

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
September 13, 2015

Lesson Text: Acts 4:34-5:10
Lesson Title: Sharing All Things

Introduction

It's mine! He can't have it! Give it to me! Sound familiar? If you have children it seems these are some of the first words and sentences they learn. Willingness to share does not come naturally. Some educators say a child does not truly understand the concept of sharing until about age 5. My four year old grandson understands the concept of sharing. The only problem is he only understands from his point of view. If I have something he wants, he says, "Let's share paw-paw." If I ask him to share his snack with me, he say, "No."

The context of our lesson text is a description of life within the early church. Sharing was not a problem. The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit which resulted in united prayer, boldness to preach the good news of Christ, and mutual concern for needs within the fellowship. There was a closeness, a bond, and a sense of responsibility, which resulted in a voluntary giving up of personal rights and privileges to take care of one another.

In our last study from Acts 4:23-31, Peter and John spent a night in jail at the hands of the Sanhedrin in the temple, and they warned them not to preach in the name of Jesus. Upon their release, they met with their brothers and sisters in Christ and had a wonderful prayer meeting resulting in God giving them boldness to continue to preach. It is not just Peter who is bold; it is not just John who is bold; the whole community, the whole church is bold in their preaching and witnessing of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At the heart of sharing is the message of the cross and Christ's resurrection. It has only been three to four months since Christ's resurrection. It is fresh in their minds and hearts. Pentecost is barely two months old. Everything Christ has promised them is coming to past. Jesus is alive and these believers are living in the power of His resurrection. That fact manifested itself in deeds of sharing and love. These believers have all things in common. Their possessions, their lands, their property, their financial resources are held in common.

All kind of questions arise as to what Luke meant when he said, "*...but they had all things common*" (Acts 4:32). Is this Luke's way of describing what Stalin or Marx taught? Is Luke talking about communism? On a much lighter note is Luke describing certain movements and lifestyles in church history such as the Moravians, or the Amish community? Was the early church conducting an

experiment in social programming that eventually failed? The answer to all these questions is, no. Luke is simply saying to hold “in common” means they shared everything. They had a common faith, a common Savior, and so it was not hard to share their possessions. They owned their own property, lived in their private homes, they just shared everything because of what Jesus Christ had done for them.

Sharing and the Example of Barnabas (Acts 4:34-37)

Verse 34-35

“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”

In Acts 4:32 the Bible says “*they had all things common.*” In verse 34 and 35, we learn how this sharing of everything came about. Christians sold their property, the money was placed into a common fund, and the apostles distributed to those in need. They shared what they had for the sake of fellow Christians who were in need. They willingly “brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet” because they understood that everything they had belonged to the Lord.

“Neither was there any among them that lacked” means the sharing by the believers left no one in need. The result of giving was a demonstration of their love for Christ and their fellow man and needs were met.

“And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” teaches us that the distribution of funds was not based on equality, but on need. The goods were not divided equally. They were distributed according to need. Luke, Peter and John, the apostles, and the early church are not saying that it is wrong for some to have more than others. That is not the principle at work here. They were sharing what they had in order to help those who had needs.

By laying their gifts “at the apostles' feet,” the believers are adhering to unity, acceptance of God appointed leadership and authority, and accountability. The church must work together in every area of ministry if the world is to be convinced that Jesus Christ died and rose again (John 17:21). Remember, it was oneness of heart and soul that produced this sacrificial spirit. To give up or sell property for the sake of the needy was a powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence in the church. To lay that sacrifice at the “feet of the apostles” sent a powerful message of unity and trust. Undoubtedly, the people of Jerusalem were amazed when they saw how the Christians loved and cared for each other.

Verse 36-37

“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

Luke tells us about a man named “Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas.” Barnabas sold a piece of property and “brought the money, and laid it at the apostle’s feet.” Luke tells us about “Barnabas,” not because his sacrificial act was more important than others, but because his name meant “son of encouragement,” which was a great example of why they were helping people in need.

“Barnabas” traced his Jewish heritage to the tribe of the Levites, the original priests in Israel. His family at some time had moved to “the country of Cyprus” in the Mediterranean Sea. Barnabas’ heritage to the tribe of the Levites meant that his ancestors did not have property. The Levites were not possessors of land in the Old Testament tribal allotments. God had obviously blessed this man Barnabas for the express purpose of using him as an example of giving back what we did not deserve in the first place.

It is possible Barnabas could have been at Jerusalem for Passover and was saved as a result of Peter’s preaching. Or, he may have been among the 5,000 men who believed after the healing of the lame man (Acts 4:4). Whatever the case, Barnabas is a wonderful example of the Christian spirit of sharing.

Sharing and the Example Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)

Verse 1-2

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

What was a great example of personal sacrifice and sharing in the early church and especially Barnabas, became an occasion for sin in the lives of “Ananias and Sapphira.” Luke contrasts the example of Barnabas with the example of Ananias and Sapphira by the word “but.” The word signals that a contrast is coming. It is a word that warns us the opposite is about to be discussed.

