

# All In

Acts 4:32-5:11

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message 14)

*<sup>32</sup>All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all<sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

*<sup>36</sup>Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), <sup>37</sup>sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.*

*<sup>5</sup>Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>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.*

*<sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup>Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."*

*<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup>Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.*

*<sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"  
"Yes," she said, "that is the price."*

*<sup>9</sup>Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."*

*<sup>10</sup>At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup>Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

## Message:

We're re-imagining the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Church. We're imagining what the Church might look like, if we took the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our life and faith community seriously.

**After a couple of introductory messages on *waiting and praying*, we spent the first month (September) talking about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.**

**Last month (October) we focused on the early Church's *Rule of Life*** - i.e., the practices of the early Church that kept them walking close to Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. We noted the early Church was fully devoted to the *apostle's teaching* (i.e., to the Gospel), to the *fellowship* (to the community), to the *breaking of bread* (calling people together around a table of forgiveness, grace, and blessing), and to prayer (for God's Church, Mission, and Kingdom). We noted it wasn't multiple choice, it was "all of the above!"

**This month, we're looking at the Church's mission.** What is the work of "Church" and it's members. Three weeks ago we talked about the five **marks** of the first disciples on mission: *Prayer, Passion, Power, Persuasion*, and God's *Presence* marked their life. Two weeks ago, we talked about the **message** of the church - that the resurrection of Jesus means God is changing everything and making all things new! Last week we focused on the **method** of the mission - prayer!

**This morning we'll focus on the **manifestation** of the mission.** Luke paints us two pictures: the first is how the church should be (**Acts 4:32-36**), and the second is how the church should not be - but sadly, often is (**Acts 5:1-11**). In doing so, Luke reminds us we have a lot to say about the church we are and the church we becoming...

**Read: Acts 4:32 - 5:11**

**Some of you have seen the film *Remember the Titans*. It is a true story.** Denzel Washington plays coach Roy Boone who inherits a high school football team filled with egos, apathy, racism and hatred. Everyone is in it for himself. The turning point comes early one morning in training camp when Coach Boone gets them all out of bed and leads them on a "surprise" run.

Coach Boone says, *Unless we come together, on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed.*

To make a long story short, they come together as a team and win the Virginia state football title and in the process bring racial reconciliation to the whole community.

**The Church is a collection of so many different kinds of people.** We got jocks and geeks, academics and entrepreneurs, Wolverines and Spartans, reds and blues, bikers and grandmas (maybe even a few biker grandmas). We got CEO's, COO's, CFO's, maybe a few E-I-E-I-O's who may have seen UFO's. We're from different places, different schools, different neighborhoods, and different homes... But in Jesus we are to be one heart, one mind living life together in community.

In these verses, Luke gives us two pictures of the Church - both involve money. Matters of money are inescapable. They are at the heart of discipleship; but they are not the heart of discipleship.

## THE SPIRIT-DRIVEN CHURCH

In Acts 4:32 we read, *“All believers were one in heart and mind”*

Sometimes a short quotation carries with it an entire worldview. This one does. This “one **heart**, one **mind unity**” is what Jesus prayed passionately about just before he died (**John 17:20f** - *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me...that all of them may be one...as you and I are one.*)

Jesus: *Father, since oneness is who you and I are; this needs to be who they are as well.*

Jesus died to make us *right with **God*** and *one with **each other***. Actually he was crucified - that is he was “all in” - he gave his life for this. The unity of the Church comes at a very high **price**. It cost **Jesus** his life. It must cost **us** ours as well.

Since he gave his life for it, Jesus is jealous for the unity - community - of his Church. Jesus knows our unity (or lack of it) directly impacts our ability to fulfill our mission. Being of “one heart, one mind” isn’t just mentally agreeing on a disputed matter, it is the living out of that matter practically - together. (The early Christians, being Jewish, didn’t distinguish as we westerners do, between our thinking and our doing. They simply went together!) Jesus loves us so he gave his life for us - they go together!

Unity in the church is not primarily the pastor(s), elders’ or staff’s job or responsibility; it’s **yours** and **mine**. Are we fully devoted to the unity of the Body of Christ? Are we willing to make the sacrifices necessary - as Jesus and the early disciples were? If we see someone in need, do we prioritize their need over ours (cf. Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19)? Are we all in? Or is our talk and walk going in different directions?

