



“God Provides, We Proceed”

Acts 4:32-37

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Speaker: Pastor Drew Hunsley

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18:04

All right, well, grab your Bibles. We're going to be in Acts chapter 4 this morning. We're going to finish up Acts 4 that we started last week. So if you brought your Bibles, make your way there. If you didn't bring a Bible, there's a black one underneath of your chair. You can follow along if you'd like to. We're on page 1118 in those Bibles. So while you're making your way there, let me just kind of catch you up. I know there's always new people in the room every week, and some people miss and different things. So we have been working our way through a story that involves one of the greatest seasons in human history. And I think most people in the room,

18:40

If you're sitting in a church on a Sunday morning, you're probably familiar with the name and the story of Jesus and the events that surrounded his life, right? His teaching, his miracles, his death and resurrection, things we celebrate at Easter and Christmas. And you're familiar with Jesus. But the book of Acts that we're studying now tells us the story of what happened immediately after Jesus left the earth. In Acts chapter 1, we see Jesus kind of gives some final instructions to his followers. But then Jesus returns to heaven, and his followers now are left to go and to accomplish his mission that he had given them to do. Before Jesus left, he told them to go make more disciples. You have followed me, gentlemen. Now go make more. Go share what I've shared with you.

19:27

Go share it with someone else and make more disciples to the ends of the earth. And so by the time we're now in Acts 4 this morning, at this point, we're still probably within a few months of Jesus' return to heaven. The Christian church is just kind of in the early days, just being established. But this week we pick up a story after some surprising things have happened in the last few pages. In Acts chapter 3, we saw Peter and John, they were going into Jerusalem, heading into the temple, and they look over and there's a crippled man sitting there begging for alms. And they looked at him and they said, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth get up and walk.

20:07

And this man that had been crippled since birth gets up and starts jumping around and celebrating and praising God that he was healed. But the religious leaders didn't like that very much. The religious leaders liked the way that things were. They wanted the system to stay the way that it was. And they were trying to really stomp out this whole Jesus thing that was starting to bubble up there in Jerusalem that was gaining traction. And so last week, in the beginning of Acts chapter 4, we saw Peter and John on trial for healing this crippled man that they had apparently done something wrong. And so the passage this week that we're looking at, it starts with verse 23.

20:45

And in verse 23, we see where it says when Peter and John were released from this trial, it says that they went to their friends and they reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. Now, if you weren't with us last week and you weren't here to hear what was said to them, let me just kind of fill in the gaps a little bit. Peter and John go back to tell their friends what happens. And so it tells us that they went back and reported to their friends everything that had happened, the conversation that had taken place behind closed doors. And so they go back and they tell their friends, you know, guys, you were there. We healed that crippled man outside of the temple, and you probably saw us be arrested. So were arrested.

21:26

We were thrown in jail. We were brought out the next morning. And as we stood before this religious leader group, the Sadducees, and the chief priests and the scribes, the group that was there, Peter just laid it all out. John's probably bragging on Peter at this point. He says, you know, and Peter stood up in front of him, and Peter just laid it all out, right? The man was healed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And Peter's just up there telling him, right? Peter told him, Jesus, the one that you killed, who God raised from the dead. And Peter looked at him and said, salvation is found in no one else. There is no other system. There is no other religion. There is no other way to God except for through Jesus. No other path leads to heaven.

22:15

And the elders didn't know what to do with it. So the elders kind of looked at us. They were a little upset, but they couldn't punish us. So they just told us, hey, guys, stop doing what you're doing. Stop talking about Jesus. You need to just go sit quietly somewhere and stop all of this. And then Peter stood up, and Peter told him, all right, we hear you. Also, no, Right? That was kind of Peter's response. He says, you can decide whether this is right or wrong, but we're going to serve God and we're going to do what we believe God has told us to do. The religious leaders didn't really have any grounds to punish them. They were worried about how the crowds would respond if they punished these men who had just healed the crippled man in any way.

22:56

So they just let us go. That's what brought us to this point. So now let's look at how do they continue? What happens now that Peter and John have been let go?

