Inside the Huddle

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Date: 20 December 2017

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[0:00] Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

! With great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and a great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, or as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.
And they laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.
Then when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last.
and great fear came upon all who heard it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in not knowing what had happened, and Peter said to her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.
[1:58] And she said, Yes, for so much. But Peter said to her, How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.

Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.
When I was in college, our pitching coach was deaf. He'd been deaf since birth, but he was a really good pitcher in his day.
He actually was a minor league pitcher for the Baltimore Orioles, which made me love him even more. And he told us stories about pitching to Mickey Mantle.
When Mickey Mantle had just been retired for a couple years, and Mickey Mantle hit a home run off of him, this was during spring training, from the right side, and then he switched to the left side and hit another home run off of him.
[2:59] And then after that, he went out and he shook my coach's hand and he took off his sunglasses, and he was drunk. Mickey Mantle was drunk. So that has nothing to do with tonight's Bible story.

I just think it's a really interesting story, and it tells you about how great of a player Mickey Mantle was. So he was deaf from birth, and he could read lips really well.
You could have an entire conversation with him. You could speak as normally as you usually would, and he could read your lips. He knew everything that you were saying. It was amazing.
And it came in handy whenever we were playing games, and he could read the lips of the coach on the other side of the field. But what was really cool is we were watching the Super Bowl one year. Our head coach invited us all over to his house. And so we're watching the Super Bowl, and Coach McClain was able to read the lips of the coaches on TV.
[4:02] He could read. I think it was probably the Patriots that year. He was telling us what the coaches were saying to the players on the sideline. And then in the huddle, if the camera got close enough, he could—and there was face masks and everything—but he was so good at it that he could tell us what they were saying.

And so we were all huddled around him because he was telling us what was going on. It was like he had taken us deeper inside the game. We were inside the huddle. And so I share that story because in this passage of Scripture, Luke takes us inside the interior life of the church.

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Or in the huddle, if you will, of what was going on. And so in the book of Acts, we are shown the work of the church as it is scattered on mission throughout the book.
But the gospel, again, it spreads quickly through Jerusalem and then Judea and then Samaria, and then it's going to the ends of the earth. As the apostles are going and as they are teaching and as they are preaching and they are planning churches, the gospel continues to spread.
And we'll see that as we go through this book. But as we read about the church scattered, however, Luke occasionally calls a timeout, and he allows us to glimpse inside how things looked inside the church that was gathered.
[5:12] And so this passage is like one of those timeouts. He is taking us inside the huddle. He is showing us what this first church was like. And one of the pictures Luke provides us with here is a wonderfully positive and encouraging image.

The other is sobering and terrifying. These two stories are tied together and they are brought forth by Luke in a strategic way. He does this for a purpose.
Both stories involve the church. Both stories describe the selling of property. Both talk about giving and offering from the sale of those properties. And Luke uses both of these instances to highlight the kindness and the severity of God at work in the church.
Together, these two accounts emphasize the importance of unity within the church of Jesus Christ. The first account highlights how unity is experienced. And the next highlights how unity is endangered.
Obviously, unity is what Scripture calls for us to pursue in the church as Christians. And likewise, divisions within the church are discouraged by the Bible.
[6:23] These two passages help us understand and pursue Christian unity, the type of unity that we are to have, and to seek to maintain that unity within our churches. It's not easy, but it isn't complicated either.

So the first thing we see from this text is that unity within the church is established by the gospel. Verse 32, Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.
This is a big church, remember? They talked about how many men came to faith, around 5,000. And we can assume that with the men came their wives and their children.
So this church, quite possibly, is around 10,000 people or more. In verse 4, Luke mentions 5,000 men again. And again, they had women, or wives, I should say, and children.
And so this was a very big church to keep united. And again, that's a whole lot of people to unify. We struggle to understand today how that is possible, right?
[7:26] When our churches are not nearly that size, and we seem to struggle with this kind of unity, experiencing that. But the answer is simple. How were they unified? Well, they were unified because they believed the gospel.