When people who are so different come together, it’s a miracle. The world notices miracles and wonders if there might be something to this Jesus.

Remember “Field of Dreams.” It’s a real baseball field in the middle of an Iowa cornfield. The field was actually owned by two different people: one owned center and left field; one owns right field and the infield. They apparently didn’t like each other very much. So...there are two driveways; two concession stands, two admission prices.

A person interviewed by the news media said, “It’s just unbelievable the way these people act. They’re like churches.” (Ouch! That has to break God’s heart.)

In Jerusalem, the Church of the Sepulcher is built over the (a) probable site of the Jesus’ crucifixion and tomb. The property is “shared” by six churches: Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Roman Catholics, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syriac Orthodox. Each has its own chapel; each has its own entry door.

They have never been able to get along so in 1192 a Muslim family was given the keys to the church building. They’ve opened and closed the doors every morning and night since.

In 1853, the Sultan (Muslim) stepped in to declare “status quo” - that is, nothing could change in the common areas without everyone’s approval. There is a ladder leaning against the building since 1853 - they can’t agree to move it (**PIC**)

The fights/battles continue. On a hot summer night in 2002, a Coptic monk moved his chair from its agreed on position into the shade; 11 people were hospitalized in the ensuing fight.

In 2004, the door to the Franciscan Chapel was inadvertently left open; the Orthodox considered it disrespectful; a fight broke out; numerous people were arrested.

This is His Church. It grieves God's heart as he watches churches **torn apart** by pride, bitterness, envy, selfish ambition and personal preferences regarding worship, building changes/additions, dress codes, money - not to mention doctrinal differences.

In some churches, criticism is apparently revered as a spiritual gift... But disunity, disharmony and dissent undermine the Church's mission, Christ's mission. There is no place in God's family for talking bad/negatively about each other, attacking each other, **tearing-down** each other, or being jealous of one another.

We're to be one heart and mind: **loving**/praying/**forgiving**/rejoicing/weeping with each other; bearing one another's burdens; encouraging one another; being devoted to one another. We belong to each other. Requires sacrifice; being all-in. Paul reminds us to (**Ephesians 4:3**) *Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.*

**Luke paints us a picture of "good church." In Acts 4:32b, we read, *No one claimed any of his possessions as his own but shared everything they had.***

One of the first words (we) our children/grandchildren learn is "**mine**" (usually comes right after "no"). Some never outgrow it: my ministry, my building, my seat, my parking spot, my money, my way. . .

I've been in ministry a while. Someday I'll sit with my grandkids like a veteran and say, "This scar is from when we first had drums in church; this one from the first time we set a 'movie' screen in the front of church; this one from introducing drama; this one from the women in office discussion; this one from the year of Covid19..."

I have more battle scars from friendly fire than from enemy fire; people who say they follow Jesus can be vicious and cruel like children siblings who demand "mine."

A miracle took place in the early church - the **Spirit** came and they got united behind Christ's **mission**; they took their eyes off **themselves** and placed them on a **lost world** and came to one heart and one mind (Christ's). That's unity. That's a miracle! God did it!

Imagine an interview with an early church member: "Do you like every decision the apostles made?" No. Do you like meeting in caves or down by the river? No. Do you like singing a cappella? No! Do you like the rock hard seats (lit.)? No. Do you like those clean shaven people with short hair? (They are strange!). So why are you here? Because we're changing the world by making more and better disciples together!

Paul will write in **Romans 12:9** - *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourself. Serve the Lord. Be joyful in hope; patient in affliction; faithful in prayer.*

How can we learn this? Got a dog? Go away for a week. Come home. Your spouse says "Welcome Home." You might get a hug and (maybe) a kiss (depending on how long you've been married). You tell your kids, "I'm home!" Your kids say, "Oh, you were gone?" But your dog starts barking; almost runs you over; runs around and round, jumps up and down: "You are great! Where have you been? I'm so glad you're home. Just pet me!" They go nuts!

People complain, "He treats me like a dog!" I hope so! Honoring one another means acting and living like everyone is great! It requires being "all-in."

