

Sermon Title: We Cannot Stop Speaking  
Scripture Text: Acts 4:13-37 (Acts #10)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 3-26-23

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Come with me, please, to Acts Chapter 4; and, Lord willing, we are going to finish this entire chapter today.

As we entered Acts, I wanted to make the commitment to not get bogged down; there are so many wonderful places you could stop and spread out your tentacles to very important things—and I reserve the right to do that somewhere along the way, but I want us to see the flow as this *incredible* spread of the Gospel in the early days took place.

I want to catch you up with where we are; we went through the first 12 verses of Acts Chapter 4 last time. And at the risk of sounding like the cheesy introduction to an episode of a continuing TV series, you do need to know where we left off.

So: Previously on the H.B.C. Adventures in Acts, here's what we've seen. Here's an outline of the whole chapter, including the part we will review. This is about Peter and John being arrested, and the first open persecution of the Christians. Number 1: "You Are Under Arrest." Number 2: "The Evidence Against You Is Strong." Number 3: When they were interrogated, they said, "We Confess."

Now we come to the new stuff for today: "Let's Offer A Deal"—Verses 13-17. "We Order You To Remain Silent"—Verse 18. "Deal Rejected"—Verses 19-22. "The Disciples Emboldened"—Verses 23-31. And "The Spirit Working"—Verses 32-37. So, you can tell: we are not going to go slowly here, but I want you to see the big view.

It started out with: "You Are Under Arrest." This was some days after the original "three thousand souls" were saved, in Acts Chapter 2 (vs. 41). We are not told exactly how long, but it wasn't a long time afterwards. It happened when they came to the Temple to pray one afternoon. Peter and John healed a man who had never before walked (3:6-7). His family and friends carried him every day to the Beautiful Gate in the Temple to "beg" for "alms" (3:2), and that's how the man made his subsistence.

Now, he's going around "walking and leaping and praising God" (vs. 8). Well, that gathered a crowd. There were a lot of people around the Temple anyway, but they wanted to see what had happened to this man; because all the times they had been to the Temple now *for decades*, they had seen this man there, and they had probably stopped and dropped something into the bucket for his "alms."

Well, as soon as the crowd was gathered, Peter preached that this was all about Jesus—that Jesus is the Messiah, and the leaders of the Jews had led the people to reject Him and have Him arrested and crucified, but God raised Him from the dead.

After the sermon had wrapped up and they were with the rest of the Apostles, while Peter and John were still talking to people in the Temple, the leaders of the Temple elites came. It says there were "Sadducees"—that's one of the parties among the Jews, the ones who controlled the Temple (cf. Acts 5:17); "the captain of the temple guard"—their security team; and some of the "priests" (4:1); they came up, and they interrupted what was going on—because we are told in the text they were "greatly disturbed" (4:2).

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First of all, they were "disturbed" because of all these people gathering every day in the Temple, which they regarded as *their* turf. "You come here when we tell you to come here. You do what we want you to do; that's how the Temple operates. This is *our* Temple!"—that was their attitude.

And here these people were gathering every day, and they were being taught by the Apostles—who were *not* approved by the Temple Elites; that "greatly disturbed" them.

Secondly, they were "disturbed" that the Apostles were preaching, not just in general about God's Word, but about Jesus, whom they *hated*—the one they *thought* they had eradicated by having Him Crucified.

And finally, we know they were "disturbed" because Peter and John were not only in the Temple, teaching without their authorization, teaching about Jesus; but they were also preaching about resurrection—that's a doctrine that the Sadducees rejected outright! They believed that you die, and you're worm food—*that's it*; there was no life afterward (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8).

So they came up; they interrupted what was going on; and right in front of everybody, they seized Peter and John, and threw them in jail overnight.