That is what they all had in common. Their faith in Jesus Christ is what united them and kept them together. In verse 33, we read that the apostles kept preaching the message.
That people were in harmony as a result of that. They were harmony around their teaching of the gospel. And the gospel is the most powerful unifier in the world. They had the same mind in that they understood what mattered most.
They were of one heart, meaning that they had a great spirit of love that was permeating throughout the church. They were utterly committed to the gospel.
And that made them committed to one another. God is the one who establishes unity within the church, right? It's not something that man can create. But we do have a responsibility to maintain the unity that the Lord has given to us.
[8:31] The gospel unites all different kinds of people from all different walks of life. And it's able to bring them together. People who are so different from one another. It's able to bring them together and unite them in mind and in spirit and in heart.

Unity does not mean uniformity, however, right? We're not bringing people in and then telling them how they should now dress or sound like or whatever.
Our unity isn't based on what we have in common. It's based upon the gospel that we share, the salvation that the Lord has given to each of us.
Unity, we see secondly, is experienced through the gospel. So it is established by the gospel. It's experienced by the gospel. We see that in verses 32 through 37.

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We see that the believers here are selling their possessions, that they are bringing the proceeds from those cells to the apostles. The apostles are distributing that within the church.
[9:37] And so we see that there isn't anybody who is in need, who goes without. Everybody is able to have what they need to survive.

And then one person is highlighted, and that person is Barnabas, who we'll talk about in a second.
Another thing to understand, as we talked about last time, is that this isn't communism.
This is not forced giving. Communism is forced giving. The Holy Spirit was working in the lives of these people. And we understand that government cannot accomplish what God is capable of doing, and only what God is capable of doing.
Amen? Amen. Even though they did pray in the cabinet meeting this afternoon, and I heard Ben Carson's prayer, it was a really good prayer.
Now we just pray that God will hopefully answer it, right? Okay, so they were experiencing this unity through the gospel. It's possible for a church to agree on every minuscule point of doctrine and still have division.
[10:43] It's possible for a church to agree on every political issue and still have division. It's possible for a church to agree on many of the things that we deem essential and still experience division.

The type of unity that Luke describes here is rooted and it's grounded in the gospel. This kind of radical sharing begins with a common gospel identity, and then it produces the radical practice of sharing that we see.
So now let's consider three aspects of their sharing. The first is that their sharing was extensive. Who does it say was sharing? It says that their sharing was not limited to a few, but it included everyone.
It said there, I can't see what verse, but it says there in verse 32 through 37, that it says that no one went without, that everything belonged to anyone who had need.
So they were sharing with everyone. There was nobody who was left out. If they had need, they were able to get what they needed. Secondly, it shows us when and where they were sharing.
[11:53] It says that they were sharing all the time. Whenever somebody had need, they shared.
And then it shows us what they were sharing. They were sharing everything. No one claimed that their possessions belonged to them only.

They held their possessions loosely. And so I hope you keep that in mind because some of you guys, maybe not here, but I know some of you have motorcycles, and I'd like to borrow those.
So you need to be loose with your possessions. When the time comes, I may be asking. You probably don't.
I probably need to learn how to ride a motorcycle first. That would be a good thing. I went down to the Salvation Army yesterday. Georgia Villarreal invited me to come down, and I saw the distribution.
They had all these brand-new bicycles that kids are going to have for Christmas. I was like, this is an amazing thing. This is very good. This is one of the things that it's all about, you know, giving and sharing with people, being generous.
[12:52] We understand generosity, but we find it difficult to apply our understanding of generosity to ourselves. Our issue, again, isn't that we don't understand what generosity is or what it means to be generous.

