

Radical Love

- Acts 2:32-37
- When the Spirit fell on the church and the power of the Gospel began to turn Jerusalem upside down, Satan did not sit idly by. He acted. We talked last week about the beginnings of persecution that was part of the strategy of Satan. He used the Sanhedrin to speak threats of physical violence and we will see them follow through with those threats in chapter 5. The second strategy of Satan is moral corruption from within. If he cannot crush the church with physical violence from without, he will try to bring the church to its knees through moral decay and compromise from within. We will see the first example of that next week, Lord willing, as we look at the deception and hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. The third strategy of Satan is distraction. We will see that in chapter 6 when there is a temptation for the apostles to deal with felt needs and with administrative duties rather than continue to commit themselves to their primary task of preaching the Word and prayer. Now, I didn't notice these three strategies on my own but am indebted to John Stott who also said this about Satan: "Over the years he has changed neither his strategy, nor his tactics, nor his weapons; he is still in the same old rut...If we are taken by surprise, we shall have no excuse."
- We finished up last week with a second great shaking that took place in the church. The first happened at the birth of the church, on the day of Pentecost, and the people of God were all filled with the Spirit of God and spoke the Word of God. With tongues. And three thousand were saved that day. Then the second shaking happened when the church prayed, crying out to God to look on the threats of those who would try to silence the believers, and again all the people of God were filled with the Spirit of God and spoke the Word of God. With boldness. Now, you would think that the church from this point on would say, "Hey, we have seen amazing things happen when we go out and preach to the lost. That's really what we need to be about. Let's not waste another minute meeting together and singing and praying and preaching. The people who have needs are out there. We are fine." But that is not what happened at all. The church continued to preach the Word of God with boldness to the lost, but I want you to see that another powerful evidence of the fullness of the Spirit is seen in the love of the body, the commitment that believers have to one another. John Stott writes, "(Luke) is concerned to show that the fullness of the Spirit is manifest in deed as well as word, service as well as witness, love for the family as well as testimony to the world."
- Let's look at this passage today and examine it under these three headings, "Radical love," "Radical ownership," and "Radical giving."
- **Radical love**
- That first verse is amazing. "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul." They were radically committed to loving one another. And look at the expression again: they were of one heart and one soul. It reminds me of the Greatest Commandment. The disciples asked Jesus which commandment is the most

important of all. He answered with the Shema from Deuteronomy 6. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Then He said, "The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:28-31) I love the story in Gary Thomas' book, *Sacred Marriage* about two brothers who worked during the day in a field and in the evening at a mill together. Each night they divided up the grain they had harvested and each took his portion home. One brother was single and one was married with a large family. The single brother decided that his married brother, with all those kids, certainly needed more than he did, so at night he secretly crept over to his brother's granary and gave him an extra portion. The married brother realized that his single brother didn't have any children to care for him in his old age, so he go up each night and secretly deposited some grain in his brother's granary. One night they met halfway between the two granaries, and each brother realized what the other was doing. They embraced and as the old rabbinical story goes, God witnessed what happened and said, "This is a holy place—a place of love—and it is here that my temple shall be built." Radical love. Selfless love. It is put on display by this,

- **Radical ownership**

- "No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own." That seems to be a contradiction in terms, doesn't it? If what belongs to me is not my own, then it doesn't belong to me, does it? Well, no it doesn't. It belongs to the Lord. But at the same time, He lets us choose what we are going to do with those things that belong to Him and are in our hands. He gives us stewardship over much. And what we see in this passage today is evidence that the first church took to heart Jesus' words in Luke 12, where He said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy." (Luke 12:32-33a) Because they believed this promise, that God would give them the kingdom, they were free to let go of their stuff.
- This passage today sounds very much like the passage Dan preached on a few weeks ago, doesn't it? Look back at Acts 2:42-47 for a moment. Let me ask you a question: Is it possible to eliminate poverty? Think about it. Well, you know what Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 26:11, "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me." He was responding to the disciples' indignation over the woman breaking open the alabaster flask of very expensive ointment and anointing Jesus with it, saying that the ointment could have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus praises the woman for her sacrifice for the Lord, for using that precious gift for the body of Christ. Is it possible to eliminate poverty? The answer is a qualified yes. There will always be poor people in this broken world. But if you listened to the passage as Kevin read it this morning, you heard these amazing words: "There was not a needy person among them." Not because the church only allowed people in who were doing quite well, thank you, but because the needy were taken care of in the church by those who were not needy. It was a radical expression of the love of Christ at work. As a result, in the church in Jerusalem, in its infancy, there was no