They've been sent back out into Jerusalem, sent back to their friends. Sent back to the church. Now we see how the story continues this week. We're going to start in verse 23 and we're going to finish chapter 4, Acts, chapter 4. So if you want to follow along with me, you should be there in your Bible at this point, or you can follow along on the screens. Starting in verse 23. It says, when Peter and John were released, they went to their friends and they reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

23:36

And when the other Christians, when the rest of them heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, sovereign Lord, who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our Father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, who you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

24:19

And now Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness. While you stretch out your hand to heal, signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. But they had everything in common. With great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. And there was not a needy person among them.

25:04

For as many as 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. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, he sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. This is the word of the Lord. Would you pray with me? God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the privilege of being able to gather together and to humble ourselves before what you would speak to us this morning.

25:38

So God, as we have this time as we come before your perfect, inspired, holy word this morning, God, we pray that you would soften the clay of our hearts, God, that you would prepare us to receive whatever it is. God, that we would be receptive, that we would receive with open hands whatever challenge, whatever request, whatever encouragement, whatever it is that you have for us this morning. God, give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what you have for us today. We give this time to you, and we pray that you would speak and that we would listen. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen. All right. Well, as we dive in, the first thing that we're going to see in this

group of Christians, the early church, we see them emboldened and empowered in verses 23 through 31.

26:21

After Peter and John were warned and then released by the Sanhedrin, they returned to their friends, and they updated them on what happened. Right? And so, upon hearing the news about Peter and John, what was the early Christians, what was their immediate response? They prayed. They immediately turn their attention heavenward, and they thank God for what he's done. And they ask for continued strength in the midst of all it is that's going on. They offer this beautiful prayer that serves as really can kind of serve as a sort of a model prayer for us. We see some really important and really valuable kind of stages in this prayer that I just want to point out for us as we see their prayer in verses 24 through 30.

27:04

And at the beginning of this, we see they begin this by acknowledging who God is and what God has done. We see in verse 24, just as they begin praying, they address God. They say, sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them. They kind of start by giving God's credentials. They acknowledge that God is in control of all things. You know, the act of praying is an act of dependence. It's a very clear identification. It's a very clear statement that we are not capable of doing whatever it is on our own, that we are not enough on our own, that we need God's help in our lives, that we need to bring our request to God, that we need God's provision in whatever it is that's going on in life.

27:53

Just the act of praying is an act of dependence. We acknowledge our insufficiency and we cry out to God because he's capable of accomplishing what we are not capable of accomplishing. But while our dependence is implied when we pray, it's also good for us to explicitly say it out loud sometimes, isn't it? These early Christians were not shy about their limitations and their need for God. And so they prayed to God. They said, God, you are in control, and we come to you because we need you. Prayer teaches us dependence. It also shows us in these verses, we see that they express confidence in God's plan. If you look at verses 25 through 28, there's kind of an overarching theme that we see through those verses where the people set themselves against Jesus, the Messiah.

28:44

But you, God, you accomplished exactly what you had planned to do. The people are praying there. They're acknowledging that even as David had prophesied about this centuries ago back in Psalm 2, which is quoted in verses 25 and 26, by humbling themselves in prayer and expressing confidence in God's plan, they clearly identified where their hope was, what their eyes were fixed upon. If God had accomplished everything that he has done up to this point, why would they ever doubt that he was going to continue to do what he had promised? God had made some big promises for these men and women. These men and women had given everything. They were out there kind of sticking their necks out. They were putting their lives on the line to go and to do what Jesus had told them to go and do.

29:35

This was not some small mission that God had given them to do. Jesus said, no, take the news of me. Take the news of salvation, take the hope of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Make followers of me everywhere. That's a big deal. That was certainly a big responsibility. It was something that they needed to take seriously. And it was something that was far beyond what they were able to do in their own strength and their own power. But they also needed to be reminded that if God had promised that he was going to go with them, that if God had promised that he would empower them to do this work, this wasn't something that they were out there trying to do on their own. God had faithfully fulfilled all the promises up to this point.

30:19

God has had a plan in place, and they've seen the plan playing him out, and God is perfectly playing it out up to this point. So now they're sitting here going, all right, but is God going to provide tomorrow? What he's done in the past should inform their expectations for the future. What God has done in the past is going to help them to have faith for tomorrow. They're acknowledging in this prayer they're expressing confidence in God's plan, that God is in control and that everything is going to work out exactly the way that he wants it to. But then they also in this prayer, in verse 29, we see they're asking God for help in their current need. Verses 29 and 30, we see it here.

