

6/7/15

Acts 4:32-35

## The Local Living Church

*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. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, 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.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Ever wonder what makes one church seem alive and another feel dead?

What makes one church enjoyable and another drudgery?

Sometimes when I am on vacation, I'll go to a couple of different churches on one Sunday. One summer Sunday I visited two churches on one Sunday morning. One was very much alive and the other completely dead. One was vibrant and engaging, the other was cold and uninviting. At the alive one, the people were friendly, worship was participatory and the message was grounded in scripture. At the other, the people didn't speak, worship was a performance and the message deviated from the Gospel.

Two different experiences on one Sunday morning in two different Baptist churches. The problem was not the music style, the location, the size or the ability of the preacher. The problem, as I see it, was a deviation from the design. What is the church *designed* to do and be? When you get to the book of Acts, you find a passage that clearly outlines what the church should look like. Acts 2:42-43 and this passage, Acts 4:32-35, serve as templates for how the church should function. Look, there will always be various styles, locations, sizes and denominations. But there is only *one* model for church design.

### **The Lord's Church is Designed to be the *Living* Church**

Luke tells us several things about the New Testament church. There are things in the text we can learn from in the local living church:

#### **People Must be Loved**

As you think about the need for people to be loved, there is an important qualifier in v. 32. Before we deal with how they love, notice who it is. V. 32 says, *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.* "Now the full number of those who believed," Luke is referring to Christians, that when Christ saves you, He transforms you and you are called to a different and higher life that transcends petty jealousies or hurt feelings.

We are held to a higher standard of living and part of that higher standard comes in the form of loving people you might not otherwise love. Notice the description of the believers in v. 32. Luke says “Now the full number of those who believed were one heart. The word “heart” *Cardia – Cardiac – Cardio*. The heart – sense of reason. Thoughts, vision, passion, unity in purpose, to be of one mind is to have the mind of Christ in common, that we understand that primarily we *gather* to worship and we *scatter* to witness.

We come here on Sunday to give praise to God, to hear a message that points us to Christ that our hearts are bound together in living the Gospel in a hostile world. Furthermore, this gathering reminds us that we are not alone. You have brothers and sisters in Christ facing what you face, struggling with life and relationships and jobs and kids. And we come here to find strength in this body.

Luke says they are one heart but then he says in v. 32, “They were one soul.” *Psuche*, the spirit in us that animates. The thing that’s making you alive is the same thing that is making me alive: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in me is the same spirit in you if you are a believer. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:6, “That which is from the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is Spirit.” In John 3:8 Jesus tells him, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is of everyone born of the Spirit.”

What Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is lived out in Act 2 and Acts 4. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again to a new life of supernatural affection for the body of believers. If you are perpetually complaining and hateful, if you are easily offended or often resentful, then where is the Spirit of Christ in that? How is that good and Godly and Gospel-centered? How is that winsome and selfless and Christ-like? And if the church depended on your affection and love, would it thrive and grow and live? After being with the church a little while in Corinth, Paul had a few things to say about Christ-like church love. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, he says: “Love is patient and kind, love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it’s not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing. It rejoices with the truth. In v. 7 he writes, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” The love of the Lord that comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ makes us love. Grace forces love. Grace manufactures love, and in the context of the church for the Glory of God, by the Power of the Cross, people are to be loved. It’s God’s design for the church. People are to be loved.

### **Possessions Are To Be Used**

When you read v 32 you find a radical approach to "stuff" in that community of faith. Let’s read the whole verse 32. *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.* A complete across-the board sharing. Further described in verses 34 & 35. *There was not a needy person among them, 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. They held the things of this world lightly.*

It boils down to believing that everything you have belongs to God. Surrendering your life to Christ means putting possessions under the shadow of the cross and material property is always subservient to a spiritual purpose. For you personally, this means that whatever possessions or wealth you accumulate are to be used to honor God and help His people. But because of our sinful nature to horde things, instead of *loving* people and *using* things, we end up *loving* things and *using* people and, to quote James, my brothers this should not be.

It is in us to horde and keep and stockpile even from birth. How often as a parent have you had to say “share with your brother”? The Gospel breaks the spell of materialism and makes Christ your supreme possession and pearl of great price. As you see it in the text, this plays out in the life of the church. As a church, we are not a savings and loan institution. We operate with great fiscal responsibility and prudence but we should always operate at a thin margin, putting resources to Gospel ministry. We do that as a reminder of our tremendous need and dependence on God for everything. The local church is designed to be a living church. 1. People are to be loved. 2. Possessions should be used.

### **Preaching Is To Be Persuasive**

Let me show you where I get this. In v. 33: “*And with great power the Apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them.*” At the center of growth for the New Testament church was the preaching of Christ crucified and raised from the dead. And whenever the church is healthy and strong and its church members are thriving in the midst of the struggle, there is solid Gospel preaching going on.

Six things preaching ought to be:

1. Scriptural – exposition – Peter preached and quoted the Old Testament
2. Prayerful – Apostles prayed. They had been with Jesus.
3. Passionate – consumed – Do you believe this is life or death?
4. Personal - Preacher is bothered by his own sin (ring of truth)
5. Christ-Centered – In this text, resurrection.

Charles Spurgeon, every Baptists preachers hero, said "Choose a text, then drive it straight to the cross." But so many messages in

Christian churches are full of stories and emotionalism. That filthy book that recently came out (50 shades of grey) , Churches are taking that title and naming a sermon series after it. It is r idiculous.

6. Grace-Filled – The Gospel is a word of hope and shows the bankruptcy of sin and the love and restoration and forgiveness that is found in Christ. Grace changes everything.

## **Power is From the Lord**

In v. 33 we read, "And with great power the Apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all." What you have here is a recognition that it is from the Lord. It's all *of* God. God's grace sustained them. God's grace worked through them. God's grace is what saved them. By Grace through faith in Christ. The *local* Church is designed to be the *living* church. There is grace at the cross.

*(Pastor shares the Gospel then prays)*