The name “Ananias” means “the Lord is gracious.” The name “Sapphira” means “sapphire, beautiful, jewel.” The actions of these two Christians was anything but gracious and beautiful. Their actions were selfish and hypocritical.

“Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession...” From all appearances their deed was the same as that of Barnabas, they sold “a possession” of land. They were under no pressure or obligation to sell the land. It was their choice to sell or not to sell. It was also their choice to give some of the money they received to the church to help those in need.

Ananias and Sapphira decided to “keep back part” of the profit they made on the land sale. The word “kept back” in the text means “to withdraw covertly for one’s own use.” It is a loaded word Luke’s Jewish audience would recognize from the story of Achan in Joshua 7:1. Concerning Achan, the Bible says, “*For Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing.*” The Israelites had conquered the city of Jericho and all the goods were to be devoted to the Lord. But Achan saw a garment, some silver, and a wedge of gold, and he “took” it for himself.

After the sale of their land, Ananias and Sapphira “brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” On the surface, they were conducting themselves in the same manner and spirit as the early church and Barnabas by laying their offering at the apostles’ feet.

Verse 3

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”

We have another “but” which signals another problem. If Ananias is expecting to be recognized for his contribution he is about to be surprised. “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Luke does not tell us how Peter discovered the deception but his knowledge of the deception must be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter knew because the Lord informed him.

Peter asked Ananias four questions. First, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” “Filled” is the Greek word *pleroo* {play-ro-o} and means “to cause to abound.” The early church and Barnabas was sharing their goods and possessions because they were “filled” with the Holy Spirit. Ananias has “kept back part of the price of the land” because he is “filled” with Satan. “Satan” is controlling the decision making of Ananias at this point in his life.

Ananias had “lied to the Holy Ghost.” The Bible says that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). Peter knew the plot to deceive the church and appear to be Christians who shared when they really were liars began at the instigation of Satan. While Satan was the instigator, Peter was correct in placing total responsibility and accountability on Ananias. He is the husband and spiritual head of this home.

Verse 4

Second, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?” In this question Peter emphasized to Ananias that he was under no command to sell the land. It was his to do with as he pleased. Third, “And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” After the sale of the land Ananias was under no obligation to give the money to anyone. Fourth, “why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” In this fourth question, Peter probed right to the heart of the matter which was Ananias’ “heart.”

“Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” Peter directly charged Ananias with lying to God. He had lied to men, of course, but the nature of sin is such that it offends God as well as men. It is interesting that Peter accuses Ananias of “lying to the Holy Ghost” in verse three, and in verse 4 he accuses him of “lying unto God.” Here is another great proof text of the deity of and personality of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”

Having lied to the Holy Spirit and upon hearing Peter’s words, Ananias fell down and “gave up the ghost.” He died right there in the congregation of God’s people with his offering laid at the feet of the apostles.

What killed Ananias? Maybe the question should be “Who killed Ananias?” The answer is God. This judgment seems drastic to us because we either ignore sin, or joke about it. Sin is no joking matter. This story teaches us something about the seriousness of sin. God killed Ananias because he lied about his offering! He wanted a name for himself. He wanted glory that belonged to God.

“Fear came on all them that heard these things” is recorded here in verse 5 and repeated in Acts 5:11. “Fear” is the Greek word *phobos* {fob-os}. It is that which strikes holy terror. The people were in “fear” of God. God’s judgment for sin is to be feared. Ananias died because God killed him and it struck “fear” upon everyone who heard what happened.

This “fear” is something the average Christian and the average church today knows nothing about. Christians today just do not believe the God they serve is the kind of God who would take the life of a hypocrite or liar. Certainly, God is a patient and forgiving God but He is also the God who judges sin.

Verse 6-8

“And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?”

Jews buried their dead immediately, so “the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.” They wrapped Ananias’ body and carried him outside the city and placed him in a grave. After “three hours,” his wife, Sapphira, comes into the assembly, not knowing Ananias has died because of their sin, and is immediately questioned by Peter.

“Sapphira” confirms that she and her husband sold land for a certain amount. What comes next must have shocked her. Peter asked, “How is it that ye have “agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.” “Agreed together” means “in symphony.” They had made a pact to do what they had done. It was all planned. This was all about them and had nothing to do with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Their decisions and actions concerning sharing was so different from the other Christians and individuals such as Barnabas.

Verse 9-10

“Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.”

No sooner had the men returned from burying Ananias than they are directed to bury his wife Sapphira. Like her husband, she “fell down” at Peter’s “feet, and yielded up the ghost.” Sapphira died because of hypocrisy and lying. She was wrapped for burial and “buried by her husband.”

Conclusion

Does the story of Barnabas cause you to rejoice and be thankful that you are a part of Christ’s church? It should. Does the story of Ananias and Sapphira cause you to tremble a little? It should. There are great and needful lessons to be learned from Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira. One lesson is that God blesses generosity and He judges hypocrisy. May we never forget that lesson.

Are you a Barnabas or Ananias and Sapphira? Does your Christian service come from a desire to glorify the Lord or do you want to be seen and recognized for your contribution? The difference is sometimes hard to tell on the surface. But the truth lies deep within our hearts (Psalm 139:23-24).

Amen.