

United in Generosity Acts 4:32-37

Sure, many of us will give out of our surplus, when we have more than enough, but rarely will we step out to be generous when it will actually cost us.

Generosity is one of the key ingredients, one of the defining characteristics of a thriving gospel-loving, Christ-centered church.

Mutual generosity among believers breeds unity within the body of Christ.

If we are all serving and striving for the same mission, to exalt Christ through making disciples, then we all enjoy and look forward to opportunities to further that unity and mission through our generosity.

Generosity comes from a heart that has been touched and transformed by Christ.

A heart that has been touched by God has a realization that God has been generous to me, so I can and will in turn be generous to God, his church, and others.

As we encounter our text today, we enter into a series of messages which provide us an inside glimpse of the inner workings of the church.

In previous messages we have seen the birth of the church through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of Peter.

From here in 4:32 to 5:11 Luke takes us inside the church and shows us what genuine and false unity looks like and the results of each.

As we go through our text today, we will see how our unity in generosity can have an enormous impact on our lives and the Kingdom of God.

What about you this morning? Would you consider yourself a generous person? Do you understand how generous God has been and is to you? Does God's generosity toward you impact your generosity toward him?

Today we will understand:

- Our generosity comes from Genuine humility
- Our generosity leads to unity in mission
- Our generosity glorifies God
- Our generosity is an example to others

³² And 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. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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 sales³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

I. OUR GENEROSITY COMES FROM HUMILITY (32)

Peter and John were arrested for preaching, thousands come to faith in Christ, the believers pray for boldness, are filled and continue to preach.

The result of this filling and subsequent ministry is the church operating at full capacity and force.

³² And 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.

This newly formed congregation of believers came together; many right there from Jerusalem, but many others had traveled into the city for Pentecost and after receiving Christ, stayed in this new band of Christians.

But this new band of believers were remarkably different from those around them, even different from the various religious sects in the city.

If we remember from Acts 2 these believers were focused on God's word, above all, they desired to know and grow in their understanding of Christ.

So, they listened intently to the preaching of the apostles and applied this teaching in their lives.

What was the result of this application? Their understanding of God's great love for them, shown in Christ, had a profound effect on them.

See, these new believers intimately understood something about God's grace and love that we tend to forget.

John mentions it in **1 John 3:1**, "*See how great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.*"

Their understanding of God's love caused them to have a deep sense of humility and this genuine humility lead to two things.

Genuine humility leads to:

- **Unity with one another**- they were of one heart and soul
- **A recognition of God's rule**-they didn't view their possessions as their own
- These believers had genuine humility that lead to real unity. They were united in their understanding of Christ and of their mission in life.

When we think about being generous, we must recognize that a generous heart comes from a humble heart.

A heart that recognizes its great need and its great debt to God is a humble heart.

And when a church full of believers come together and understand their position in God is fully through Christ, they are united under the banner of the gospel and this mutual sense of humility creates a gigantic sense of generosity.

Their humility caused them to be united together in one accord.

They genuinely cared for the well-being of one another and they were willing to sacrifice in order to display their generosity toward each other.

Their humble unity also caused them to recognize God's rule in their lives.

They did not view their possessions as their own. They understood God's rule over all.

These believers understood that God owns every single thing in this world and we are mere stewards to his possessions.

Your vehicle belongs to God. Your house belongs to God. Your bank account belongs to God. Your health belongs to God. Your vacation leave belongs to God.

We eat freely from the smorgasbord of God's grace extended to us in the birth of the Son of God, who became flesh and blood and body and soul and lived among us and died for us that we might receive the free gift of salvation and be called Children of God.

We have sampled the Word who is Christ and we have received the Word who is Christ and we have seen the Word who is Christ and we have recognized the Word as the Grace of God in Christ.

When we begin to truly wrap our head and heart around the depth of God's rule we will see that all we have belongs to the Lord and we are called to be generous with all of his possessions.

When we see our possessions and money as belonging to God we stop asking, "How can I get more?" "How can I spend more on my happiness?" and we begin to ask questions like "How can I use what I have to bless others?" "How can I spend my time, talents, and money to further the gospel and Kingdom of God?"

We begin to ask these questions because we are utterly humbled by God's grace to us and our understanding of his grace begins to turn a selfish heart into a generous heart.

Our generosity also leads to unity in mission.

II. OUR GENEROSITY LEADS TO UNITY IN MISSION (33)

As we are humbled by God's grace and united with one another, we are also united in our mission to reach the world with the gospel.

³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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

Watch what happens here.

They are humbled by God's great grace toward them and they are united to one another and they also understand God's rule and reign over their lives.

As they continually submit their lives to Christ in humility, he begins to do amazing things in their community through the power of the gospel.

"*With great power*" they continually preached the resurrection. This was the theme of their mission. This is what they were united around.

We also, are united in mission. We desire to glorify God and make disciples by exalting Christ, equipping disciples, and engaging the world with the gospel. This drives everything we do.

Their unity of heart and soul allowed God to work in mighty ways among them.

Their focus on the gospel was supreme in the life of the church.

They were not concerned about the next vacation, the next raise, the next big purchase.

They were focused on Christ and spreading his name.

They did not try to fit Christ in when it was convenient; they saw the purpose of their lives to be lived for God's glory.

When we are humble, united, and focused on the gospel, God's grace and power is poured out on his church.

They valued people over possessions, and it was shown in their generosity toward the church and one another.

