

Sunday, July 6, 2025 | Filled

Week 14 | Acts 4:32-37 | "Warts And All, Part 1"

**READ:** Acts 4:32-5:11 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> Now, the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

<sup>5:1</sup> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." <sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." <sup>10</sup> Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Between filters on social media, photoshopping models, or the imagination machine itself, Hollywood, much of what we see on TV, the big screen, or online is either pure fabrication or has been altered in some way. So much so that it's hard to tell what's fact and what's fiction.

And now, with the advent of AI, this problem is only getting worse. Any flaw is a cardinal sin in a culture where vanity is a virtue.

But this is hardly a new problem. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, portrait painters often minimized or completely overlooked a person's blemishes. No one wanted their faults immortalized on canvas. That is, no one except Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England. While getting his portrait made, he noticed that the artist didn't include any of the imperfections in his complexion. In response, he said,

"Mr. Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint your picture truly like me and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me. Otherwise, I will never pay a farthing for it."<sup>1</sup>

#### **INSERT PICTURE: Cromwell Portrait**

Cromwell prized honesty over vanity, no doubt a consequence of his deeply held Christian beliefs. Over time, the story was shared so frequently that it became condensed, resulting in the idiomatic phrase 'warts and all.' Its use in a conversation indicates that someone wants the *full* account of something, both the *good* and the *bad*.

The Bible presents humanity as it is, warts and all. It is not a puff piece. Anyone brave enough to read its pages will not come away from the experience feeling good about the human condition. And though the Book of Acts paints a beautiful portrait of the early church, Luke does not shy away from exposing its unsightly bits. Yes, early Christians got a lot right, but as we'll see in this passage (4:32-5:11), they were not without their faults. We would do well to learn from both their successes and their failures, seeking to replicate the former while avoiding the latter.

I want you to notice two things:

#### **i. Vs. 32-37 – Believers Behaving Bountifully**

**Vs. 32** – The “full number” of the believers were so unified that Luke said they were of “one heart and soul.” This is the sort of bond that Jesus prayed for in John 17. The Psalmist puts it this way, “Oh, how wonderful, how pleasing it is when God’s people all come together as one! It is like the sweet-smelling oil that is poured over the high priest’s head, that runs down his beard flowing over his robes. It is like a gentle rain from Mount Hermon falling on Mount Zion.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to John MacArthur for this anecdote.

It is there that the Lord has promised his blessing of eternal life” (Psalm 133). Despite still living in a fallen world, the church was a paradise of loving unity.

In fact, their love for one another was so great, and they were so unified that “no one **said** that any of things that belonged to him was his own, but they held everything in common.” This is **not** to say that they didn’t possess personal belongings. The things held “in common” were still things “that **belonged** [emphasis added]” to someone. John Mark’s mother owned a house and had servants, and she used such resources for the needs of the early church (cf. 12:12). The point is that the Christians “**said** [emphasis added]” that, though they had every right to their possessions (cf. 5:3-4), they did not **regard** those things “as his own.” In other words, they considered their possessions a means to **help** others rather than as things to be **hoarded**. They cared more about their fellow believers than their stuff. Essentially, they said, “What’s mine is yours,” without insisting, “what’s yours is mine.” They gave freely without expecting anything in return (cf. Lu. 6:35).

**SIDE NOTE:** Here are four reasons which show why these verses do not support communism or socialism:<sup>2</sup>

- 1.) First, this passage is **descriptive** rather than prescriptive. Admittedly, a general lesson about generosity can and will be drawn from these verses (cf. Deut. 5:7-11; Pro. 19:17; Lu. 10:25-37; 2 Cor. 9:7). But insisting that every church should act exactly like this ignores what the text does. By and large, this text is explanatory, not obligatory. As such, we must be cautious about doing exactly what Luke describes. No two churches will handle giving in the exact same way.
- 2.) Second, the **faith** community is in view. These donations primarily supported those **within** the church rather than those outside. This was not a government taking possession; this giving occurred in a church context.
- 3.) Third, this giving **wasn’t** under coercion or compulsion. The believers retained ownership of their possessions before giving them away to others. The church did not take possession of believers’ possessions by force; they were donated.<sup>3</sup> There are no donations in socialist economies, only demands. What **belonged** to the believers they **brought** freely, willingly, and cheerfully.

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, David W., “Does Acts Teach that Christians Should Be Communists?” November 16, 2015, *Center for Faith & Culture*, <https://cfc.sebts.edu/faith-and-economics/does-acts-teach-that-christians-should-be-communists/>, [accessed July 3, 2025].