Well, then came the inquisition: they brought them before the Sanhedrin—the Supreme Court of the Jews, if you will—and they just knew that the evidence against these guys was very strong. What evidence? Verse 4—"But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand." The evidence that these guys were so terrible is that now, "five thousand" people—"five thousand" *heads of households*, never mind the women and children—were all rejoicing in the salvation that they have in their Savior, whom the elites meant to put to death...and He didn't stay dead! So to them, that's not proof that the Messiah has come, that is just overwhelming evidence that these Apostles are *evil*, and the people who believed in Jesus are all deluded; they all need to be sent away.

So they say: "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (vs. 7), and what they got was an immediate confession. Before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John immediately confessed: "Well, yeah we are guilty of healing this guy that had never walked." They said they did it by the power of Jesus, and in His "name" (vs. 10). And then they further confessed to preaching that Jesus *is* the Messiah, and that He rose from the dead. So we got down past Verses 10 and 11—"By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He"—Jesus—"is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

And then it's interesting: Peter and John were the ones that ended the inquisition with these words in Verse 12—which I highly recommend you memorize: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

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So they said, "Yeah, we're guilty! We healed a guy. We preached Jesus, crucified and risen again—the only Savior of the world."

So now they have to figure out what deal they can offer these guys. These pompous, proud elites of this *entirely* corrupt temple system—remember, we just read in Romans Chapter 10: "They have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge"; they are trying to "establish their own...righteousness," rejecting "the righteousness of God" (vss. 2-3). That's what this is all about. Now they have to figure out: What are they going to do with these guys that they have arrested?

And it didn't make their problem better by arresting them; it make it worse. Look at Verses 13 and 14—"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men..." That doesn't mean stupid; it means: "They didn't go to *our* schools; we didn't train them; we haven't punched their cards; we didn't say they can be here! I mean, this isn't just, you know, *God's* Temple that anybody who believes in Him can come to; this is *our temple!*" That's what they mean by "uneducated and untrained men": "They aren't one of *us*; they aren't *among* us." (cf. Jn. 7:15)

Well, when they saw that, "they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply."

This persecution is *very much* like what you hear today: "Oh, these *Christians*—they're just a bunch of people with their head in the sand. They're anti-science. They don't understand. Why, they're 'uneducated and untrained'—you wouldn't want to follow *them!*"

But "they had nothing to say in reply" to the fact that, well, this guy that had never walked—*he's walking!* It says here he was "standing with them"; I guess he got tired of "leaping and praising God."

They couldn't refute anything that the Apostles were saying. So watch them squirm, and come to a *ridiculous* conclusion: Verses 15 through 17—"But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men?'—now, listen to how they say this—"For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.' "

Wouldn't you say it's *about time* to maybe examine your theology? *How* did they heal this man? "By the name of Jesus." "But wait a minute! We *killed* Him!" Well, yeah, *but He didn't stay dead!* "God raised Him from the dead." Wouldn't you think it's about time for the *leaders of the Jews* to say, "Maybe these are the representatives of the Messiah; we can't *deny* any of this!?" (cf. Jn. 10:25, 37-38; 14:11)

But here's what they said: "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

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You would think "a noteworthy miracle" would have changed them, but nope; just more of a problem to be eradicated—just like Jesus had been a problem to them (cf. Lk. 16:31). They wouldn't even *think* about connecting this to the Messiah, "Because *surely*, if the Messiah came, He would have applied for admission to our club! This is, after all, *our temple!* We are in charge here!" Oh, the *pride* and the arrogance! But they could not refute *any* of it.

And here is a lesson in what to do when you deal with people who don't want to believe: Don't back down. Don't shy away from citing miracles that God has done. Because the burden of proof is on the *rejecters* to *refute* the miracles which are attested by the authority of the Bible—which is attested *better than any other ancient book!* If you want to deny the miracles of the Bible, *you* need to prove it! Prove your point! Because the record stands written, and the evidence for the validity of the record is *profoundly* strong!

*Our* task is to preach the truth, not to win arguments; to preach "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15); to make sure that when we talk to people, just like Peter and John did, we turn the attention to Jesus—just as has always been God's plan for saving souls (1 Cor. 2:2; cf. Rom. 1:16; 10:17).

