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“It’s how you live!” – Acts 4:32-37

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○ These words are contained within a song by Point of Grace... **It’s not who you know; it’s not what you do; it’s how you live!** ○ Chuck Swindoll said, "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it." And so, how you live, react or respond is what really matters in this life. We are not just helpless victims, nor the powerless product of chance or good fortune.

And so as you read Acts chapter 4, I encourage you to notice the difference between a religion and a relationship; Judaism, and Christianity; between the Sadducees or Pharisees, and the disciples of Christ. Notice that it’s not so much what you do, but how you live. You see, in our world today and with our wealth, you can virtually have whatever you want, but do you want what you have? How content are we, and how generous are we? Are we living for ourselves, or are we living to bless others?

○ Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John heal a forty-year-old man who was disabled from his birth, and the leaders of the temple imprison them overnight. They have not threatened anyone; hurt anyone; broken any law; caused a riot and disrupted the peace. Yet they are imprisoned overnight, then questioned and threatened that they need to stop their practices or there will be consequences. All because of a good deed!

What were the motives that drove the Sadducees? They felt threatened that their position and livelihood was at risk; the status quo was being challenged and they didn’t like it. As the spiritual leaders of the nation, they were in control of what happened religiously. These disciples had not sought their permission. And so, they were concerned to protect their religion and their position. But it’s not who you know; it’s not what you do; it’s how you live! And under their watch, Judaism was failing dismally. It was a religion bent on following rules, rather than people expressing their love freely and generously.

And so, having been threatened, Peter and John return to their friends and inform them of these latest events, threats, and demands that they no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus. How would you respond to such treatment? We’d probably spread the word about such unjust treatment and call the media or seek legal advice to sue them. ○ Look at 4:24, **“When they heard this, they raised their voices together, in prayer to God.”** They prayed first! So often we pray, last. We exhaust all other avenues before we turn to God. And that actually reveals our lack of faith in God.

So often too, we seek that those who threaten us or cause us pain, are punished in some way; we seek revenge that they pay for what they have done. The disciples however leave that in God’s hands, and are more concerned about continuing to honour the Lord. They are seeking to be faithful, loving servants. ○ And in v.29 we read their prayer, **“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”**

They didn't ask for protection or shelter, or retaliation, but for greater boldness, and that the Lord would increase the demonstration of His power and saving grace. Thus, increasing their danger. But this would exalt Jesus.

As a result, ☉ we read that **“they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly.”** The Lord honoured their prayer and answered their prayer. V.33 says, **“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”** I believe that this is a prayer that God will continue to honour today. It is often the prayer of the persecuted church around the world. “Give us strength to persevere through suffering and boldness to proclaim the truth of the gospel.” Were Jesus words as recorded in Matt 13:13 still ringing true in their ears? **“Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”** This is where the rubber meets the road; where faith is lived out. It's not who you know; it's not about what you do; it's how you live! Are we praying for courage to share our faith; to stand firm to the end?

Luke then records a description of the church at this time, and it's a description of how the church was living out her faith. ☉ V.32-35, **“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all, that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”**

All the believers were one in heart and one in mind. For far too long, Christians have preferred to remain separate from one another on the basis that we don't have the same doctrine – we don't believe the same things nor practices. We do church differently to one another. Churches of Christ has from its inception sought to bring Christians together, back to what we understand to be the teaching and practice of the New Testament.

And so, we ought to be demonstrating what it means to be of one heart and one mind – that's it's not about what we do, but who we are. We are one in heart; encouraging one another, forgiving one another, caring for one another, comforting one another, serving one another, praying for one another, providing for and protecting one another; that our love for the Lord transforms who we are and how we live. **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Matt 6:21) Where is your treasure? For these believers they treasured one another more than their possessions or wealth.

The culture that we live in; this self-focussed world that permeates our thinking is always pulling us away from such behaviour and acts of love. It wasn't too much later that ☉ Paul appeals to the folk in the church at Philippi, **“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”** (1:27) “In one mind, and one spirit, the way you live your lives will be evident to all.”

As a result, ○ from v.32, **“No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ...there were no needy persons among them. (And) For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, and the money was distributed to anyone who had need.”** One in heart and mind they loved one another – they did everything they could for one another’s wellbeing – in direct contrast to the existing religious system.

The Sadducees, Pharisees, and those living under Judaism were unfortunately living by the rules and not according to the intent of the Law. The Law was given as a way of explaining what was meant to come out of the heart. However, Judaism was failing the people and it became more important to adhere to the rules than to help one another. Remember how Jesus copped such criticism for His good deeds performed on the Sabbath? The people of the time – living under Judaism – were not of one heart and mind, doing all that they could for the well-being of each other.

But now, here was a growing group of people who were living like the covenant people of God. They were sharing what they had – no one was needy among them – believing beggars didn’t need to beg any longer, but were being cared for. Those who had property that they could do without sold their property and gave the money to be used to provide for one another. They were content with what they had, and generous in their provision. They were not focussed on making money, but rather giving it away. They sought to be good stewards of what God had given to them. Do you consider yourself to be the steward of what God has given into your hands, or do you consider it, your stuff? It’s actually God’s that he has given to us on loan.

Over the years as I have served here, it has been so good to see the generous heart of the church. Every year we have set a target in which we seek to financially support many who work in mission. God has allowed us to meet that target each year. We have also met many other needs along the way. When we were building this facility, we actually gave more funds away to mission than previously before because we felt that God does not bless the stingy giver.

At one stage we also sought ways in which to reduce the debt that we would owe. We considered leaving off the prayer chapel and building it later, but then re-considered and agreed that prayer is one of the primary functions of the church and that we should trust the Lord to provide – and of course He did. God honours the generous giver, and I believe this is why God has honoured this church. I want you to know that you cannot outgive God. He will provide all of your needs. But we are called to be good stewards of that which He has placed into our hands.

○ Luke then records these words... **“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”** This is the first mention of Barnabas. He was a Levite; that is, he was from the family line of Levi and their primary task within the nation of Israel were to be the supporting workers within the Temple – they were to do all of the menial tasks that temple worship required – to serve the needs of the Priests who were the descendants of Aaron. He may have well served in the Temple surrounds, but I can only assume that he must have been most unfulfilled, until as a Christian he could live out what was in his heart.

For although his name was Joseph, the disciples saw a constant encourager, and called him Barnabas. And he continued to live his life by that description. The next reference we see of Barnabas the encourager is him being sent by the Disciples to Antioch to encourage the Christians there. He travelled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys and then later took John Mark with him.

We too are called to be encouragers. Paul appealed to the church in Thessalonica to “encourage one another and build each other up.” It’s so easy to tear one another down; to discourage and complain, and we Aussies are good at knocking down the tall poppy, and unfortunately, we may take some pride in that. But as Christians we need to be encouragers. The devil is doing a good enough job already without our help. Listen to what comes out of your mouth and ask yourself, “was that encouraging?” And Barnabas was a faithful and generous steward of what God had entrusted to him.

○ **It’s not who you know; it’s not what you do; it’s how you live.** How content are we, and how generous are we? What do we treasure most? Are we living for ourselves, or are we living to bless others? Are we being faithful stewards with what the Lord has given us? And are we praying for courage to be bold with our faith?

TN196 All I once held dear