation as the Early Church was. But we again are pendulum people and so the Church has swung to the other extreme.

Since the LORD has not asked us to live in a commune style of existence, a lot of followers become selfish and think they don't have to give to the work of the ministry at all.

Because these early believers believed so desperately that people needed Jesus, there was no selfishness or disunity in their ranks.

These early followers believed that all they possessed belonged to and came from, the LORD. *What was the result?*

II. Great power and grace.

Read *Acts 4:33*

I do not buy into all of the mysticism we hear in certain circles of Christianity however, there are certain truths and promises that we are taught in scripture.

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! NKJV

Why is it good and pleasant for Christians to dwell together in unity?

Christian unity is **good** because it shows others God's intent and purpose for His children.

In His High-Priestly prayer, Jesus said in ***John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;***

John 17:21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. NKJV

Christian unity is **pleasant** because it makes life together with other believers more enjoyable than times of bickering and conflict.

Because the Holy Spirit was moving and the Christians were submitted to Him, the LORD gave Great power to the Church.

According to the Greek Lexicon, the word **Great** is the Greek word “*megas*” (*English for Mega*), meaning *big, exceedingly great, large, high, loud, mighty, or strong.*

H. Leo Boles said, “*Great power means the force of argument (preaching) accompanied with spiritual power.*” (Boles)

Like we learned a couple of weeks ago...

Matthew 10:19 But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

Matthew 10:20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. NKJV

This word **great** or mega is the same word in ***Mark 4:37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.***

Mark 4:38 But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" NKJV

Windstorm means *a tempest, wind, a violent agitation, and stream of air, or a very strong tempestuous wind*. So, this wasn't just a little storm, this was a Mega-storm.

What is ironic about the narrative in ***Mark 4*** is that the Disciples obeyed and got into the boat, but Jesus still allowed a mighty, exceedingly great, mega storm during their obedience.

Jesus' love, power, wisdom, and foreknowledge are mightier than we could ever imagine, and He **allows** mega-storms in our lives to teach us the things we need to learn.

Then notice ***Acts 4:33, And great grace was upon them all.***

Just as the LORD allows trials into our lives, He also offers us Mega-grace as well.

Grace is the word *charis* in Greek, and it is where we get the word charity. Grace is God's unearned or unmerited favor, a gift freely given to us, it is not something we earn by good deeds.

Grace is such an incredible concept for some people to accept, because they ask themselves, “*What kind of God offers His divine favor to flawed people?*”

But **great** grace refers to a super-abundant supply of divine help and blessing, given by God's abundant and undeserved favor.

When the Bible adds "**great**" to the word grace, it emphasizes the magnitude and abundance of God's favor, suggesting an extraordinary outpouring of His blessings.

"**Great**/mega grace" should remind us how we must **depend** on the unmerited favor of God, rather than ourselves.

III. Sharing is caring.

Read *Acts 4:34-35*

The fruit of the Spirit was so evident in these early believers, they sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with others.

Now some have concluded from this portion of scripture that Christianity demands some kind of social and economic equality, amongst its members.

Some criticize Jesus for having taught some kind of religious communism or socialism. But this is not a Biblical concept.

While Luke was writing the ***Book of Acts***, he was not instigating Marxism. That kind of thinking does not line up with the balance of the Word of God either.

Gareth Reese said, “*Communism says, “What’s yours is mine and I’ll take it!” **Fellowship** says, “What is mine is yours; I’ll share it!”* (Reese)

Here in ***Acts***, Luke was simply recounting what was happening during that time while these believers were of one mind, heart, and soul.

Their common interest in furthering the Gospel overshadowed their differences and their desire for the world’s wealth.

Later, the Apostle Paul admonished the Church that lazy people should go without...

2 Thessalonians 3:10 If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. NKJV

But because of the mega-grace that filled these believers, the Gospel was spreading so rapidly, and the early Christians kept the main thing, the main thing.

No one in their company was in need because they shared together. *Do you want to be part of a powerful fellowship?* Be filled with the Holy Spirit!

During the early 1980’s when the cold war between the former USSR and the US was coming to an end...

“*Pravada*”, the former official newspaper of the Soviet government, printed a series of articles discussing what went wrong with communism.

One article asked the question, “*Why is Christianity growing, and communism diminishing, when in reality we share the same goals?*”

But communism and Christianity do not have the same goals!

You see, man in his natural flesh state is incapable of really caring about anybody but himself. Man will never say, what’s mine is yours, without trying to see what’s in it for himself.