By the way: Something else that never crossed the minds of the people that arrested Peter and John was to apologize for the silly arrest. That never came up. But that's another lesson: The enemies of Christ *always* bluster their way through *any* situation. Even when it is *obvious* that the facts are not on their side, they'll just shout louder or change the subject, accuse you of following myths and "old wives' tales" (cf. Prov. 29:9).

So, they offered them a deal. "Here's your plea deal: Shut up!" That was what they offered. Now, it actually made sense to those guys, because to *them*, the problem was: "All these unauthorized people in *our temple*, teaching things we don't like!" So they made a law against it.

Verse 18—"And when they had summoned them"—so they brought them in, interrogated them; they confessed to everything; they sent them out; they said, "Okay, we're going to tell them not to do it anymore—"when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Oh, boy, *that* fixed it! "We're not going to let them *do this* anymore!"

Marsha and I also love to walk. We probably don't probably walk as fast as Christian does. We have our route that we walk, and we get to go by a park in our neighborhood, and there's a nice pond there. And like most places with any water in this area, we have an infestation of geese. They're kind of fun to look at sometimes, but they keep leaving us gifts on the sidewalk. So a few weeks ago, we were walking along, and Marsha came up with the solution: She said, "I'm going to make it *illegal* for them to do that! *No more geese on the sidewalk!*" It didn't work! They *refused* to quit doing it.

Well, you know what? That's how well it worked here. I think of a couple of examples that show us that *this kind of thing*—this is not just long, long ago in Jerusalem. This is getting *here*, more and more. A couple of examples *I* know personally:

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One is a Christian who was falsely accused of fraud. And as the legal process worked its way through, it finally came to the point that he was offered a deal; he was offered a guarantee, though they had accused him of *several* counts of fraud: "We will guarantee: no jail time, no court trial. We will drop *all the counts* except one. All you have to do is plead 'Guilty' to that one charge, and *all* your legal problems will go away." I asked him what he was going to do. And his reply was without hesitation, very clear. He said, "Well, all I would have to do is swear before God to tell the truth, then tell a lie, and my troubles would be over. I guess I'm going to court, because I *cannot* lie." And he went to court. And it wound up that he was railroaded; the consequences were pretty severe. But what do they say? "The softest pillow is a clean conscience."

The other example I think of, I know you are aware of—someone I just met a week before at the Shepherd's Conference. During the Covid outbreak, the government in Alberta, Canada jailed pastor James Coates after they tried to force the closure of the church on the basis of health mandates. Now, they had done just what we had done: They *did* close down when they said, "You're all going to die if you get together in a group!"—and it became obvious that *that wasn't* the case. They reopened earlier than we did; their situation was different than ours. But they told him, "You have to stop preaching. You have to stop meeting. You can't do this anymore." And so they met, and he preached, and they came and arrested him. Maybe you've seen the video of him being put in the back of the police car, with four of his kids just *wailing* in the driveway: "Daddy! Daddy!"

We share a *border* with that country! That's about 800 miles from here! That's in the *Western world*! It's *coming*, and you know what? While he was in jail, James was immediately, and then repeatedly, offered the opportunity to be released immediately. They even had the form ready for him. All he had to do was sign this document, promising that he would *stop preaching*, and that he would not lead worship. And he would up having many weeks of fruitful ministry in jail, before he was released. Now he is preaching to a *packed* church every week. Little different consequences—but you know, jail wasn't very much fun.

My friends, we can be *confident* that if the Lord tarries, if He doesn't come for His Church soon, we can expect to be put in situations like that (cf. Prov. 3:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:12). What excuse will they use? *Who knows?* Well, we have a *very clear example* that we can follow.

They arrested them; cited the evidence; they confessed; they offered a deal—the deal was: "Don't do that anymore! Don't say that anymore!"

Next point—Verses 19-22: Deal Rejected. Verses 19 and 20—"But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge.' " I love that because of how they worded it: "You know, it's *you*, or God; and you are at odds with each other!" It's gently worded, but: "Guys, we have a *higher authority* than you—even in *your* temple!" So, "You be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." I love that response: "We have to obey *God* as a higher authority, and you are opposing God."