31:03

In verse 29, we see that they ask God to see the threats of the priests and the elders that had come against Peter and John that were coming against them. They pray for God to allow them to continue their work. Look upon the threats, verse 29, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness. They ask for boldness in their witness. And they ask for the ability to go and to continue to do the work that God has given them to do. You know, when we come to God, when we ask God for his help, we're expressing the reality. God, I can't handle this on my own, but I know that you can. Where our strength is limited, God's strength is limitless. Where our ability is flawed, God's ability is perfect. This isn't about their ability.

31:55

The people here in Acts, chapter 4. This isn't about them. This isn't about their ability to go and to accomplish this or that. We don't see them building a war room and dividing up Jerusalem into maps with quadrants and regions and all right, you're going to go over to 4th street, and then you two are going to go over to 6th street and we'll meet in the middle. This wasn't a strategic thing where they were going to do this in their own power. This isn't about their ability. This is about God's ability. And so by coming to God and saying, God, we need you, tells us that their eyes were in the right place. As we continue through this, we see the second thing. It's the same verses, but I actually want to come back. But we see this group assured and enlisted.

32:40

I want to come back to something. It's kind of a different point. So I made it a different point in our outline. But I want to come back to something in this same section and highlight a different element in these same verses here. Because there is an assuring and empowering reality hidden in these verses that I think should

shape our daily lives as Christians, if we notice it and we live in the light of this. I think we need to stop here and talk about this for just a minute. Because these men and women here in Acts, chapter 4, they believe that God is in control, Period. Flat out, God is in control. And that changes the way that they live. That changes some of the realities of their life. That has implications on a day in and day out basis.

33:25

They spoke of the fact in their prayer that God was in control of all things. Verse 24, right at the beginning of their prayer, they pray and they refer to God as the sovereign Lord. Sovereign Lord was defined, I looked it up. Oxford Languages, describes sovereign Lord as supreme ruler or monarch. It refers to someone who possesses supreme or ultimate authority. When they pray to God and they say, God, you are the sovereign Lord, they're acknowledging that he's in control of all things, that he possesses ultimate power. And as they continue to pray, they point back to this same reality again a little later. Verse 28, they point out, they pray back to God. They say, you did whatever your hand and whatever your plan had predestined to take place.

34:14

God's predestined plan that they're talking about here refers to the idea that God is in control of all things, that God has a plan for how the events of the day were going to play out. I want you to think and process with me for a minute. Jesus was betrayed by Judas just a few months earlier. Was that God's plan? Did God know that was going to happen? Did God intend for that to happen? Yes, he did. All right, keep those heads nodding. All right. Jesus, death and resurrection. Was God aware that was going to happen beforehand? Yes. Was that the plan? From the very beginning of the earth, before the foundations of the earth were laid, God knew that Jesus was going to go to a cross and die to pay a penalty for sinners? Yes, he did. God's sovereign.

35:00

God's plan, his perfect sovereign plan was playing out. What about in their last few weeks of events, in the last few days? That lame beggar that Peter and John had healed just a few days earlier, did God know that was going to happen? Was that a part of God's perfect plan? Yes, it was. Absolutely it was. What about Peter and John being arrested and standing before the religious leaders and having to give account of their faith in front of this group? Was that a part of God's plan? Of course it was. Absolutely it was.

35:34

This group of believers here in Acts 4, they're acknowledging that God was in control, that he is the sovereign king and that as the sovereign king, as the one who is an ultimate control and authority of all things, he has a perfect plan that is ordained and controlled by him. So that brings us now to a place where a lot of people get hung up. All right, so stay with me for just a minute. We're not going to dive all the way into this pool But I want to just dip my toe in for a minute or two because, I don't know, some of you may or may not have heard of a term, but you may have heard this term called Calvinism before, all right?

36:10

And some of you have some thoughts that come to mind, and some of you may have very different thoughts that come to mind when you hear that word.