<sup>3</sup> Peterson (2009), p. 163, “It is important to note that this sharing of possessions was voluntary and occasional.”

- 4.) Fourthly, as before (cf. Ac. 2:45), the funds weren't distributed **equally** but **equitably**. Proceeds went to help "the needy." Money wasn't distributed in a way that ensured everyone, regardless of their need, received the same exact amount. Not everyone lived at the same economic level. The reality was that some people owned property while others did not. Whether this discrepancy was due to some injustice is not clear. Given the first-century social and political landscape, if someone owned property or great wealth, the odds were high that some wrongdoing had occurred (cf. Lu. 3:12-13; 19:1-9). However, what is clear is that some of the believers who owned excessive amounts of wealth sold it to help meet the necessities of their fellow Christians.

As you can see, the early church was as far removed from a communist/socialist society as possible.

**Vs. 33** – Not only were they devoted to the well-being of their Christian brothers, but they were also devoted to the disciple's doctrine (cf. Ac. 2:42). Clearly, their prayer for boldness worked. With "great power," the apostles preached, and through that preaching, "great grace was upon them all." Generosity, coupled with powerful preaching, is a conduit for God's favor.

Interestingly, this passage can be summed it in **three** phrases: great power, great grace, and great fear. All three of these were present in the early church.

But notice that the theme of their "testimony" was "the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." They never got tired of talking about Easter. It was their favorite topic to talk about at this time. Why? 1 Co 15:14–19 Paul explains, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." The resurrection is what gives preaching its power. Without it, preachers are but peddlers of empty truths and false wares. But because Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead, the preaching of the gospel is not something to be ashamed of; it is something to proclaim since "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Thus, every chance they got, the apostles preached about the resurrection. They were constantly pointing people to their hope in life and death, Jesus Christ. Death was not the end. Eternal life could be obtained through putting their faith and trust in the Son of God.

**Vs. 34-35** – The church did such a good job taking care of its own that Luke says, “There was not a needy person among them.” What a testimony! So in-tuned were believers with the felt needs of their friends that there wasn’t a single person in the entire church who did not have what they needed. How did the church manage such a feat? After all, we’re talking about thousands of people. Did Peter go on a book tour? Did they get handouts from the government? Luke explains that those who “were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” Giving the proceeds in such a public way was no more an attempt to flaunt one’s generosity (cf. Matt. 6:3) than when the offering plate is passed around the church. This event is akin to the extravagant and public giving of gifts that marked the construction of the Temple (cf. 1 Chron. 29:6-9). Nor should we assume that when it was laid at the “apostles’ feet,” it became the property of the apostles. The disciples did not get rich from the offerings of the people. To lay something at someone’s feet is to give it freely. These were funds given without any strings attached.

The verb “brought” and “distributed” are in the imperfect tense, implying that this wasn’t a lightening sale of property and possessions but “a gradual liquidation of assets.”<sup>4</sup> Things were sold off and given away as needed.

People took their possessions and used them, not for themselves, but for the benefit of others. Presumably, in their attempt to help others, they did not impoverish themselves; otherwise, they’d consume the very funds they donated to help others. But it is still remarkable that people willingly, sacrificial, and cheerfully sold off their holdings to help their fellow believers.

**Vs. 36-37** – Luke mentions one such donor was named “Joseph.” He was so well known to the apostles that they gave him a new name: “Barnabas (which means son of encouragement).” Interestingly, he’s mentioned another twenty-three times in the Book of Acts, and, as such, he plays a pivotal role in the early life of the church (cf. 9:27; 11:22-26; 14:12; 15:36-39; etc.).<sup>5</sup> This is one of Luke’s heroes.

Joseph/Barnabas was “a Levite” and “a native of Cyprus.” So, he was of the priestly line in Israel and hailed from an island in the Mediterranean Sea known for its oil, wood, pottery, and, especially, copper.<sup>6</sup> Later in life, he’ll return to his home island of Cyprus and lead the Christian

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<sup>4</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Cyprus,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 563.

community. Sadly, he'll be stoned to death by the Jews of Salamis in 61AD, the very people he was trying to reach with the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Luke tells us the Son of Encouragement "sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." Moved by love for his fellow believers and the hope of the resurrection, Barnabas gave up his property to help others. As far as investments go, owning property is as close to a sure thing as you can get. The benefits of owning property are many. Property values appreciate over time. Building equity through owning houses and/or land increases one's net worth. Such investments can be used to generate passive income (i.e., rent), and by diversifying one's assets in the real estate market, one ensures financial stability. From a worldly perspective, it would be unwise to sell one's property and then give away the proceeds. But from a heavenly perspective, there could be no better use of that property. Such a gift pays eternal dividends.