We understand what it means completely, and I think that's why we often struggle so much with applying generosity in our own lives. Jesus illustrated this perfectly in the parable of the Good Samaritan, if you remember.
The lawyer wanted to debate over whom he should consider a neighbor. Remember, that was the question that sparked the parable. Jesus wanted him to embrace everyone as his neighbor.
And so he shares that story. Talk is cheap. The Lord expects us not just to be hearers of his word, but doers of his word. And the type of generosity he requires of us is not just a giving away of our possessions, but caring about the needs of others.
We are called to be actively involved in the lives of our fellow Christians and the lives of those in our community, and to be generous with one another if the Lord has blessed us with the ability to be generous.

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[14:04] Okay, so the second thing we see is that their sharing was empowered. It was empowered from verse 33. And again, it says there, And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Here we see another example of word and deed ministry. The apostles were declaring the gospel in their preaching, and the church was displaying the gospel in their generosity.
The people gained a proper perspective of their possessions as they pondered the resurrection. They could speak and give fearlessly because they understood that their salvation was secure. And so they weren't afraid to hold their possessions loosely. They understood that they were undeserving recipients of God's favor. They marveled at his grace, and so they were willing to bless others because they understood how much God had blessed them.
Their sharing was extraordinary. In verses 34 through 35, again, we see that there was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses, they sold those things.
[15:11] They brought those proceeds. They laid them at the apostles' feet, and then the apostles distributed them. Wealthy people existed in the early church, right? They had property.

They had possessions. They had a surplus of things that they could afford to sell, and that's exactly what they did. They saw their wealth as a blessing, and they also saw it as a responsibility to meet the needs of those who were in the church who did not have as much as they did.
A good verse to keep in mind as we consider this is 1 Timothy 6, verses 17 through 19. I'll read those for us. The wealthy people in Acts chapter 4.
And so here at this point, we are introduced to a man named Joseph who earned the nickname Barnabas, which we saw means son of encouragement.
And Barnabas is a major figure in the book of Acts. He's mentioned here for the first time. He's mentioned 23 times in total. And if believers, now here's the question.
[16:46] This guy was pretty impressive. He was given a pretty awesome nickname. When Danny was pregnant with Hazel, I didn't threaten.

I encouraged that if it was a boy that maybe Barnabas would be a good name, but she didn't think so. Barnabas, like the others, didn't have to sell his feed and bring the proceeds to the apostles. They weren't forced to do this, but he chose to do that. And going back to Barnabas, and here's something to think about. In our church, what kind of nickname would people give to you based upon your attitude in church or your service in church?
You know, I think we've got a lot of... We're few in number tonight, but there's people here that I think, you know, you get some pretty good nicknames. I think. We call Lee our sound man. Faithful, not sound, faithful audio visual man. We've got to think of some kind of way to shorten that.
So Luke introduces us to Barnabas here, and he does that because this man stands in stark contrast to the next two people that he's going to introduce us to, and that's Ananias and Sapphira.
[18:06] The church couldn't make it without generous people like Barnabas. The church continues to be sustained by those who give generously to the cause of the kingdom, not looking to get anything in return for what they give, but they are seeking to be obedient and to bless the church with what God has blessed them with.

And so next we see that unity is endangered by hypocrisy, and that comes from chapter 5, verses 1 through 11. Luke, interesting here, he doesn't hide the faults of the early church.
He doesn't, because this is inspired, right, by the Holy Spirit, and we see that all throughout Scripture, that God isn't afraid to show the faults of his servants.
And so here we see that this church, as good as it was, has a fault. He's not seeking to write a fairy tale about how perfect the church is, right? Again, no church is perfect.
Even this early church who came about as close as it seems like any church has come to be that kind of a perfect church. But again, like the old saying goes, and I know that you've heard it, if you find a perfect church, don't join it because it won't be perfect anymore.
[19:22] And that's the truth. And the truth is also you won't find that perfect church. In Acts chapter 4, we see the church members acting at their best. But here in Acts chapter 5, we see the church members acting at their worst.