Believers who are focused on the gospel are more concerned about people than possessions.

They viewed their possessions as belonging to God to be used for the mission, so they did not mind giving up possessions or money for the mission.

Their focus on the resurrection, on the mission of the church drove their generosity.

The text tells us in verse 44 that there was not a needy person among them, because the church did whatever was necessary to take care of the need.

The average gift of the average church member across America is 2.5%.

Think about your giving in light of the mission.

Think about the amount of lost people in De Soto, Jefferson County, Missouri, the U.S., and the world.

One of the reasons I continually share about what we do at the offering time is because I desire for us to catch the vision; I want us to all see the mission and desire to do all we can to see our world, our town, our families, and our schools reached for Christ.

When you are generous with money and possessions God has entrusted to you, we are able to be generous and do more ministry, feed more people, meet more needs, spread the gospel with more power and effectiveness.

I want you to understand that our church is part of the mission of God and that you are also a part of that mission.

When we don't give, when we don't tithe, we are shorting the mission.

Part of our mission here is our facility. Yes, we pay a mortgage on this facility, but we use this building here in multiple ways throughout the year to reach our community.

When you give generously to the offering and to the building fund you are helping us be generous with what God has allowed us to steward.

We are truly able to care for one another when we are all generous, when we give from what God has given us.

The more generous we are the more generous the church can be.

When we see our generosity as part of the mission of God we will gladly give, gladly sacrifice, gladly serve because we understand what we have is a gift from God entrusted to us for his glory.

Would you be generous with what God has entrusted to you so we can fulfil Christ's mission for our church?

III. OUR GENEROSITY GLORIFIES GOD (35)

I also want us to see that our generosity glorifies God.

³⁵and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

When we give, when we tithe, and are generous with what God has given us, we are literally glorifying God.

These believers sold houses and land and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.

This may seem strange to us, but the apostles at the time were God's representatives on earth and by laying their generous gifts at the apostles' feet they were truly presenting an offering to God for his glory.

They gave generously and their giving glorified God.

The more they understood God's generosity to them, the more they wanted to give back to God.

God in his great love for us displayed the magnitude of his generous nature to us by giving us his very son, his most prized possession for us. And he didn't give to us as a reward, or as payment for a job well done. God generously gave Jesus to us when we absolutely did not deserve it. He literally gave Christ for us and bought us, the most beat down, broken, poor,

pitiful excuse for people; he gave his all so that he could continue to share his love with us in salvation. Imagine that! God gave Christ, but has not stopped giving!

Our generosity is a direct reflection of our acknowledgement of God's generosity to us

They practiced reciprocal generosity.

They did not simply give a tithe, 10%, the text says they laid it all at the feet of the apostles.

Many view the tithe, giving 10% of their income as the ceiling, but these believers treated the tithe as the floor.

I knew a guy who made over \$400,000 a year and never gave a dime to the church. He attended regularly and helped out here and there, but he told me he never gave. We talked one day, and he told me he could not see himself giving away 10% of his money. In the course of the conversation he told me how just two weeks earlier he went to Vegas and lost \$10,000 at the casino, in one night! He was more than willing to literally throw away his money for personal enjoyment which ended quickly instead of investing in the kingdom of God which reaps eternal rewards.

As they laid their gifts at the apostles' feet they were giving, not to the apostles, but to God himself.

When we give, whether it is at the time of the offering, before or after church, or through giving online, you are not giving to me or anyone at the church.

When you give, you are giving directly to God as a joyful, thankful, worshipful act of obedience.

We always remember that our giving is in direct response to Christ's generosity to us.

And what I have learned personally over my life and observed in other faithful saints is that the more I grow in understanding Christ's generosity to me the more I want to give, the more I order my life, spending, and finances around giving to Kingdom causes.

I see any talents I have, the time in my day, and the money in my bank account as belonging to God and a gift to me to be laid at God's feet to advance the mission he has given us.

So, when the time comes to worship God through giving, we don't begrudge giving, we look forward to being able to worship God and we willingly give to the church, the building fund, and whatever else we have an opportunity to give towards.

Let me ask you this morning, how generous are you in your heart?

How much do you understand God's generosity toward you?

Does your generosity to God match his generosity to you?

Our giving glorifies God and is a direct result of our personal understanding of his generosity to us.

IV. OUR GENEROSITY IS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS (36-37)

³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas was an example to others in what generosity looked like.

This example was an encouragement to others showing that they could also be generous.

Notice something very important here.

Barnabas wasn't simply considered generous because of the size of his offering.

He was known as the "Son of Encouragement" because of his generous spirit.

A generous hand is the byproduct of a generous heart. Our hearts must first be turned to Jesus, we must understand the depth of his generosity to us and then this understanding will lead more and more to an attitude and lifestyle of generosity.

Generosity is a lifestyle that is evident to others.

Generosity is not dependent upon the status of your bank account.

When are living a generous lifestyle it is displayed in our attitudes, motivations, the way we think about our time, talents, possessions, and yes money.

What about you? Would you say your life is a generous life? In attitude? In practice? In the way you view your possessions?

This type of living, this kind of attitude is vastly different from the world and is quickly noticed.

And guess what? When someone asks you why you are so generous in attitude or practice, you now have a wonderful opportunity to tell them about the generosity of Christ toward them.

How have you responded to God's generosity?

When we as a church are united in our generosity our impact in our community and our world will be unmatched.

When we as a church are united in our mission it is shown through our generosity.