The communist dogma would teach that man is basically good, but the LORD says that man was born into natural sin and is inherently sinful! We are all born sinners in need of a Savior.

When man is dictated by a set of laws to do good, he will always rebel and find a way to sin and be selfish.

We only become concerned with other’s needs when we have the Holy Spirit living in us!

Because we are given a new nature, a new person living in us...

Colossians 1:27 which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

It is a ploy of the enemy to **divide** us over **minor** differences.

The truth of the resurrection convinced these early believers to act with loving concern for each other.

Realize, that selling off of their property to support each other was not an obligation, but rather, a love response to all that the Lord had saved them from.

Re-read *Acts 4:35*

The Church members who sold their property placed the proceeds into the hands of the leadership and trusted them to distribute it as they followed the LORD.

When we give to the LORD, we should not give with strings attached.

We are to give as unto the LORD, and then we should trust Him as He places the responsible leaders to make the hard decisions on the distribution of funds.

Notice also, that only those who had a legitimate lack of necessities were given financial support.

Church charity begins with those who are Christians first, those who had need here were part of the family of the Early Church.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. NKJV

We should listen to the Spirit about Church financial support, but ***1 Timothy*** gives criteria for people to receive money.

- The Church leadership must discern who is truly needy.

1 Timothy 5:3

- If someone can support themselves, they should. *1 Timothy 5:8*
- If a family member can support a needy person, the Church should not support them. *1 Timothy 5:3-4*
- Those who are financially supported by the Church should later try to give back to the church. *1 Timothy 5:5, 10*
- It is right for the Church to examine moral conduct before giving financial support. *1 Timothy 5:9-13*
- The financial support of the Church should be to cover the basic necessities of life. *1 Timothy 6:8*

Genuine faith and love for the LORD motivated these followers to assist their brethren with worldly needs.

IV. The Son of Encouragement.

Read *Acts 4:36-37*

Notice, that Barnabas was given the name son of encouragement by the Apostles.

He didn't need to go around blowing his own horn, or letting others know the good he had done.

As the Apostles recognized his character and the gift given by the Holy Spirit, they called Barnabas the Son of Encouragement.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

It is always better to let the Lord show off your deeds rather than try to promote yourself.

There is something odd about this story because, in the ***Book of Numbers 18:24***, we are told that a Levite could not own land.

So how did Barnabas have land to sell, since he was a Levite?

Again, because the law does not work! It tries to force people to be moral, kind, generous, and fair, but it cannot work because we are sinful.

The Law is perfect, but we are not.

Galatians 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. NKJV

It wasn't until the LORD touched Barnabas personally that his heart was filled with love and compassion.

Spiritual compassion is a unique gift, given by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to experience empathy for those who suffer, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally.

All Christians possess some level of compassion that influences their character and actions, but this spiritual gift is unique.

The **specific** gift of compassion intensifies a Christian's connection to the suffering of others, deepening their desire and ability to show mercy and care to those in need.

Barnabas is in Jerusalem, filled with the Holy Spirit, seeing the needs of the other Christians and says, "*What's mine is yours*"

What the Law could not accomplish, **Love** did. **Love Works.**

Without love, society begins to unravel- just like it did during the fall of the Soviet Union.

What did the early followers do when faced with persecution?

They relied on each other for encouragement and to experience real, authentic, powerful prayer.

During their prayer, the disciples focus on three aspects...

- 1. They realize Who the LORD is!**
- 2. They realize the LORD is working out His plan.**
- 3. And they prayed a petition for strength and endurance, knowing that the LORD would see them through**

Then their genuine faith and love for the LORD motivated them to assist their brothers with worldly needs.

V. Practical Application.

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In *Acts 4*, because the Holy Spirit was moving and the Christians were submitted to Him, the LORD gave Great power and Great grace to the Church.

Here are a few questions to ask ourselves as we close.

1. *Do we really trust the LORD as the creator of the universe?*
2. *Do we realize that nothing is too difficult for Him?*
3. *Do we take time to realize the LORD is working out His plan for our lives?*
4. *Are we in constant prayer asking Him for strength and endurance?*
5. *Am I doing my fair share to further God's kingdom here at Living Faith?*

Giving of my time, talents, and treasures

***Barnabas** was a great example of a giving spirit.*

*He was known for his generosity with more than just material things; he was also generous with **encouragement** and that is why they called him **Barnabas**, the “**Son of Encouragement.**”*

We need the Holy Spirit to empower us to know who we are talking to in prayer, to empower us to live a surrendered life unto Christ, and the power to encourage others!