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Now, realize: This brings up a kind of situation that can be murky to navigate. When *do* you disobey civil authorities? Doesn't Romans 13 tell us "to be in subjection to the governing authorities"—God put them there (vs. 1)? Yes, it does. But how can you say, "We are going to *disobey* you to obey God?"

Well, that sets up one of the two situations in which Christians *must* disobey government authorities. It's one of two things: It is when they tell you *not* to do something that God says you *must* do—preach, pray, worship, tell what you know; or, they order you to *do* something that God specifically tells you *not* to do—like tell a lie, deny the Lord, recant your faith, something like that.

So, how do we submit to the "governing authorities" and *yet* say that sometimes we have to disobey? Well, you reconcile that by understanding that we submit, *unless* they order us to disobey God. When *they* usurp the place of God, we say, "We have to obey God, the higher authority." And *then* we disobey—and we accept the consequences of the disobedience because *they, too*, are ordained by God; and God promises that He *will* see us through whatever trials come to us for obeying Him above all (Ps. 41:12a; 56:3-4; Prov. 2:7-8; 3:26).

I have to say that these next two verses sound very much like what we heard from the Province of Alberta, Canada—and the County of Los Angeles and the State of California, back in the heyday of Covid after they attacked churches who resisted their overreaching Covid mandates.

Look at these next two verses: "When they had threatened them further..." I think it was a \$10,000 fine *per event* of John MacArthur preaching in his church, for a *long time*—"threatened them further." Then, "they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them)"—oh, by the way: all those charges have been dropped in California; all those charges have been dropped in Alberta...but not without a lot of suffering in the meantime, and a lot of hassles—"they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened." Believe it or not, some people were so *silly* and *backward* that they actually *rejoiced* that that crippled man was "walking and leaping and praising God"—in *their* temple! "*Harrumph*" again! It says, "for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed." *Wow!* Yeah, I'll say the deal was rejected.

You know, after the Apostle Paul had, himself, been a prisoner—about four years; it took him about two years to get to Rome, and then two years in Rome, and then he was released, and then he was re-imprisoned; and right at the end of his life, he wrote this in Second Timothy Chapter 2, Verses 8 and 9—"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead..." What is Peter's message in every sermon so far? "This is all about Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David"—remember how Peter immediately connected it to the plan of God for the Kingdom of God to come to Earth?—"descendant of David, according to my gospel..." All of the Gospel is wrapped up in Jesus! You can't get around it; that's our message. And then he says: "my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal"—I love this next phrase—"but the word of God is not imprisoned."

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I would say that it sounds like Paul had read the Book of Acts; but the truth is, he *lived* more than half of the Book of Acts. Actually, as the dates work out, he might have read the Book of Acts before he wrote Second Timothy. How weird would *that* be? Doctor Luke, whom you have discipled, has written the story that includes your story. Well, maybe he had.

But I want you to notice now: After they were ordered to remain silent and the deal was rejected, I want you to see how devastated the Christians were in that circumstance, after their leaders had been tossed in jail. Look at this, starting at Verse 23—"When they had been released, they went to their own companions..." Where would they have done that? Well, it could have been that room where the "hundred and twenty" first met (Acts 1:15), but now there are "*five thousand*" heads of households (4:4)! They probably went someplace in the Temple; that's where a big group could meet. "When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them' " (vss. 23-24).

Look where they turned! They did *not* have a protest rally. They did not go file a counter-suit. They turned their hearts to *God!*

And it appears that this is certainly a summary of what the whole group prayed; I'm sure it was led by the Apostles. But they were *all of one mind* about it! As they prayed in response to this first case of open persecution, *they didn't focus on the bad guys!* "They lifted their voices to God with one accord," and the whole group shared the same attitude of focusing on God.

So, back up one verse, and let's keep reading in 24 through 26—"And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said"—and this is going to sound a whole lot like Psalm 2, because it's a quote from Psalm 2—"Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ."