All over the NT, the generosity of the church is highlighted. Later, during a great famine, the church collected money and sent it to believers living in Judea (cf. Ac. 11:27-30). When Paul was commissioned to go to the Gentiles, he was asked "to remember the poor, the very thing [he] was eager to do" (Gal. 1:10). Part of the reason Paul wrote to the Corinthians was to ask for money on behalf of the believers in Jerusalem who were being persecuted (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-4).

**So, what's the takeaway?** Great benevolence toward the family of God and great allegiance to the word of God pave the way for great assistance from God.

After talking about their radical generosity and their adherence to the apostle's doctrine, Luke said, "And great grace was upon them all." Not just grace, but *great* grace. That is to say that heaven showered down upon the early church extraordinary favor. They were the recipients of a considerable amount of God's grace. I would that Grace Pointe would show such care for its members and such faithfulness to the Scriptures that the Lord would see fit to give us such support that our cups would overflow.

It has been often said, "You can't take it with you." And this is true. Despite what the Pharaohs thought, you cannot take personal possessions with you into the afterlife. But, for the believer, your relationships are transferable from this life to the next. Because of the hope of the resurrection, believers may be separated from each other for a time, but not for eternity.

When the reality sets in that we'll be together forever, we'll be far more invested in the well-being of our fellow believers than the well-being of our bank account or financial holdings. Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Watson, "Cyprus," in *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), 283.

where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). The Lord was advising us to invest our time, treasures, and talents in endeavors that will outlive us and not perish when we die. And there is no better way to spend your resources than helping someone get back on their feet.

Jesus tells us that on the last day, he will separate the believers from the unbelievers, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. One of the significant differences between the two will be the test of charity.

**READ: Matthew 25:34-40 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right [believers], ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

The follower of Jesus who uses their possessions to help the needy will be praised when they get to heaven. In contrast, a believer who hoards their possessions will, at best, be ashamed when they get to heaven, or, at worse, their uncharitable conduct will prove to be evidence of an unregenerate heart.

**READ: Matthew 25:41-46 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left [unbelievers], ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

One of the greatest hindrances to the gospel is simply this: lack of funds. The church could reach more people and accomplish more if Christians simply gave more. Can you downsize in such a way that does not jeopardize your livelihood (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8) while, at the same time, securing your eternal treasures?

Now, while there are legitimate reasons to use a self-storage facility (e.g., moving, renovations, business inventory, etc.), but, by and large, most people use such services because they have far too much stuff. Here are some statistics on the self-storage market:<sup>8</sup>

- Approximately 90% of the worldwide self-storage inventory is located in the US.
- In 2024, the annual revenue for self-storage is an estimated \$44.33 billion.
- The average cost for a 10x10 without climate control is \$132 per month.
- Over 50% of self-storage renters are female.
- 65% of all self-storage renters have a garage.
- Gen-Xers, those born in the 1960s and 1970s, use self-storage more than any other generation.

Eliminate the excess and utilize it for gospel initiatives. Sell the toys. Cut back on the splurging. Rather than be a hoarder, be a helper with your finances. James 2:15-16 says, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” Do not say, “I’ll pray for you,” when it is in your power to say, “I’ll help you.”

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<sup>8</sup> Bernau Jr., Alan, “54 Self-Storage Industry Statistics to Know in 2024,” May 20, 2025, *Alan’s Factory Outlet*, <https://alansfactoryoutlet.com/blog/self-storage-industry-statistics/>, [accessed July 3, 2025].



## **Video Description:**

### **Filled | Week 14 | “Warts And All, Part 1” (Acts 4:32-37)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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But this is hardly a new problem. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, portrait painters often minimized or completely overlooked a person's blemishes. No one wanted their faults immortalized on canvas. That is, no one except Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England. While getting his portrait made, he noticed that the artist didn't include any of the imperfections in his complexion. In response, he said,

“Mr. Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint your picture truly like me and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me. Otherwise, I will never pay a farthing for it.”

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**Sermon Manuscript:** <https://bit.ly/3leFJFN>

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