

Topic	Money and the Power of the Spirit
Reference	Acts 4:31~37
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Two weeks ago my daughter asked me a question. Why are there both rich and poor people in the world?

It is a huge question. We can debate it from economics, political, sociological or even historical angle but I thought about it and I came out with a rather philosophical answer. The poor exist to test the humanity of the rich.

Our text today has a mirror in the Old Testament in the Book of Nehemiah. This book is about the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem which had been destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Now the Persians are in control and the Persian king had been sympathetic to the plight of the Israelites. They were allowed to return to Judah after 70 years of exile. Now at the point of Nehemiah chapter 1 the Israelites had already gone back to Judah and the temple in Jerusalem had already been rebuilt but the walls and the gates of the city remain in ruins and this caused the people of God much distress as they were subject to raids and attacks by bandits and by enemies to the south, to the east and to the north and so Nehemiah chapters 1 to 4 carry great details about how the walls and the gates of Jerusalem were being rebuilt and as this was happening in Nehemiah chapter 5, Nehemiah turned his attention to another huge problem that Israelites were facing. There had been a famine and many of them had mortgage their lands in order to borrow money to survive. These loans came with interest and when they couldn't repay their loans their lands were seized and when they didn't have a land to work on they lost their source of income and they went deeper into debt. Many of them ended up being enslaved together with their wives and children and this was the situation in Nehemiah 5 and that made Nehemiah very angry.

With the new walls and gates the Israelites could enjoy physical security but all this seem pointless when there was no financial security especially among the poor and so in Nehemiah chapter 5 Nehemiah summoned all the nobles and the rich Israelites and he scolded them for their treatment of the poor and needy.

Nehemiah 5:6 *When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.*

Why Nehemiah was angry?

In those days according to the economic system of that time when you lend money you charge interest, but in those days if you cannot pay your debt your lender will seize your land or house and it is similar to our practice today. Further in those days if you still cannot repay your debts

you then either sell yourself into slavery together with your wife and your children in order to help pay off what is owed. The rich Israelites were simply acting to what they had in those days. Now Nehemiah was angry because what they did was not right. He said,

Nehemiah 5:9 *So I continued, "What you are doing is not right..."*

Although they may have been justified according to the economic system of that time but it was not right according to God's laws pertaining to lending money. In fact they all had disobeyed God's commandment. Now the basis of Nehemiah indignation and indictment is the Mosaic Law specified in Exodus 22 verse 25 to 27 that deals with the issue of lending money.

Exodus 22:25 *If you lend money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest.*

Second law regarding collaterals

Exodus 22:26-27a *If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has.*

We might ask what is the point of asking for a collateral if you have to return it by sunset? That is another way of saying don't take your collateral. These laws governing the lending of money in Exodus 22 are within the context of God's people. After all verse 25 refers to lending money to one of My people, God's people and that's why Nehemiah was angry in Nehemiah 5 because the wealthy Israelites were going against these laws and they were mistreating the Israelites poorly. Now when we consider what happened in Acts chapter 4 they were doing the very opposite of what Israelites did in Nehemiah 5. They were taking care of each other but that was also within the context of God's people. Now before we move on

Rules Governing the Lending of Money to a Fellow Believer

- 1) DO NOT charge any interest
- 2) DO NOT profit from it in any way
- 3) DO NOT ask for any collateral

We may add one more to this list based on the teaching of Jesus

Matthew 5:42 *Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

- 4) DO NOT turn away from the one in need

What we see in Nehemiah 5 is therefore a clear violation of God's commandments which was what got Nehemiah very angry. Later if we continue to read Nehemiah 5 they did repent of their sins and they did give back to the poor all the interest they charged and all the properties they seized.

Now when we compared what happened in Nehemiah 5 with what we see in our text in Acts chapter 4 there is a huge world of difference. What we have in the early church among the early believers was like a utopia. The rich Christians shared their wealth with their poor brethren and there was no one in their midst who was in need.

Nehemiah 5 shows a background to our text today to show the sharp contrast between two communities of God's people, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. One is way down there and one is way up here. Now we must realize that the early Christians in Acts 4 were all Jews and therefore they were all well aware of the commandments in Exodus 22 and also what happened in Nehemiah 5, but not only did they not charged interest nor take collaterals which they knew they mustn't do, they went far-far beyond Exodus 22, namely the rich shared what they had with the poor. What happened in Acts chapter 4 is in fact a repeat of what happened earlier few months before following the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first descended on the first believers because at the end of Acts chapter 2 it says

Acts 2:44~45 All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

So this is two chapters before what we have today. Now if we combine these two verses with our text for today. This is a picture of the early church.