poverty. There is a precedent for this. Look at Deuteronomy 15:4. Now at Verse 11. There will always be poor in the land, and we should open our hands and our hearts to those who have genuine needs. But there should be no poor among us. Paul said in Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." This principle goes way beyond just putting some money in the plate when we are asking for an offering to help somebody in Bocachica or in Burlington. They shared all things in common. I like what Williams Hendricksen said, here: "The Christians practiced common use of their possessions, not common ownership." They shared their food with one another. And their homes. And their vehicles. Tools. Whatever they had. In other words, they held things very loosely so they could love each other more deeply.

- **Radical giving**

- Look at verse 33. Great power for testimony and great grace on the church. I think part of the power of the testimony was the evidence of radical giving that was going on in the church. Those with houses and land, verse 34, were selling them and bringing the money from the sale and laying it at the apostles' feet. Not just a tithe, which would have been expected. They were bringing the whole thing. I can hear Peter talking to someone in the temple who says, "Hey, what's this I hear about a, what do you call it, a church? What's going on with all you people who are following this Galilean guy around, what's his name, Jesus? He was crucified, right?" "Yes," Peter would say, "but haven't you heard? God raised Him from the dead on the third day, and I saw Him. I talked to Him. I ate with Him. Jesus is alive! And do you know what He has done? He has changed our lives. Thousands of us. He has given us salvation, the promise of eternal life, and He has given us peace with God and love for God's people. In fact, just the other day, Barnabas did something amazing. Do you know Barnabas? Oh, wait, of course you don't. I mean, you know him as Joseph. From Cypress? The Levite. Right. Well, we nicknamed him Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement," because the Lord uses Him to bless people like you wouldn't believe. I mean, just being around the guy makes you want to serve God with all your heart. Well, anyway, just the other day Barnabas sold a field that he owned and brought the money from the sale and laid it at our feet. So we could use it to help some of the people in the church who need food and clothing and are just struggling with basic needs. Yeah, you're hearing about the church because it is a work of God. Now, let's talk about Jesus of Nazareth some more..."
- We are going to learn more about Barnabas as the book of Acts continues. He's the one in Acts 9, the only one, who was willing to welcome Saul of Tarsus into the church after his conversion. Everybody else was terrified of the guy. "They were all afraid of him," Acts 9:31 says. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles..." Then we see Barnabas again in Acts 11 when the church in Antioch is exploding with growth and the church in Jerusalem hears about it and sends Barnabas to go and take care of the church in Antioch, to pastor that flock. Who does he call on to help when the growth of the church outruns his ability to feed them? He goes to Tarsus to look for Saul. Then again in Acts 13, we see Barnabas and Paul sent

out by the church at Antioch to do missionary work. Barnabas decides to take along his cousin, John Mark, and John Mark bails on the mission after about two weeks. When it is time for the second mission, it is Barnabas who wants to give him another chance. He saw something in John Mark that Paul, years later, came to see for himself. Barnabas. The son of encouragement. But where does it all start? Here in Jerusalem, when the church is just days old, and Barnabas sees that there are people in the church who are his brothers and sisters in Christ who don't have some of their basic needs. He says, "I have this field, and I don't need it. I have everything I need." And he sells the field and brings the money he got from the sale and puts it at the apostles' feet. His heart belonged to Christ and so did everything He owned. He cared more about people than he cared about possessions. John Piper says of Barnabas, "He put down things and picked up people."

- There was no chapter break when Luke wrote the book of Acts and you will notice that he puts Barnabas' example side by side with another example, which we will look at next week, Lord willing. Barnabas gave deliberately and received praise. Ananias and Sapphira withheld deceitfully and received punishment.
- Prayer