36:16

But there is a lot more to that conversation than we have time to get into today. I'm not going to touch on most of it, all right? Because this morning's message is not about teaching Calvinism today, but to massively oversimplify the concept for you, just so that we're all on the same page here, there's some in the world who would say God is in absolute control and he determines all things. Alright? That's one side of the conversation. This is just a church disagreement that people kind of look at this and argue about this sometimes, right? A bunch of seminary students sit around and yell at each other about this. Some people will say, God is in absolute control and he controls all things, he determines all things.

36:55

While others on the other side of that will say God exhibits influence on people or situations or whatever it might be. But ultimately the people and the situations are the ones that determine the outcomes of whatever it is that's going on in that moment. All right, now let me just touch one thing here. All right? I opened a can of worms. We're not going to empty it. But here's what we are going to talk about. One of the most common objections that people make to their perception of Calvinism to say God's in control. God determines everything. Their objection is that God predestines the outcomes of events. And it leads people to say things like, if God's just going to do whatever he wants, why do I have to obey? Right? That seems logical. God's going to do whatever he wants.

37:41

Why do I have to do anything? Why do I have to get involved if God's in control? If God's going to do what God wants to do, I don't have to do the work. I can be as lazy as I want to be and it doesn't matter. God's just going to accomplish his plan some other way. I don't have to obey. Well, if God's just in ultimate control, then we're just robots. So if I disobey, if I don't do something, it's really, it's not even my fault, right? It's not fair for me to be blamed for something that God programmed me to do, alright? All those objections that people will make to saying God's in control, people go, oh yeah. And they start making these complaints, alright, grab your Bible and look back at Acts chapter 4 with me for just a minute.

38:32

Because the beliefs and the actions of the Christians in Acts chapter 4 goes directly against everything that I just said. All those assertions that I was just making those implications to say, well, if God's in control, then. And all those fill in the blanks that I just gave you. The actions in Acts chapter four, these Christians flies in the face of every one of those. Because in Acts chapter 4, these Christians, they had a clear belief that God is sovereign. They explicitly said it in their prayer. In verse 24, God is the sovereign Lord of all. In verse 28, they acknowledge and pray very clearly that whatever your hand, whatever your plan, that God you have predestined to take place. They believe that God had a predestined plan that was being played out.

39:23

But then in verse 29 and 30, we see them continue to pray, right? Verses 29 and 30 it says, now Lord, look on their threats and grant to us. Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal. The signs and wonders are being performed through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. Verse 31. And when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness. You know what we don't see here in Acts chapter 4? We don't see fatalism. Fatalism is the belief that everything is predetermined and it's just going to play out the way that God has it to play out.

40:11

It doesn't matter what we do because everything's just playing out exactly the way that it's supposed to. And it doesn't really matter. God has predetermined everything, our actions don't make any difference. But these Christians here in Acts chapter 4, they were passionately going about the work that God had given them to do, right? They believed that God was sovereign and in control of all things, but they were also passionately involved in doing the things that God had told them to do. There is no apathy in these Christians. There is no laziness in these Christians. There is no contentment to just sit back and say, alright, well I guess God's going to do whatever God feels like doing. So I'm going to go sit and watch Netflix until my eyes roll up in the back of my head and I pass out, right?

41:03

These Christians were passionately going about the work that God had given them to do. Now they were looking to God to provide strength and power for their work. If you told them, you know, we don't have to do anything because God's in control, I think they might slap you, right? I think they may just get so mad that they would just shake you until they just did something violent to you, Right? There is nothing in these people that gives the impression that they're okay with just sitting back and saying, well, God's in control, right? So I'm going to go take a nap. They knew that there were two sides to this. They knew and they were actively acknowledging that there were two different sides to this.

41:46

Now, if you ask me to reconcile and to make all of this make sense, I'm going to tell you that I'm not smart enough to do so. But let me just tell you what the Bible clearly says. And if you doubt me, I stuck a couple of slides up here that have more than enough verses to support both of these statements. There's two sides to this conversation. The first one, the Bible is clear. God is in control and he will accomplish his purposes, right? I think that's fair for us to say God's in control and God will accomplish his purposes. On the other side of that coin, it's also true. The Bible is also abundantly clear. God has told us, get to work. I'm just going to pause here for a second. I see some of you taking pictures, right?