Here we read about the duplicity of Ananias and the complicity of Sapphira and God's response towards the violation of his holiness. So in verses 1 through 4, we see that Ananias and Sapphira were blatant hypocrites.

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They had a piece of property. They sold it. Ananias did so with his wife's knowledge. And together, they had this plan that they were going to keep a portion of the proceeds back and they were going to lay the rest at the feet of the disciples as if they were giving the full amount.
And then we see Peter's response, rebuking of them for their sin. And then we understand that as a result of what Ananias has done, he is struck dead on the spot.
And so at first we might think, well, what was so wrong about what they did? What was so bad about this? First of all, they were spiritual imposters. They were neither forced to sell their field nor were they to give it to the church.
[20:42] We don't see that there was any kind of commandment going forth from the apostles that they should do this. All of it was supposed to be voluntary, but they pretended to give more than they actually gave.

And they kept some of the proceeds for themselves, but again, they acted as if they had given the full amount. So they were spiritual imposters. They were praise seekers as well.
They wanted a reputation like Barnabas. Maybe they wanted a cool nickname like they had, but they were going to try and do it. They were going to try to give to get that reputation, but they were going to do it in a way without expressing the same kind of compassion that Barnabas had.
Perhaps Ananias wanted a nickname too. Again, something that would make him feel more important and elevate his status within the church. Thirdly, we see that they are liars. Few people understood or understand how seriously lying really is.
Peter says that they were lying not just to the church, but they are lying to God. When people don't value the holiness of God, they minimize sin. And that's what's happening here.
[21:51] Fourthly, they were greedy. They kept back part of the proceeds for themselves. John MacArthur suggests that somewhere along the line, these two had made a promise, perhaps publicly to the church, that they were giving the full amount received to the Lord.

But they were not. They were greedy. They wanted some for themselves. Fifthly, they were deceivers. They had planned this whole thing out. They had orchestrated this from the beginning. And they did so as if God was unaware of their plotting and their planning. And then sixthly, they were used by the devil to grieve the Holy Spirit.
Satan tempts people to believe that sin is not a big deal, but lies and deceptions and greediness, these are all things that are contrary to God's nature. And these are things that grieve him, especially when they are taking place within his church.
And so, God's judgment fell on them immediately. It's important to note that this judgment comes from God and not from Peter. This is God's doing, not Peter's.
[23:00] Peter was simply doing what Christians are supposed to do, which is to rebuke sin and to hold professing believers accountable when they stumble and they fall. So now the question becomes, and a lot of people would read this and think, was this judgment extreme?

It seems extreme, they would think. And when I was thinking about this, it reminds me of 2 Samuel 6. Do you remember the story of Uzzah and the ark? And they are transporting the ark and it's in an oxen cart.
So the first question is, why is it in the oxen cart, right? It shouldn't have been there. It was supposed to be carried by the priests, but that wasn't the case. And so it wasn't in the place where it was supposed to be.
And then if you remember, the wagon and the oxen stumbled and it tipped and it looked like it was about to come out. So Uzzah pushes his hand out or sticks his hand out to steady the ark and he touches it and he dies on the spot.
And remember, this really upset David. He called an end to the whole entire parade that was going on and they took quite a long time out before they did transport it back.
[24:08] And they did it the second way, the right way. But the thing about Uzzah, that seems extreme. But what he didn't understand and what we don't understand is that Uzzah was of the mind that his hand was cleaner than the ground that the ark was going to land on.

And it wasn't. Uzzah wasn't in a position where he was able to touch God's ark of the covenant. And so we've got to understand that all of us don't just fall short of the glory of God.
We fall way short of the glory of God. And the other thing that we need to understand that unfortunately I don't think many Christians do is that none of us deserves to be saved.

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None of us. God doesn't owe salvation to anybody. And God would be completely justified if he allowed every single one of us to spend the rest of our eternity in hell.
Because we are the ones who have sinned against him. We are the ones who have violated his holiness. God sees the heart. And so God saw what was taking place in the heart of this man and this woman.
[25:23] He knew all of their motivations, that they were belittling his name, and that they were being used by Satan to assault his church.