This is another case of what I call "Inspired Application." They're not saying that Psalm 2 was a prediction of this exact event. What they are saying is: They saw the parallel, and conformed their prayer to this truth from the Word of God. They understood the general principle: The enemies of God *rage*—they "rage against" Him (Prov. 19:3); they "rage" against His people; they "rage" against His Son. They "devise futile things" and they persistently "gather together against the Lord and against His Christ."

And therein is another lesson about persecution: Expect it! It's not *rare*! It is *far more rare* for people to live in a culture like we have lived in, where there is *so little* persecution of Christians for *so many years*...but that is changing. Don't expect the enemies of Christ to be *happy* when you stand for Christ, when you preach the Gospel, when you tell them the truth (Jn. 15:18-20; 17:14).

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Our job is not to win the favor of the world around us! And trying to do that—*it never works!* And where did anybody ever get the idea that "light" needs help and support from "darkness" (2 Cor. 6:14)? That's not how it works! "Darkness" needs to hear about the "light" (Is. 9:2; Jn. 1:5; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:18; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9).

And then, don't miss the lesson from these next two verses, a pretty straightforward lesson: *God is in control!* Look at 27 and 28—"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel..." Now, what was their motivation? Kill Jesus! *All* they wanted to do was *murder* Jesus (Matt. 12:14; Mk. 3:6; 11:18; Lk. 19:47). They "were gathered together...to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." (cf. Acts 2:23)

Isaiah 53 says God "crushed" His Son (vs. 10) for *our* "iniquities" (vs. 6). *God* put all this together! (Rom. 8:32; 1 Jn. 4:14) Understand: When evil people "rage," when they come against "the Lord's Anointed," when they come against His people, *God is in charge of that!* Is He *motivating* the evil? No! (Jas. 1:13) But He is going to have His will be done (cf. Gen. 50:20; Prov. 16:1, 9; 20:24; 21:1). *That* is how your sins got paid for! Jesus, "who knew no sin," became "sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). He went to the Cross to do that.

Another lesson comes from this prayer, as it continues. Look at the next three verses: " 'And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.' And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."

Oh, I *hope* that they gathered at the Temple, because I hope "the Sadducees" and "the priests and the captain of the temple guard"—I hope they had to feel the ground shake when those people were praying. But then again, they weren't as snarky as I am, wherever they were.

God gave them this little bonus: this miraculous confirmation to them, being again "filled with the Holy Spirit."

But would you notice the two-part request of that prayer? And this is another pattern for how we respond when we are persecuted:

Number 1: "Take note of their threats." They didn't *fight* against the people. The [authorities] falsely, without any legitimate cause, arrested Peter and John, interrogated them, told them to shut up. And what did they do? They called out to God, and they said, "Take note of their threats." They left it in God's hands! They didn't try to impeach the high priest. They didn't try to start a Twitter campaign to smear the Sadducees. That would have been too easy...well, it would have been hard if you didn't have Twitter. But they just prayed, "Lord, take note of their threats." (cf. 2 Kings 19:14, 16)

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"And while You are noticing their threats"—second request—"give us boldness to speak Your Word." So notice again how much effort the early Christians focused on changing anti-Christian public policy: *they didn't!*

Now, it's not *wrong* to lobby for more friendly laws. It's not *wrong* to oppose anti-Christian public policy. But that's not the *highest* priority. You know, we have an election coming up. That's the good thing about living in America: there is *always* an election coming up. But we have an election coming up in the city of Boise, and someone has filed to run against the incumbent mayor of Boise. Our current mayor is "deeply scared and grieved," she says, "about the Supreme Court decision overturning Roe versus Wade." *She wants as many abortions as possible* to take place in this city! That is *serial murder*—at least, by complicity. *You can't vote for somebody like that*—not and call yourself a Christian! It is *right* to stand up and speak the truth (Prov. 28:4b; Mk. 6:18). Now, the problem is: I have no idea if the person who has filed to run has a different view or not. But I know something I *could not* do: I *absolutely* could not vote for that person.