42:35

You can go back and do your homework and read all those verses, right? I promise you, I think all of them are accurate. And maybe I typed a number here or there. Go back, be like the Bereans and double check my work, right? But both of these statements are biblically supported. Both of these statements are true. God is in

control. He will accomplish his purposes. And God wants you to be out there doing the work. Can I tell you something? God has work for you to do. It is disobedient for us to sit back and to just say, well, God's in control, so I'm going to take a nap. Our job is to do what he has told us to do. It's appropriate. It's good for us to acknowledge that God ordains the outcomes.

43:20

But we also have to acknowledge that he's ordained the methods to go and to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. Romans talks about how will they believe in whom they haven't heard. And God certainly is going to reach in and save people. We don't save people. Right. But how will they believe in whom they've never heard? And how will they hear without someone preaching to them? All right. Both of these things have to work in cooperation. God's in control and somebody needs to go tell them. Right? God ordains the outcomes and the methods. God might be planning to use you to accomplish his plan. So it's not on us to decide when to obey or not to obey. What is on us is to do what he tells us to do and then to trust him with the results. All right.

44:10

Beyond that, to make sense of how all those things fit together. That's just an academic exercise. That might be fun sometimes. Right. I enjoy having a good argument just as much as the next guy. But ultimately, both of these things are true. Both of these things are biblically supported. And both of these things are expected in the life of a healthy Christian. We need to understand God's in control. We're not in control. Right. That helps us to lay our heads down on our pillow at night and to rest well knowing that the results of my life don't depend on me. The spiritual life of my neighbor or my loved one or my kids, that's not my responsibility. I can't manipulate and control the situation. I can't twist words and argue somebody into the kingdom of God.

44:57

It's not my job to do God's work. Okay, we're gonna rewind that. That sounds a little off. Right? It's not my job to do the Holy Spirit's work, in that whole conversation, the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts people of sin. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings life into dead people. But it is my job to tell them, it is my job to do the work that God has given me to do. To go and to share, to go and to be obedient. To go and to do the things that God has commanded me to do. God is sovereign and he has work for us to do. Alright. The last thing that we're going to look at, verses 32 through 37, we see a great community.

45:40

These verses are going to sound fairly familiar to us if you were with us a few weeks ago. Because back in Acts chapter 2, we saw much of the same thing. We saw the community modeling this extravagant generosity. Sounds very similar. The verses are very similar to what we saw at the end of Acts chapter 2. But I do want to draw out a few things here. There's an incredible community that we see here in verses 32 through 37. Let me tell you what, let me just read the whole section, then we'll go back and we'll pick it apart a little bit. All right. In verse 32, it's talking about the community of the Christians. It says now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.

46:20

No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. But they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the great grace that was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses, they sold them and they brought the proceeds of what was sold and they laid it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, he sold a field that belonged to him and he brought the money and he laid it at the apostles feet.

47:00

When we look at this community, when we see the way that these Christians were living with one another, that they were loving one another, we see an incredible community, a great community. I want to use that word great because we see that word show up over and over again in these verses. There's a greatness in their community that they lived with one another. So there's a few different things that we see. See the first one is that we saw that their foundation was their great unity. Verse 32, it tells us that the number of those who believed they were of one heart and one soul, they were united together in a supernatural way.

47:40

Everything that follows, all of the implications of how they lived with one another, how they handled their possessions, how they treated one another, how they met the needs, all of those things that we see in the rest of these verses, it flows out of their great unity, their love for one another. The fact that they were united in a supernatural way. Everything that follows after that now is not something that is pressed upon them. It's because they love one another. It's because they were loved to such extreme lengths by Jesus that now they realize that and they're driven to love one another in the same way in which they've been loved. We also continue through these verses. Not only do we see a great unity among these people, but we see that there was a great power in their message.

48:26

Verse 33, it says, with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord. Jesus. The work of God among them was. It was a powerful work. They were seeing God move in amazing ways. They were accomplishing miraculous feats. Peter was walking around saying, hey, you're sick. Get up. Hey, you have this problem, let's just take care of it, right? There was. There were these miraculous things that were happening in different places. The earthquakes that showed up, the tongues of fire, they were speaking different languages that they didn't know God's doing miracles among them. But the greatest miracle is the fact that we've seen dead people become alive thousands and thousands of times so far in the last few weeks, right?