So they shared. Love ultimately must become **tangible**. It must move from our heart/mind to our voice, to hands, to feet, to our wallet (Truth is, our wallet is usually the last part to go). It is hard for me to understand the report I heard a couple of weeks ago that over half of the adult professing members here (at Covenant) give little or nothing! The apostle John writes (**1 John 3:17**) *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*

The early Church believers were all in - their heart is in; their mind is in; their body is in; and their wallet was in.

**Luke sums this up by saying (Acts 4:33), "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was upon them all."**

Last week we noted the apostles prayed for **boldness**. They didn't ask God to make it easier. And God didn't. But God answer their prayer; he made them **bold**.

We also talked last week about the importance of prayer in completing God's mission: "Lord make us one; Lord, make us bold; Lord, grow your church, bring (insert specific name) into your family."

It's not about us - not half, not 25%, not even 10%. This is all about **Jesus**.

**Luke notes the results of being "all in" (Acts 4:34): *There was no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sale and put it at the apostles feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.***

Note three things about this passage:

1. Their participation was **voluntary**. There was a need. Their participation wasn't required. But people stepped up because they were focused on Jesus, on his mission, on making disciples. And they were all in.
2. They were amazingly **generous**. Throughout Acts, believers considered themselves family. If you're part of a family, your "stuff" belongs to the family. You love each other and your love is expressed in your willingness to share...
3. Their attitudes, opinions, and values had been **transformed**. "How can I get more stuff" became "How can I share what I have?" "How can I get it to be 'my way'" changed to "how can I come along side and make it better for you..." When they saw a need, they

asked, "How can I share my time, talents, testimony, and treasures to enhance the family of God..

Christ requires his disciples, all his disciples, to be fully devoted, **all-in**, self-denying, taking up their **cross** followers. Christ's Church is here to serve one another, his world and his kingdom. It is not about us. Luke paints a picture of a faith community where everyone is all in...

## THE SELF-DRIVEN CHURCH

**And then. . .there is the story of bad church. This story appears to be about lying and giving.** Some commentators the issue here is obviously **lying**. Don't do it! Other commentators say the issue here is **withholding** from God what is rightfully his. Don't do it. The result of either is death - physical, spiritual, eternal. I think it is even a bigger issue: **Do we take God seriously?** There are extreme consequences for not really fearing God and trying to fool Him. People love to go through the motions without being all in. The result is deadly.

Peter asks the penetrating question: *What made you think of doing such a thing? (5:4).* **Ananias and Sapphira, how could you be involved in something so supernatural and not fear the sovereign power of an awesome, holy God?**

Peter finds it hard to comprehend: *"You've seen the Spirit at work: speaking in different languages, miracle healings, room-shaking prayer, sharing of possessions; one heart, one mind unity. Why you would [suddenly] think so little of this awesome God boggles my mind."*

*"Don't you fear God?"* It is nice to have a deep sense of **reverence**, admiration, **adoration**, wonder, and acknowledge, as the disciples did, the sovereignty of God. But do you really understand who he is? What he can do? Do you stand in awe of his sovereignty, wisdom, majesty, grace, holiness, creative power and justice? He holds your blessings or lack of them, your life and eternity in his hands.

Peter and John were recently faced with a similar question: Do we listen to the rulers who held their physical life in the balance and stop talking about Jesus or keeping talking Jesus knowing he holds their eternal life in his hands? Do we listen to people's opinions - even church people's opinions about church - or to God's Word and Will? Think about that - it should be an easy choice.

Do you really know **God**? Do you stand in awe of God's **creative power**: *"God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light!" (Genesis 1)*

Imagine being able to walk into the parking lot and say, "Let there be a Mercedes" and Boom! There is a brand new Mercedes! Or kids looking at their report cards: "Let there be all 'A's'" and there are. Or looking into the mirror and saying, "Let there be hair..." Ever pause to consider the complexities of DNA, an atom, photo-synthesis; our sun being exactly 93 million miles away so life can be sustained.

I don't have that power. You don't have that power. Only God does. He is an awesome God: *"What made you think of doing such a thing?"*



Do you stand in awe of God's **holiness**: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory.*" (cf. **Isaiah 6:3**).

When the Hebrew language wants to emphasize something they repeat it; repeat it three times and it takes on supreme importance. The Bible underscores only one attribute of God three times: his holiness. Our God is not just holy; he is not just holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. Christ's community is a place of holiness so dramatic every blemish is magnified. What made you ignore God's holiness and justice and take him for granted?