And he wasn't going to stand for it. And the other thing that I don't think that we think enough about either is not that God would do this, but why doesn't he do it more often? You know, he's merciful and he's gracious.
It seems like it should happen more often, but because of his grace, it doesn't. In Philippians 2, 12, the Apostle Paul says, Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.
A healthy fear of offending God is what he means there. And then a righteous awe and respect for him, for his name, and for his church. And that was not happening with Ananias and Sapphira.
In verses 7 through 10, Peter approaches Sapphira about her involvement in the matter. The results of that meeting are the same. She shared in her husband's conspiracy, and as a result of that, she shared in her husband's fate.
[26:30] An interesting point here to make is that sometimes, as a wife, you shouldn't submit to your husband when he is asking you to do something that would cause you to sin against God.

So, what are the applications here from the second portion of this scripture? How can we avoid being like Ananias and Sapphira?
How can we avoid, you know, somebody dropping dead on the spot in our church? Well, first of all, fear the Lord. Fear the Lord.
We've already read Philippians 2, verse 12. Proverbs 1-7 says that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It means that we respect the Lord.
It means that we seek to understand His holiness. That we don't treat sin as if it's nothing. But we take it seriously. And we respect who He is and what He's done for us.
[27:30] So, fear the Lord. The more you fear the Lord, the more likely you will be to be obedient to Him. Secondly, apply the gospel. The gospel frees us from self-centeredness.

This story should remind us of our need to deny ourselves daily and to take up our cross and follow Jesus as He's commanded us to. So, apply the gospel. The more you apply the gospel, the less self-centered you'll be.
The more selfless you'll be as a result of that. The more Christ-centered you will be. And you won't struggle so much with issues like greed and deception and lying like Ananias and Sapphira did.
Thirdly is repent of your sin. When you're aware of your sin, you must repent of it. Seek God's forgiveness. You know, in that moment, Ananias was found out.
He should have called out. He should have sought repentance in that few moments that he had before he died. But he didn't. And then Sapphira as well. I don't know the situation. She was brought in.
[28:37] Where was she? She didn't know that her husband had died. I don't understand all of that situation around there. But somehow she came into the church. She was led to the apostles.

And she was asked the same questions. And instead of being honest and repenting of her sin, she stuck with her story.
And as a result of that, God took her life as well. So, the takeaways from this would be, to be a healthy church, we must be a united church.
Which means that we are focused on the gospel. That we're applying the gospel to our lives. That we understand the things that God has given us aren't our things. That they're his things.
And so, we should hold those possessions loosely. There are treasures that we have that often we treat as idols. You know, one thing that I've heard is, especially for I had an uncle who had Studebakers.
[29:35] And he collected them and never drove them. They just sat in his garage. And we'd come over and we wanted to see the Studebakers. And he would let us, but he would follow us around with his handkerchief.

And anytime we touched it, he would leave a little fingerprint. And he was right there to wipe it off. And the thing about him, and I loved him. He was my favorite uncle.

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He's no longer living. And those cars belong to somebody else. Somebody else has their fingerprints all over them. And so, we've got to understand that the things that we treasure, we're not going to be able to keep them and take them with us.
And so, we should hold on to those things loosely. You think of what those cars might have been worth and how much, you know, if he'd sold them, how much good could have been done with those money.
So, hold on to your things loosely and don't treat them as yours, but treat them as blessings from God. And then finally, do all that we can to make sure that we are not a source of division within the church.
[30:41] So, this means that, again, we're not thinking of ourselves primarily, but we're thinking of the Lord primarily. That we're loving our neighbors as ourselves. And as a result, when we do this, the church grows.

The church is healthy. People are blessed, not just within the congregation, but the community is blessed by the church. And so, let's seek to be that kind of church.
Thank you.

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