49:11

The Bible describes that when we are not in Christ, that when we are on our own, that we are dead in our trespasses and our sins. There is nothing spiritually alive in

us. But these last couple of chapters in Acts, they show us that in the midst of all of that, in the midst of the miracles, in the midst of the healings, in the midst of all the other stuff tells us that thousands were added to their number, that thousands of dead people became alive in Christ over the course of the last few weeks or months. God was working powerfully among them. The power that verse 33 is talking about is the Holy Spirit that is empowering their witness as lives are being changed. When God is at work, things change, lives are transformed, people get involved.

50:05

Boring stagnancy is never an accurate description of the work of God. God is in the business of changing lives, and God's taking dead people and making them alive. Colossians, chapter 2, verses 13 and 14. A couple of my favorite verses just lay out the Gospel so clearly. They say, and you who were dead in your trespasses, in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all of our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. But that punishment that we deserved, he set it aside, nailing it to the cross. The work of the apostles was given great power as God worked through their testimony, as the Holy Spirit came and empowered them and equipped them to go and do what God had told them to do.

50:52

There was great power in their gathering, that lives were being changed. Not only was there great unity and great power, but we also see the Lord's great grace that was upon them all. Not only does verse 33 talk about the power, but it also mentions Great grace. Verse 33. It says, with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace was upon Them all. The fact that God was giving them great power to do his work was wonderful. But there's a danger that can be found there. Lots of people want power and control, right? That's not exclusive to Christians. There are people all over the world, all throughout human history, that want power, right? Oftentimes it gets them into trouble. Oftentimes. If anybody watched the movie Aladdin, right?

51:43

Everybody knows that there was the guy that wanted the power, and there was the guy that kind of didn't really want the power, but it worked out okay for him in the end, right? Be careful about being the guy that wants the power, right? There are people all over the place throughout human history that have craved the power, and they've gotten themselves in a lot of trouble, right? Pounding podiums and being dogmatic leaders and becoming dictators, becoming cult leaders, right? People that wanted power have done all kinds of terrible things throughout human history. There's lots of people that want power and control. But following Christ is not just about the power that God gives to us. If you're serving God to feel empowered or to feel important or to feel good about yourself, you are doing it for the wrong reasons.

52:30

Because God has also poured out his grace on these early Christians when He loved them and he received them as his own. Our value, our significance as Christians, is not in our strength, but rather in our weakness. That word grace can be defined as the favor that God pours out on the undeserving. Realizing our own sinfulness is foundational to a healthy relationship with God. Let me give you a quote

from a guy that's been dead for about four or five hundred years, Philip Melanchthon. He said, you contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary. That's kind of a good reminder for all of us, I think. We don't contribute to our salvation. We don't earn our salvation. God doesn't look at us and say, you know, they tried really hard.

53:24

So I'll just get them the rest of the way, right? I'll help carry them across the finish line. No, no, no. God didn't save you because you deserved it. God didn't save you because you're good. God saved you because he felt like it. Romans chapter 5 tells us that God demonstrates his love for us, that even while we were sinners, Christ died for us. The only thing that you bring to your salvation is the sin that made it necessary. These men and these women here that we see in Acts chapter 4, these men and women are empowered by God to do amazing things. But the power wasn't what this was ultimately about. It was the great grace that they had freely received that made them truly special. We see their unity, see the power of God at work among them.

54:15

We see the great grace that they had received. And finally in the last few verses we see that great generosity drove their actions. We see this incredible picture of generosity on display as the church, they step up, right? They just as clearly as they could, as clearly as probably anybody in human history has ever stepped up, this group stepped up. Essentially they said, Jesus gave everything for me, so now I'm going to give everything for him. Verses 34 through 37. Let me read them for you one more time. It says that there was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of land or houses, they sold them and they brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles feet and they distributed it to each as any had need.

