

Waking the Sleeping Giant - 18

One Heart and Mind

Acts 4:32-37 *“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. 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.”*

It has been said that when humankind fell from grace, we inherited not only a tendency to hide from God, but a tendency to hide from one another as well. We struggle with conflicting desires. On the one hand, we desire to be close to one another, and on the other hand, we want to hold one another at arm’s length. We have learned to be suspicious of other people’s motives. At times we’ve been burned and so we fear being burned again and we build barriers which effectively insulate us from one another and become an obstacle to true unity in the Church.

We read in John 17 where Jesus prayed that we might be one, even as He and the Father are one. But for that to happen, many barriers have to fall. Suspicion has to be replaced with openness; uncertainty has to be replaced with willingness; and fear has to be replaced with love. On that famous day of Pentecost when the Church was born, that is precisely what happened - the barriers came crashing down. The Holy Spirit of God moved in and produced a wonderful unity in that first group of believers.

Our text today describes the extent of that unity as it existed at the very beginning. For a while, they were allowed to live in the glorious oneness which only the Spirit can produce. I believe this oneness can be found where people truly allow Christ to be Lord and surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives. I believe that deep down within us, we all long to be close, to be part of the same family, to be in tune and in touch with one another. As we look at this passage of Scripture before us, let’s see what kind of unity the Spirit produced in this young Church and what kind of unity He can produce in us today.

Acts 4:32a *“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”*

When the Spirit of God took charge of the lives of these disciples on the day of Pentecost, He produced a mystical unity among them. In the first part of verse 32, it says that the believers were of one heart and mind. They were experiencing a new oneness, a unity which they did not produce. The diverse multitude which had gathered from all nations and tongues had been melted together by divine love into a union that was mystical in nature and divine in origin. Those things which divided them before had faded into insignificance. They had met the Lord. They were together and they were one.

Notice the three words mentioned in the first part of this verse: the words *believers*, *heart* and *mind*. Their new-found unity could be seen in three areas which these words reveal to us. It was a unity of faith, a unity of emotions, and a unity of will.

Notice that these 'believers' were one. They were one with each other because they believed the same thing. They had placed their faith in Jesus and were now attempting to live out that faith together. There can be no fellowship without such a shared belief.

1 John 1:7 *"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."*

It is only as we walk in the light of the truth of God's Word that we can enjoy true fellowship with one another. A common faith unites us. The prophet Amos asked that very simple question many years beforehand:

Amos 3:3 *"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"*

They were not only united by their faith, but they were also united in heart. Their faith had brought them together and now their every desire was to follow Jesus Christ. They desired to express His love and to share that love with every human being they met. What had begun in faith had made its way to their hearts. They not only believed it intellectually and accepted it by faith, but they knew it to be true experientially.

These disciples had experienced the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. They had been given new life and their hearts were full of joy. They were excited about their faith. Because of the love of Jesus for them, they had fallen in love with Him; and along with Him, every other believer as well. Now they could call one another 'brother' and 'sister' because they were in one family. They could express love, care and concern for one another freely and openly. The barriers had fallen down and they were one - one in faith and one in heart.

They were also one in mind. The mind has to do with our will. The mind has to do with our decision-making processes. What had happened on the day Pentecost was not only to affect their hearts, but also to affect their thinking. Now, they not only believed alike, and desired alike to follow Jesus, but they made a decision to do so together. They decided to follow through on what had happened to them. They were willing to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and all the other disciples as their family. If we, as the Church of Jesus Christ, are ever going to express the unity of the Spirit, we must not only *desire* to do so, but we must also *decide* to do so. There must be an act of our will in order to follow through on the desire we have to be one.

They had made this decision and they declared it publicly. It says, in the last part of verse 32, *"No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."* They acknowledged to one another that they were one. They said, *"What's mine is yours; what's yours is mine. We're together in this thing."* That is a really powerful acknowledgement of unity and it's also a powerful demonstration of the reality of that unity. Only God could achieve this. This was a mystical unity - something born of God, begun by the Holy Spirit and carried on in His power.

Is it possible to possess this kind of unity today? I believe it is. But again, I believe that it's not something which is produced by human plans. It is something which can only be done by the power of the Spirit of God working in the hearts of people who are committed to Him. If we had to depend on human beings to produce this unity, we would quickly despair. There is too much selfishness and self-centeredness within us to pull it off. But because this unity is a mystical unity, a unity produced by God through the power of His Spirit, then we have hope. We can possess this kind of unity if we will yield to the Holy Spirit to produce it in us. We must surrender to Him and desire His will for our life.

Acts 4:33 *"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 ..."*

We now move from a mystical unity to a ministerial unity. These people were not only one in spirit, but they were also one in purpose, and their purpose was to preach the Gospel to every creature. The great and powerful Sanhedrin had warned them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, but were they afraid? Far from it! By the power of the Spirit working in their lives, they were more united than ever to get the job done.

It says here that the Apostles were giving witness *"with great power."* It says further, that *"God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.."* They were experiencing great power and great grace. Because of the great power which they now possessed, they could give effective and powerful witness to the grace of God. And when they did so, even greater grace was shed upon them. The grace and power of God produced a living witness - and a living witness produced even more grace.

There is nothing quite like a Church which is united in purpose. A unity in terms of our ministry produces an even greater unity among us. That is why it is so important to move from a mystical unity of spirit into a practical unity of purpose. Otherwise, we will quickly become inward and introspective. When that happens, it's only a matter of time before we lose the unity altogether. The whole purpose of our being one, is not to bask in our oneness, but to join together with a common purpose. There is work to be done. There is a Great Commission to be fulfilled. That is why Jesus birthed the Church on earth and left us here to fulfill His mission. That is why He made us of one heart and soul.