You see, the highest priority, when people oppose you because of your faith, is to stand for the truth. Don't be a *jerk* about it, but stand for the truth—proclaim the Gospel, call upon the Lord in prayer, ask Him to give you "boldness" as you "speak." And learn from the example of this prayer that the persecution—it's not against you, you're just a convenient target (Ps. 69:9; Jn. 15:19, 24); it's "against the Lord and against His Christ."

Peter—one of the two guys who was arrested, touching this whole thing off—he would later write First Peter 4:14—"If you are reviled for the name of Christ..." Isn't that what happened to him? *He* was reviled; *he* was told he was a problem; *he* was told to shut up—but it was "for the name of Christ." "If you are reviled for the name of Christ," Peter wrote, "you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Well, now look what else happens here. We have the same thing happening at the end of Chapter 4 that happened at the end of Chapter 3, where we have an incident that sets the stage for the next chapter. If I was determining chapters in the Bible, Acts would already be two chapters shorter, because I would have combined Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4; they all fit together. And then you're going to see: Oh, yes, and it flows directly into Chapter 5.

We won't linger here, but you need to see what is going on. Look what happens next; we are going to see the Spirit working among these people who are calling on God. Verses 32 and 33—"And the congregation of those who believed..." Now, remember: "Five thousand men" (Acts 4:4)—heads of households, plus "women and children" (cf. Matt. 14:21). "The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all."

What would it look like for that many people to be "of one heart and soul"? Well, they acted as if *they belonged* to each other (cf. Eph. 4:25). It's like what Jesus said in John 13: They "will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (vs. 13).

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So read on; Verses 34 and 35—"For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need."

Caring for each other is being "of one heart and one soul." So, as needs arose, they treated each other as if they were *one big family* (cf. Jas. 2:15). They were of one "household" (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 4:17), and they took care of each other (e.g., Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 9:12).

Now, I need to give you a little bonus section. Some cults, and even some misguided Christians, take this text—and there is a very similar one that we already saw in Chapter 2, Verses 44 and 45; and I said, "Wait until Chapter 4, and I'll say more"—they take them to mean that as believers, we should liquidate all our assets and put it all in one pool, and share equally. They might say, "Well, you know, communism didn't work very well in the Soviet Union because it was under the control of bad people; but among Christians, that's really how it should be."

Well, good idea—except for what the text actually says. Let me show you some reasons why that is an erroneous misapplication.

First of all: This text *does not* teach that everyone pooled their possessions together. They had the *attitude* that all things belong to God, and they regarded them as belonging to Him—so, "We belong to Him; our stuff belongs to Him; we belong to each other." *Neither* passage says that the next step after you repent and you believe and you're baptized is: "Sell everything and give it all to the Apostles." It never says that. It never says they did that.

It says it was "as any had need." When a need arose, people would, if necessary, even "sell" possessions to help meet the need. The fact that they sold them—the text clearly implies—at several different times means: they did not just put them in one pool; it was "as" a "need" arose. Each person's resources "remained under" that person's "control" until they chose to sell them—if they chose to sell them (Acts 5:4). That is going to be a huge point in the next chapter, by the way.

Would you notice also that in the midst of this, the Apostles were in charge of assessing needs, recognizing needs, sharing them, and monitoring who received help. Spiritual leadership includes the care for souls and their physical needs as well (cf. Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3, 16).

Would you notice also: The common goal of everyone here was not to pool everything; it was to give testimony to the resurrection of the Lord. The apparent reason that this practice is recorded here is so that it could set an example. This has been common among believers wherever persecution is common to those believers. Church history is *full* of examples of Christians acting like this in times of great suffering, as the text says: "as any had need."

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If you haven't been reading those stories about what the Christians are doing to take care of one another, and then with one mind point people to Jesus, in the midst of the horrible refugee situation created by the invasion of Ukraine—well, go read some of those things. It's Acts Chapter 4 at work—they're just *all in* on doing whatever they can in the most extreme of needs. We are thankful that *we* don't live at that level of need—oh, but we *might*.

