

Sunday School Lesson for November 22

Lesson book for the Winter Quarter are in the church office. Please stop by and pick one up. Lesson's start December 6, 2020. If you need one mailed or dropped by, please let me know. Thanks

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for November 22, 2020, "Sharing Love"

Background Scripture from Acts 4:32-5:11

This week's lesson takes place during the early days of the Jerusalem church. The followers of Christ had been endowed by the Holy Ghost, causing these believers to boldly proclaim the gospel to thousands, many of whom were converted to Christ as the LORD. The apostles also performed miracles of healing. One such miracle of healing was done by Peter and John at the temple gate called Beautiful where they healed a lame man (Acts 3:1-8).

This particular miracle had both positive and negative results. Positively, many people who witnessed the man's healing, ran to Peter and John in amazement which gave Peter the opportunity to preach his second recorded sermon (Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26). Negatively, as a result of this healing, opposition arose from outside the church led by the Jewish religious leaders, who felt threatened by this new movement (Acts 4:1-2).

Peter and John were taken into custody by the religious leaders, but their persecution only served to strengthen the church which continued to grow. While in custody of the Jewish religious leaders, Peter responded to their question: by what power, or what name they were able to heal the lame man. In his response, Peter made it clear that the miracle was done by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they had crucified.

Seeing how bold Peter and John were, the religious leaders threatened them, not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore. But Peter and John said to them, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). After this, the religious leaders threatened them again and then released them (Acts 4:21-22). After being released, Peter and John joined some of the other believers in prayer, and God responded by filling everyone who was assembled there with the Holy Ghost which again empowered them to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts chapter 4:32 states that, "All the believers were of one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." From the text section, Stepping into the Word, what we already know, is reinforced, when it is states, "Too often, it seems, most people's attitude is what's mine is mine, and I am going to keep it."

Acts 4:34-35 tells us, "There were no needy person 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." I can only imagine what would happen in society today if proceeds from sales, were handled this way.

We must not assume that everyone who owned property or possessions sold them and gave the money to help the poor. The text indicates that only when a need arose among the believers, those who had property sold as much of it as was necessary to help. The fact that one individual, Barnabas is singled out as someone who had land and sold it to help the needy (verse 36-37), seems to make it clear that they retained their rights to their personal property. Otherwise they would have been included among the poor and needy themselves. This entire endeavor of sharing was Holy Spirit led (Acts 4:31), and ours should be as well.

The apostles, as leaders of the young church in Jerusalem, were responsible for how the money was given out. Luke also tells us that, "distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." As the church grew and the work load increased, the apostles could no longer give sufficient time to the ministry of the Word and still serve tables. To help care for those needing physical provisions, deacons were chosen from among the people to assist the apostles.

In Acts chapter 5 we are told, "Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet."

Probably inspired by the generosity of men like Barnabas, Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold the land. We don't know anything more about this couple other than what this passage says. But evidently, this married couple was among the more wealthy people in the early church. Like many people, they wanted to reap the esteem and recognition they had seen others receive for giving sacrificially. It would not have been wrong to have given only a portion of the money for distribution among the poor, but that would not have brought this couple the esteem they undoubtedly wanted.

It appears, from reading chapter 5, that Peter and the leadership of the early church are angry and confront Ananias over his selfishness. His holding back of money from the sale of property will impact many that are in need. It also, seems that Peter and the leadership are angry over Ananias' attempt to deceive as he attempts to keep a portion for himself.

Ananias' behavior reveals a flaw in his understanding of God. He actually believed he had the power to hide his selfishness from God. Perhaps he believed God didn't really mind or care. When Peter accused him of attempting to lie to God in the presence of the early church, Ananias immediately dies.

We must ask, "How would the early church respond if God did nothing?" "How seriously would they take sin and accountability?" Remember, the early church has no bible. They depend upon the apostles' teaching, the collective faith of the church, and their own personal relationship with Christ.

In verse 7, Sapphira did not receive the news, of Ananias death, for about three hours. Peter gives her an opportunity to be honest and godly. Instead she lied, revealing that she and Ananias conspired to be selfish. The accusation here is slightly different. She is accused of "testing" the Spirit.

Sadly, Sapphira dies immediately following Peter's confrontation, as did Ananias. Her death, like the death of Ananias, is difficult to understand. It sounds like a harsh judgement for her action. It sounds like she and Ananias reported the amount of their gift after making a major sacrifice in selling their property for the church.

We leave this narrative learning that sin is always serious and always creates destructive consequences. Though the deaths unsettle us, the important truth that God is loving and holy is ageless and applies to us today as it did the early church.

Believers today are not commanded to sell our homes and possessions to give to others the way the early church freely did. But we are to show the same spirit of selfless sharing that the early church demonstrated. As Christians, it's our responsibility to care for our families. Likewise, as part of the body of Christ, it's our responsibility to care for our church family (Acts 11:29). The early church did this in a remarkably selfless way. There are needs among us as Christians even today. Regardless of how we may choose to meet those needs, it's our duty and privilege to do so. And in doing so, we demonstrate the heart of our Saviour and enjoy more fully His blessing.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson November 29, 2020, "Impartial Love"

Background Scripture James 2:1-13.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Sharing Love Sunday School Lesson, from South Georgia Advocate, Halley's Bible Handbook and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.