The Early Church in Acts 2~4

- 1) The rich sold properties and gave it to the church.
- 2) None claimed possessions as his own.
- 3) They shared everything they had.
- 4) They had everything in common.
- 5) There were no needy persons in their midst.

What made them do all this? Why were they able to do this?

It is not something easy to do, not something that you and I will be willing to do. What exactly happened in Acts chapter 2 and also Acts chapter 4 that caused them to subscribe to this level of unity and generosity and this is where we want to unpack the verses in our text for today. Now I see the text has comprising two parts, first the cause and then the effect. So what happened in Acts chapter 4 is a kind of cause and effect thing. The first verse is the cause, here we find the trigger. This is what set off the series of events that followed. The next four verses plus a small portion of the verse 31 are the effects. This is the result or the outcome or the aftermath of what happened earlier in verse 31 and before that. The last two verses could be seen as a specific example of the effect.

CAUSE: We need to see what took place before verse 31, because verse 31 is actually the climax of a series of events that started way back from Acts chapter 3. Our story actually begins

in Acts chapter 3 verses 1-10 when Peter and John healed the lame beggar at the temple gate in Jerusalem and that is when Peter famously said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”

This miracle caused quite a stir among the onlookers and the huge crowd quickly gathered around the two disciples and Peter then seized the opportunity to preach to them which takes up the rest of Acts chapter 3 but this made the religious leaders very angry because they didn't like what the apostles were teaching and also because they were drawing huge crowds.

When we come to chapter 4 we find Peter and John thrown into prison. The next day they were brought before the Sanhedrin to be questioned but surprisingly at the end of this lengthy interrogation Peter and John were released after being threatened and warned not to preach or teach about Jesus.

When they returned to their people in Acts chapter 4 verse 23, Peter and John related to them about the threats from the authorities and they started to pray against these threats. What happened in our text today from verse 31 took place just as they finished praying and the place where they met was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The place was literally shaken like in an earthquake and the room or hall where they met shook as if it couldn't contain the weight of God's power and glory and majesty. Now across the pages of scripture whenever God made a physical appearance with a full manifestation of His being it was often accompanied by lightning and thunder, strong winds or earthquake.

Not only there was a physical shaking of the place. There was also a spiritual shaking among the believers because verse 31 says they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Whenever the people of God are filled with the spirit they are shaken out of their comfort zones and out of their normal behavior. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is often accompanied by amazing changes in a person, changes that we normally do not see.

What does it mean to be filled with the spirit?

The bible teaches us that whenever a person becomes a child of God, the spirit of God dwells in him. Paul wrote

Romans 8:9 *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*

Hence if you are true Christian the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you. Now this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is like the mark or the seal or our salvation and Paul also uses the term deposit or guarantee, for example

2 Corinthians 5:5 *Now the One who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

At the same time the Bible also teaches us that we should also be filled with the spirit. Paul wrote

Ephesians 5:18 *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,...*

This was the second time it happened, the first time was in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost. Now interestingly early in the day when this happened in Acts chapter 4 verse 31 Peter was already filled with the Holy Spirit when he stood before the Sanhedrin.

What is the difference between indwelling and infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

- 1) you have 100% of the Spirit
- 2) the Spirit is a Resident
- 3) It's an issue of STATUS.
- 4) takes place at the point of conversion

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

- 1) the Spirit has 100% of you
- 2) the Spirit is President
- 3) an issue of SUBSTANCE
- 4) takes place throughout your sanctification

My wife and I were married in 1994 and in the eyes of the law we are husband and wife. Not only that in the eyes of family and friends we are husband and wife. Even we are upset with each other it doesn't alter the fact a single bit that we are husband and wife. In good times or in bad times, in sickness or in health whether we are happy or angry we remain as husband and wife. It is a status thing. It is not something that we need to feel because the fact is that we are married and the indwelling of the spirit is a little like that. The infilling of the spirit is often accompanied by amazing changes in a person, changes that we normally do not see.

Great changes take place when believers are spirit filled. There were great changes in the early church. Now technically the changes caused by the infilling of the spirit is known as transformation. It is not as if the spirit comes and zaps you and you are no longer in control of yourself. The Holy Spirit is like a counsel and guidance and you cooperate with him to effect these changes in your life. Now in sharp contrast the world tells us that we are the masters of our destiny and we must therefore effect the changes in us by ourselves using our own will power or determination or motivation.

