

Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

Title: “Unstoppable Community” Pt.2

Let's open our Bibles to Acts 4:32-35. What we have here is a snapshot of a community of people who have been transformed by putting their trust in Jesus. When people who live by faith in Jesus Christ ... who have placed their confidence in His saving, sustaining grace ... here's what their community looks like: Read Acts 4:32-37. (Everybody say, “one in heart and mind” ... “shared everything” ... “great power” ... “much grace” ... “no needy persons”.)

Our church's mission is to join God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ. And one of the things that passionate followers of Jesus do is that they build Christ-centered relationships. So we try to build this into the structure of our church in various ways including what we call Community Groups (formerly A2C Groups). These groups are about to start back up; there's information in your worship folder about it. But I want you to hear first-hand why these groups are important. Larry Thompson and his wife Joy lead the Koinonia Bible Study class on Sunday mornings. I've asked Larry to share what their Community Group is like:

- How is your Community Group meeting (formerly A2C) different from what you do in Bible Study on Sunday morning?
- Speaking as an individual believer, in what way has your Community Group specifically ministered to you?

As we look to our text we see that this kind of community was part of the early church. And the Holy Spirit wants us to know that Spirit-led believers who are living in this kind of community are marked by two profound qualities.

QUALITY #1 – A FIRM ATTACHMENT TO PEOPLE

Acts 4:32 - All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

So this oneness of heart and mind meant that they really cared about each other. They were attached to each other in a supernatural way. When someone else in the church hurt, they hurt. There were no cliques. Rich people didn't just care about other rich people; they cared about those who had little and needed help. Young people didn't just think about young people; there was mutual care throughout the church. Light skinned people didn't just care about light skinned people. They were all one church filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus, so they loved the way Jesus loved.

This Jesus kind of love is not just sentimental, like looking at a TV commercial about starving children in Africa and feeling sorry for them. No this is active love that moves us to do something practically to help others.

1 John 3:17 - If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

And that's where the second quality comes in. Along with a firm, loving attachment to people in the family of God there was ...

QUALITY #2 – A FREEING DETACHMENT FROM THINGS

Acts 4:32b - No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Acts 4:34 - There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales

Something happened to these people when they believed that caused them to think differently about other people and about their stuff ... money and possessions. So now as followers of Jesus our things serve a different purpose in our lives; they are a means of loving and blessing others.

But I don't think the application of this should stop with just giving our money. Sometimes the easiest thing to do is to give away money. We can become overly attached to our time just like we can become overly attached to our money. But when our love for God and for people is the top priority of our lives we have this freeing detachment from our money and our time that allows us to truly serve.

So as not to leave us with just mere statements of these qualities, Luke gives us two powerful examples of these qualities. One shows a man who has his priorities in the correct order. The other shows a man and his wife whose priorities are reversed from what they should be. First we are introduced to a man named Barnabas.

Acts 4:36 - Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),

Acts 4:37 - sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas is one of my favorite characters in the Bible. If I could emulate one man outside of the Lord Jesus, it would be Barnabas. He's a man of grace, and we know that his gracious lifestyle flowed out of the fullness of the Spirit in his life. Later in Acts we're going to see Barnabas in a meeting of the elders of the church in Antioch where it says they were ministering to the Lord and fasting. So he was a man of prayer. And out of that the Holy Spirit gave explicit instructions to send Barnabas and Saul off on the first missionary journey. So Barnabas was a man who was accustomed to hearing clearly from the Holy Spirit and obeying Him. So we may assume that Barnabas on this occasion saw the need and felt the prompting of the Spirit to give to the need. What a powerful example to hold up before the church.

But it's very easy to get these priorities reversed, and that's what happens in the second example involving a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira. Let's look into Acts 5.

Acts 5:1 - Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

Acts 5:2 - With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

As far as everyone else knew, Ananias and Sapphira did exactly what Barnabas did. They saw a need and sold a piece of property to give the money to meet the need. But in their hearts beyond what other people knew there was something really wrong with what they did. You see, they wanted everyone to think they were more generous than they really were. So if they sold the property for, say, \$20,000 they gave everyone the impression that they actually gave \$20,000 to the church to meet the need. But actually they gave something less than that, and kept the rest for themselves. So there's greed and deceitfulness lurking in their hearts. They were attached to their money and detached from the needs of people, and all behind a mask of righteousness. This is what the Bible calls hypocrisy.

So Peter, the leader of the church, immediately diagnoses the problem in Ananias heart.

Acts 5:3 - Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

They were not only lying to the church but they were lying to the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Maybe it means that they didn't believe that the Holy Spirit was present in the church, so there's no accountability for their sin. Or maybe they just thought that the Holy Spirit (God) would never really deal with their sin. You see, when we don't take sin seriously it means we don't take the Holy Spirit of God seriously.

And this blatant disregard for holiness was inspired by Satan. If Barnabas was filled with the Holy Spirit, Ananias was filled with the thoughts of Satan to ignore the Holy Spirit in this way. Listen, it's a serious thing to convince yourself that God doesn't know or take seriously the sinful desires of your heart.

Peter continues...

Acts 5:4 - Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

But Ananias and Sapphira loved the status of having a reputation for being gracious and generous when in fact they weren't. And in this hypocrisy they were not just lying to their fellow believers; they were lying to God.

Now here is where it gets really wild. God is so intent on protecting the church from this kind of hypocrisy that He takes drastic measures. **Read Acts 5:5-11.**

Notice that after Ananias dies fear came over the whole church. And when Sapphira lies to Peter and dies, again fear came over the whole church. You see, God moves quickly to remove a cancer from the church that threatened to destroy the fellowship and the witness of the church.

Now obviously not every believer who sinned in the Acts church was punished by death. But it is clear that the Holy Spirit knew that the young church was vulnerable, and if this kind of hypocrisy were to become prevalent it would kill the fellowship and the witness of the church. But I couldn't help asking myself, "What would happen if God always dealt this immediately with our sin?" We'd think twice before we acted or spoke, wouldn't we. We must know in our hearts that God is jealous over His people. We must truly fear doing anything that would hurt the fellowship or the witness of the church.

But the Gospel tells us that Jesus died for our sins so that we wouldn't have to. And when we put our trust in what He did for us it frees us to live as people of love. We develop a supernatural attachment to other believers and we have such a detachment from our things that we would gladly sacrifice and give our things to help them.

But there's another important truth we need to see in this mysterious episode in the life of the Acts church ... the awesome influence of examples. God knew that if the example of Ananias and Sapphira's hypocrisy, deception and selfishness infected the church it would destroy the spiritual community that was supposed to exist in the church. And it would destroy the witness of the church. Just think about it ... the attitude and actions of just two people could affect the whole church in this way. And the reason Barnabas is mentioned is because of the power and influence of his example ... the example of just one, gracious, Spirit-filled man.

So let's strive to be Barnabas-like people who are...

1. Free from the love of money and the status that goes with it.

When Barnabas sold his field he didn't think about all the comforts and pleasures he was giving up. Instead he focused on the good that would come to someone and the glory that would come to God.

2. Open to the needs of people

There was something about Barnabas that we should all aspire to. He was an encourager because he loved people and saw what they really needed.

3. Absolutely dependent on God

You will never be able to live this way without trusting God.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:6 - So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"