55:05

This Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, we're going to see him again over the rest of the book of Acts, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, he sold a field that belonged to him and he brought the money and he laid it at the apostles feet. We talked about this same idea a couple of weeks ago, right? In Acts chapter 2 we saw something very similar. And I noted then, the early church that this passage, this idea that we see here in the book of Acts has been miscommunicated and misused over the last 2000 years. The early church was not required to give as some early form of communist, right? We don't see them mandating and requiring, all right, everybody go sell your stuff.

55:51

And then the apostles are going to march around and collect your money and you're going to turn in what you owe. Communism essentially says what is yours is actually mine, right? It takes with power, with selfishness, it's driven by, I want what you have. But the generosity that we see here from the early church was them willingly saying no, no, what's mine is yours. This is not taking with selfishness. This is giving with selflessness. What we do see here is a supernaturally driven generosity that reflected an incredible understanding of the gospel. Jesus had given so incredibly generously to them that as a result of that, the reasonable response that many of

them came to was that they needed to give to one another with incredible generosity. You know, I've often, in churches, I've often heard people, I've heard pastors talk about this before.

56:54

You know, how much do I have to give? They'll ask that question like, God is, I don't know, he works for the IRS or something. Like, it's Tax Day, and you've got to make sure that you paid your bill and that you done your part and that God's keeping track. That God's got that one of those little weird green visors that, you know, the accountants in the movies wear, right? Jesus is up there with his ledger book going, all right, well, the Cook family is short 400 bucks this year, so I guess we're not going to give them those good deeds. Like, what? That's not how it works, right? That's not how this is all structured. When people ask, how much do I have to give? It, it tells me we have missed somewhere in this whole conversation.

57:37

Because the question is not, how much do I have to give? The question that we should be asking is, how much can I give? As Christians, we are constantly being challenged to step up, to grow, to increase our godliness in all kinds of different ways, right? We'll ask the question, how can I walk in holiness more effectively? How can I serve God more? What can I do to live my life in a way that God would be glorified and honored more effectively today than I did yesterday? How does God want me to live? We are constantly asking that question. We constantly are growing in those answers to those questions, right? Where you are today, if you're still there 20 years from now. We haven't done very much. We haven't done this life the way that we're supposed to.

58:24

We're supposed to continually be growing in our faithfulness in all kinds of different areas. And so if I can be so bold as to just change the channel a little bit on this conversation, I don't think we should be asking the question, how much do I have to give? I think we should be asking the question, how much can I give? I think we should set a similar goal here with our finances that we do in all the other areas of our obedience, right? How can I walk in holiness more effectively? God, how can I serve more? How can I love you more? How can I grow in the disciplines and learn more about you? We ask all those questions and we go, yeah, that seems appropriate. I think we should ask the same question with our resources.

59:08

How could I be more generous this year than I was last year? How can I be more faithful to use the resources that God has given me now than I have been in the past? What might be right for you today? Might not be right for someone else sitting in the room. What might be right for someone else might not be right for you? I don't know. I'm not the Holy Spirit and I'm not the one that's dealing with you with this. I'm just kind of laying it all out there. And I want you to wrestle with God with this. How is God challenging me to be more generous? How can the generosity of the early church in the book of Acts, how can that speak into my life and into your life today?

59:49

What would bringing the proceeds, laying them at the apostles feet, what would that

look like for you? I don't know. It's not my job to know. I want to encourage you to ask that question and answer that question for yourself today. Yeah, I love looking at these little sections like this. Acts chapter 4. It gives us one of these little summary moments. Acts does this so well. It gives us these moments where they kind of, they focus in on the little moments in the story, they focus in on the details. But then they give us these spots where they step back and kind of give us the summary moment. Gives us a big picture view of some things. What we see here in Acts chapter 4 is we see how the church responded in these first moments of persecution.

01:00:35

We see them praying for boldness and power in the face of the priests and the elders that had just called Peter and John in, had made them stand trial in the same place that Jesus had stood trial right before he went to the cross. We see these moments of persecution breaking out against them. And we see them pray for boldness and power that God would give them the strength to face the things that he was putting in front of them. We see them resting in God's provision, knowing that God is ultimately in control. And so we can rest easy in knowing the fact that whatever it is that happens, it might surprise us, but it didn't surprise God. And we see them radically committed to doing what they could do to support the work of God that was happening around them. They did both.