Changes we see in a Christian is not because of will power they are the results of the working of the Holy Spirit. When we examine our text from the end of verse 31 to 35 we can pick up three effects caused by the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Firstly from verse 31, **the spoke the word of God boldly** and verse 33 **With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.**

In other words they were full of zeal to testify and to spread the gospel.

Secondly from verse 32 *All the believers were one in heart and mind.*

They were united and they enjoyed oneness in their midst regardless of their social backgrounds.

Thirdly from verse 34 *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 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need*

Now in summary

The Effects of the Infilling of the Spirit

- 1) Testimony ... they shared their faith
- 2) Unity ... they shared a common goal
- 3) Generosity ... they shared their possessions

On the matter of unity a clear result of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is a sense of togetherness and oneness. It is an inclination to say we rather than me, it is the tendency to think in the interest of the whole rather than catering to the demand of just one or two.

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind.

Now this unity is actually very hard to achieve without the working of the Holy Spirit in our midst because if you have a group of 10 persons you have 10 differing opinions or views.

In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things charity or love. Rupertus Meldenius (17th century German theologian)

When it comes to the essentials such as justification by faith or the resurrection of Christ there should be no compromise or negotiation, we stand united on such fundamental doctrinal matters because they are our core beliefs but if it involves nonessentials such as the manner, the holy communion is administered or the type of songs that we should use for worship or whether woman can preach from the pulpit, these are nonessentials over which we should never quarrel for trouble starts when a non-essential is made into an essential.

Whenever there is infilling of the spirit it always causes unity among the believers in heart and mind. The kingship of Jesus leads to kinship among believers.

Whenever there is infilling of the spirit it also results in much generosity in the believer. This generosity may be the result of unity but I see as a direct result of the working of the Holy Spirit. The fact is the more a Christian is transformed the more he is sanctified; he will start to change his attitude towards money. It will affect his practice with regard to money. In our text today is notable because it depicts a powerful spiritual experience among the early Christians and immediately after the experience it shows the impact that spiritual experience had on the most practical of things which is money. As we grow and mature spiritually we should handle our

money not so much with a tight fist but more with an open palm. When we realize that we are merely stewards of what belongs to God and that is why they were able to be so generous. The term phrase stingy Christian is really a contradiction in terms because a stingy person wouldn't want to be a Christian. A nominal Christian might be stingy but it is inconceivable to me for a sanctified Christian to be stingy, the one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Stinginess may be just an effect of a deeper cause, stinginess may be the result of fear but when the spirit of God fills you fear gives away to boldness which is evident in believers because at the end of verse 31 they spoke the word of God boldly. The word bold is also mentioned in an earlier verse outside of our text.

In verse 39 they said **Lord enables your servants to speak your word with great boldness.** Boldness itself is an effect of another cause which is faith. Boldness is the result of faith which is the result of the infilling of the spirit and that is the deeper reason why the early believers could afford to be so generous and there is yet another reason to explain the generosity that is grace.

The last part of verse 33 says, God's grace was so powerfully working in all of them.

Recipients of God's grace will naturally want to extend grace. We are inclined to be generous because God has been generous to us and so a lack of generosity is a sign that a Christian has not fully appreciated or understood or embraced the full extent of God's grace. Commandments in Exodus 22 were spelled out to govern the lending of money to fellow Israelites or the treatment of fellow Israelites when it comes to money and what happens as we saw in Nehemiah 5 happened among the Israelites and also here in Acts chapter 4 we see that all this generosity, all this sharing took place within the community of believers.

We may not be able to attain the standard that the early church has set whereby the rich sold their properties and shared the proceeds with the poorer brethren but the fact remains when the spirit moves mightily in your life you become very generous.

APPLICATION

Walk alongside one or two person in our congregation who might need help. Open up your wallet, free up your calendar and roll up your sleeve to extend them a helping hand. Let us be willing to spend our money, our time and our efforts to help those in our midst who might be struggling financially. We are community of God's people but surely we can be more communal, certainly we can be more united through giving and sharing and caring. After Nehemiah did all that he did to help the poor and oppressed Israelites. After all the show of generosity towards the people of God who were needy, in Nehemiah 5 he said this confidently to God. Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

I hope you too will experience the full measure of God's favor and God's blessings. I hope that your generosity will flow out from you so that you too will be able to say Lord remember me with favor.