So let's make a couple of applications about this.

First of all: Recognize that all you have is granted to you by God. He told Israel that: "You're going to go into a place where there's going to be 'cities which you didn't build,' wells you did not dig, 'cisterns which you did not dig' (Deut. 6:10-11)—Remember: it's all from the hand of God; He is the One who allows you to create wealth." (cf. Prov. 10:22) It ultimately belongs to God. But if He has entrusted it to you, you are a steward of it; you are a manager of it. And remember that silly adage: You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. It doesn't work that way (1 Tim. 6:7). You are a steward of it for God.

Another application: You should hold your possessions lightly. By that I mean: Understand that what I have belongs to God, and He may give me opportunity; He may expose me to need; He may put the desire on my heart to liquidate this stuff and share it with somebody else. Or, maybe He will give me the opportunity, by wisely managing it and investing it, to grow the wealth so that I can give more and more.

My economist friend used to say, "You know, you can go down to the Red Cross and you can give nine pints of blood in one day—*once*; or, you can give one every couple of months for the rest of your life. Which is better?" It's a stewardship, it's a management issue.

We should also notice: It *is* the responsibility of qualified spiritual leaders to oversee needs and to respond to them and to help manage meeting them.

And I think we should also make an application: Understand that God's most common channel for meeting needs of believers is other believers (Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 9:12; 1 Jn. 3:17-18). You know, if you don't get to the grocery store, and God chooses to rain manna on your yard—free food—okay; God can do that if He wants to, but He has taught us: "We are...members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). When "one member suffers," we all "suffer"; when "one member is honored," we all "rejoice with it."

And I have to insert here—it's not a specific application of the text, but I can tell you: We're coming up on 20 years of the history of this fellowship, and I have never been so blessed to be among people who are *so amazing* at meeting unexpected needs. We have to say, like First Thessalonians 4 does: Lord, let us grow "more and more" (vs. 1, NKJV), yet *greater* in abundance. Be part of it! It is such a glorious testimony to the Lord.

This chapter concludes with a shining example of the attitude of these people toward one another, and their likeminded desire to exalt Christ; *and* it tees us up for Chapter 5. Look at these last two verses: "Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth..." Okay, the guy's name

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is "Joe"; he is of the tribe of Levi; and he was born on Cyprus. "Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." Silly place to end the chapter! But, it just ended.

Now, file that in your memory for a couple of reasons.

First: It really is a great example that sets up the contrast for a real clinker in the next chapter; and we will see that the next time we come to Acts—Lord willing, next Lord's Day.

Secondly: it introduces us to "Barnabas." Right now, all you know is: his real name is "Joseph"; he was born on Cyprus; he was a "Levite"; and the disciples called him "Barnabas"—he's a "Son of Encouragement." Barnabas is going to play a very key role in the Book of Acts.

So, now you've seen what was on the previous episodes of "HBC Adventures in Acts." Next week—same time, same pulpit: *Chapter 5!* And I hope you live through it. If you've been reading ahead, you'll know that *that* was kind of clever.

Let's pray:

*Our Father, thank You for this record in Your Word. Lord, we are not reading this and seeking persecution; but I do pray that by Your grace You will give us wisdom that we will be ready when it comes our way, by learning from this. Father, may we, like these brothers and sisters in this chapter, always acknowledge and proclaim Your sovereignty and learn to rejoice in it—even when we come under attack, and Your sovereign grace includes suffering. May all these things drive us to prayer. And as they do, may we evermore be "of one heart and one mind"—one intent, one focus: on Your Son, Jesus, our only Savior. May You grant us, through whatever You bring into our lives, endless opportunities to call people to faith in Christ, that they might "be saved from this perverse generation." And Father, please remind us always that earthly possessions and wealth—they come from You. They are Yours; You have entrusted them temporarily to our stewardship, and it is all for Your glory. But Father, whatever it is, may the testimony of our lives be what was the testimony of Peter and John here: "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard"—that which we know—all about Your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*