01:01:25

We talked about this earlier. They trusted that God was in control and they got to work. Kind of summarize this in my own head with two terms, resting and redlining. Resting. The idea that God would want us to rest in Him. Let me ask you this question. Does God want you to rest in him and remember that he is the one who empowers us to do what he's commanded? Of course he does. Yes, absolutely. We are ultimately incapable of accomplishing anything of eternal significance apart from God. Working through us. So we have to rest in the fact that God is in control and that God is going to be the one to do the work. There's rest. But what about redlining? Maybe you've heard that term before. That can actually mean a few different things.

01:02:19

But anybody ever gotten in the car, mashed the accelerator and just heard the engine go wee? Right? The rpm, the tachometer is sitting there, just pegged on the thing. There's the red lines up there at the top of the gauges. It's redlining. When you slam it down and go full speed as hard as it can drive a car at maximum pace, you're redlining your car. Does God want you to get to work and to do everything that you can to support the mission that God has given us to do? He does. Also yes, absolutely he does. God's in control, but he's also given us work to do.

01:03:03

And our job is to get to work apathetically sitting around waiting for God to just go accomplish his purposes on his own while I sit around and watch Netflix or take a nap or just sit apathetically serving my own flesh and my own desires and my own wants. That is not the description of a healthy Christian life. In fact, I would say that it's blatant disobedience. So what I think we can see here from the early church this morning, what we see in their prayer, what we see in their actions, what we see in how they respond, is these two truths that if we get off track in either direction, we

can fall out of balance and we can get ourselves in trouble. God is in control. Everything that God wants to happen is going to happen. God is the sovereign Lord.

01:03:58

He is the ultimate king in control of all things. And God has a plan, right? That's good news for us. God has a plan, and he is going to accomplish his plan. It's the reason we pray. If God wasn't in control, it's really foolish for us to pray because he doesn't have the power to do anything, right? We pray because God's in control, but also right the other side of it. God has given us a mission. God has told us at the beginning of the Book of Acts. And the same mandate that Jesus gave them is the same mandate that Jesus has given me and you.

01:04:35

He said, go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you. He Says, go. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It's the reason why our church exists, right? We exist to make disciples who know Jesus, follow Jesus, serve Jesus and obey Jesus. We use those four terms, know, follow, serve and obey, because we think it gives you a picture of what does it look like to grow up in faith. You have to meet Jesus, you have to learn what it looks like to live the way that he tells you to live.

01:05:11

But then you get to start serving and you get to go reproduce yourself and do the thing that he's told you to do. Go give it to somebody else. If we're not doing those things, we are profoundly unhealthy Christians at best. At worst, we don't know Jesus at all. God is in control. Get to work. Alright, our prayer team is going to be down here after the service is over. They would love to pray with you about whatever it is that you've got going on. We've got our prayer wall out the back doors to the right. You can write your prayer request down. And our prayer team would love to pray for those as well. But as we wrap up, would you pray with me now? God, we thank you for your love for us.

01:05:57

We thank you for the privilege of being able to come to you and to know you and to stand before the sovereign king of the universe. God, you are our king. You are everyone's king. You are every things master. You are the sovereign one over all things that we see and the things that we don't see. God, we worship you this morning as the sovereign king in control of all things that your sovereign plan perfectly plays out. But God, we also pray for boldness. We also pray for your strengthening power, that the Holy Spirit would work in us and move in us and give us the strength to withstand the temptations of the evil one. God, that you would give us the strength to go and to do the things that you tell us to go and do.

01:06:42

To be the people that you have told us to go and be. God, help us to be about your work and not just sit back and lazily say, God's in control. God, help us to look to you and to know that everything is ultimately in your hands. But God, help us to work like it depends on us to work hard, to diligently do the things that you tell us to do. To live

with radical generosity, to live with passionate prayer at the center of who we are. God, help us to be like these early Christians that God, everything about them was about you. You were their everything. God help us to give you everything. Not just the corner of our lives or a few hours a week or the occasional lip service. God, just telling you that we love you. It's not enough.

01:07:44

God, help us to get to work. Help us to rest in your sovereignty and help us get to work in obedience. God, we love you. We thank you for loving us and we thank you for Jesus. It's in his name we pray. Amen.