Do you stand in awe of God's **marvelous grace**?

Peter has been with God - he was terrified of the storm and Jesus calmed the sea; he acted impulsively and cut off a soldier's ear and Jesus healed it; he betrayed Jesus three times and Jesus forgave him. Peter finally understands he is living in the presence of a holy God who had created him: he takes this relationship personally.

Do you not understand God is **just**? Achan disobeyed God (Joshua 7) and kept some things from Jericho for himself God told him he may not take - he, his wife, his children and all his livestock were stoned to death. Uzzah (2 Samuel 6) reached out and touched the Ark of God's Covenant - something God prohibited - and died instantly.

If we watch with awe the early church healings, their standing up to bullies, their transforming lives, and sharing freely we need to face the fact that if we want to be a community of the Living God, we shouldn't be surprised if God makes it clear there is no cheap grace! If we are going to invoke the power of the holy One, remember God is not mocked (cf. Galatians 6:7).

*Ananias, what made you [even] think of doing such a thing?* Ananias and Sapphira, do you really understand who God is? Do you not fear God? Do you not keep his commandments? Do you not stand before him in awe? Have you not fallen in love with him? Aren't you all in?

**Ananias and Sapphira, did you really think you could fool God?**

This was an obvious scam. Husband and wife colluding together: "This is about us. I'll go in and say this is all of the money; you go in about three hours later and collaborate my lie." Ananias came and lied. He died (Bamm!) on the spot! She came and lied. She died (Bamm!) on the spot!

Did you really think you could **fool** God? Do you really know who you are dealing with?

There's a clue of what is coming in **4:36-37**. Joseph, a Levite from Cypress called **Barnabas** (i.e., son of encouragement), sold a field he owned. He brought **all** the money to the disciples. The response to this was **overwhelming**. Everyone loved him - he was generous, kind, helpful - so they called him Barnabas. Others followed his modeling; they're all giving each other high-fives! We'll meet Barnabas again soon. He will help followers become disciples!

Ananias and Sapphira want the same **acceptance**, appreciation, significance and community, they saw Barnabas had. They want all the benefits Barnabas received; but

they didn't want to pay full price. They forgot it meant being all in - that it cost Jesus everything. Today we all like a good sale; but following Jesus requires paying full price. Are you all in?

When **Christ** is in you, and you're in **Christ**, you are already **accepted**, secure, and significant. But Satan had convinced them they weren't; then he convinced them they could be - simply by selling some property and just giving half, but saying it was the whole. Pretend...

How we view God impacts our identity; impacts how we see the world, impacts how we live our life... The truth is, our worth is not dependent on what people say, on what we do, or even on what you give...but wholly on Jesus. We don't have to pretend, project an image, or impress anybody.

Satan tries to convince us we only need to put one foot in - we can leave the other foot out if we want (*You put your right foot in; you take Your right foot out; you put your right foot in and you shake it all about. You do the hokey pokey. That's what it's all about.*) (No.) That "one foot in" hokey brings death - always spiritual, but sometimes even physical death. God struck Ananias and Sapphira down dead!

On the surface, the **penalty** seems incredibly harsh; but the **warning** is clear: the **stakes** are high; acknowledging this community belongs to God is literally a matter of life and death.

We can fool a lot of **people** (and we certainly try, and sometimes we're even temporarily successful); but we can't fool **God**.

**Hebrews 4:** - *Nothing in all creation can hide from Him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done. (God knows. He knows everything). That is why we have a high priest who has gone to heaven - Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him.*

He knows everything about me and he still wrapped himself in flesh and came to sacrifice himself for my sin so I can be forgiven. Only if I go all in.

**John Bell, former president of Special Olympics, tells a story of a 100-yard dash.** All the runners got in the starting blocks; the gun went off; one runner fell and skidded along the track. The other seven all stopped; they all went back, and they all walked down the track and broke the tape - all in, all together. They all claimed victory side by side.

That's a picture of the Spirit-driven church. **All in. All together.**

Are you all in? Is your head, **heart**, voice, **hands**, feet, and **wallet** in? All in? Are we all in this **together**? *Unless we all come together, on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed!*

**Let's stand. Let's pray together.**