Not only will we be able to maintain the unity of the Spirit if we are of one purpose, but we will be able, because we are united, to fulfill that purpose in a powerful way. Over and over, it is confirmed that those Churches which are united are the very Churches accomplishing something for Jesus Christ. I believe that all significant, effective ministry can only be done by Churches which are united in their desire to see that ministry done. A Church can have a great ministry location; committed leaders; excellent facilities; fantastic parking; and plenty of money; but still be totally ineffective in reaching their community for Christ.

On the other hand, I know of Churches which were small; hard to find; with pastors with no formal training; with only a handful of leaders; meeting in inadequate facilities; and always struggling to pay the bills; but which literally exploded as they reached person after person for Jesus Christ. They did so because they decided to come together with a united purpose to do something for Jesus Christ. Their human resources were meagre, but their divine resources were infinite. And because of their unity, they were able to tap into the divine resources they needed.

In this area of unity and purpose, it is so vitally important that we understand the place of decision. Our mystical unity comes as the result of the Holy Spirit's action in our lives. Our ministerial unity comes as the result of our decision to pull together. God has challenged us. It is at this point that we have to make a decision: The question is: What are we going to do?

If your Church, or any Church, is going to have this essential unity of purpose, then we need everyone on board, pulling together, sharing the load. We have to decide that the overall purpose for which we are striving is important enough to give ourselves to it fully. We must decide that we are going to give more than our spare time to the endeavour, that we will be supportive, involved, active participants in the direction God is leading us to follow.

We also see there was a material unity. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the Apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 4:34-35 *"... 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."*

We have seen a mystical unity produced by the power of the Holy Spirit, a ministerial unity produced by a decision to fulfill the commission of Jesus, and now, we see a material unity produced by the love of Christ within us. Notice first the spontaneous expression of that unity. In order to provide for the needs of all among them, those who had possessions sold them and laid them at the Apostles' feet so that the distribution could be made. As a result, there was none who lacked. This was a spontaneous expression of what God had done in their hearts. The unity they felt, they expressed by sharing everything they had.

In a different context this may look like communism to some people. But communism breaks down because of the selfishness of the human heart and the ruthlessness of the ambitions of those who seek to impose it on others and enforce it by the use of raw power. What we see here is not communism, but rather, a spontaneous expression of people who really cared for one another. We see an expression of people who were more interested in the purposes of God than their own material possessions. This truly is something which was born from within, not something which was imposed from without. They cared, and so they gave.

The spirit of what happened here is to be expressed again and again. This passage is not to be taken as God commanding everyone to sell their possessions and live in a communal society. But He is telling us, quite clearly, that our possessions are only a means by which His work can be accomplished. Everything we have is ours by the grace of God, and we ought to hold them lightly so that we are able to give them gladly if there is a need. That's the real message - a very important message indeed.

You can tell quite a lot about a person's Christian faith by their giving. People who are truly surrendered to Christ reflect their commitment in their giving. When I see people who don't give, or who give very little, or who make excuses as to why they can't afford to give, I immediately know that there is something not quite right in their relationship with God. When a person who has been taught what the Scripture teaches about giving ignores it, then that indicates they do not take their commitment to Christ seriously. It indicates that they are not willing to be obedient to God's will for their lives. If Jesus Christ has your heart, He has your money and possessions too. If He doesn't have everything, He doesn't really have your heart. There are many things that we aspire to do for Christ, which we may not be able to do, even though we have the desire. But one thing all of us have within our power to do is to give.

We have a wonderful example of one man who was a giver. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the Apostles called Barnabas, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the Apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37). In order to emphasize the nature of what was happening among these early disciples, we are given a specific example of one who knew how to live because he knew how to give. Barnabas and Paul would later join together and become a mighty team as they preached the Gospel all over the region. His name was Joseph - a Cyprian Jew. He was a Levite, one who was devoted to the handling of sacred things. But because of his nature, he had been given a new name by the Apostles. His new name was Barnabas, which meant 'Son of Encouragement.' Here was a man with the gift of encouragement. Every time you see him in the book of Acts, he is engaging in a ministry of encouragement.

Later on, in the book of Acts, when John Mark defected during the first missionary journey with Paul, it was Barnabas who interceded for him, and eventually took Mark and worked with him. Later on, Mark was used in a great way, perhaps because Barnabas had been his encourager. Here was a man whose heart was toward the Lord. And so, it seems quite natural that he would be mentioned as one who sold his land and gave the money for the Church's use. He was an encourager. He was a giver. We need more men and women like Barnabas. We need more encouragers in the body of Christ.

Sadly, not everyone is like Barnabas. In Acts chapter 5, we see the story of two who were not. Ananias and Sapphira pretended to be faithful and committed Christians. They wanted to appear to others like givers. But what they claimed to be was not the reality of their lives, and they suffered a disastrous consequence. Barnabas is presented to us as a wonderful role-model and his attitude and giving heart had a profound impact on those around him.

What happened in the life of the early Church can also happen to us today. We can be filled with the Spirit's power, united in vision, united in purpose, united in our love and concern for one another. We can become people who make a difference in this world, if we are people in whose lives Christ makes a difference. We can enjoy the unity of the Spirit, the power of God, effective ministry as we allow Christ to live His life in us and through us.

May it be so, Lord!