

Session 18 Bold Witness and Willing Generosity

Acts: The Book That Explains Everything

Session 18 | Acts 4:29-37



Before You Read

Big idea: God answers the Jerusalem believers' prayer with bold speech. Luke then describes a united company whose resurrection witness is accompanied by practical care, and introduces Barnabas through his generous gift.

Where we resume: Session 17 ended at Acts 4:28. Peter and John have reported the rulers' threats, and the gathered believers have addressed the Creator, quoted Psalm 2, and confessed God's determined purpose in Jesus' rejection. Verse 29 continues that same prayer with their present request.

Two connected scenes: Verses 29-31 finish the prayer and record God's answer. Verses 32-37 describe the believing multitude, the apostles' witness, and the use of shared resources. Luke moves from courage before opponents to care within the company.

Read alongside: Acts 2:43-45; Luke 12:32-34; Acts 5:1-4. Watch both the kingdom setting of the sharing and the owner's control over the gift.

Four movements to keep watching

- **The request (vv. 29-30):** Boldness to speak, with healing and signs in Jesus' name.
- **The answer (v. 31):** The place is shaken; the company is filled with the Holy Ghost and speaks boldly.
- **The shared life (vv. 32-35):** United believers, powerful resurrection testimony, and distribution according to need.
- **The named example (vv. 36-37):** Barnabas sells land and entrusts the proceeds to the apostles.

A simple right-division reminder: This is still the Twelve's Jerusalem witness in Israel's prophetic kingdom setting. Jesus' instructions to the little flock help explain their conduct. Courage, generosity, and care for the needy remain instructive today; the particular signs and property arrangements must be understood in their stated setting. Paul's later instructions provide direct guidance for the Body of Christ.

Acts 4:29

*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings:
and grant unto thy servants, that with all
boldness they may speak thy word,*

What does the passage say?

- **"And now"** turns from creation and prophecy to the assembly's present request.
- **"Behold their threatenings"** entrusts the danger to God's attention rather than prescribing how he must punish the rulers.
- They call themselves **"thy servants,"** placing their identity under the sovereign Lord addressed in verse 24.
- Their primary request is not safety but **"all boldness"** to continue speaking God's word.
- The prayer directly answers the command not to speak

in Jesus' name.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Isaiah 37:17** - Hezekiah asks the LORD to hear and see the words of the threatening enemy.
- **Acts 4:13** - The council had already observed Peter and John's boldness.
- **Ephesians 6:18-20** - Paul later asks prayer that he may speak the gospel boldly even as an ambassador in bonds.

Words to notice

- **"Boldness"** is the same open confidence noted by the rulers in verse 13 and produced in verse 31.
- **"Behold"** asks God to take notice and act according to his wisdom; it is not information God lacked.

Do not miss

- Courage is requested, not assumed to be a permanent

personal trait.

- Do not make this prayer a promise that threats will dis-

appear. The requested answer is faithful speech in their presence.

Acts 4:30

*By stretching forth thine hand to heal;
and that signs and wonders may be done
by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*

What does the passage say?

- The assembly asks God to accompany bold speech with his own outstretched power.
- **“To heal”** connects the prayer with the public sign that occasioned the arrest.
- **“Signs and wonders”** are evidential works that authenticate the witness being proclaimed in Jerusalem.
- **“By the name”** again locates power and authority in Jesus rather than in the apostles themselves.
- Jesus is again called God’s **“holy child,”** the consecrated One opposed by the rulers.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 2:43** - Wonders and signs were done by the apos-

ties.

- **Acts 3:6, 12, 16** - The lame man was healed in Jesus’ name, not by Peter’s personal power or holiness.
- **Acts 5:12-16** - The prayer is answered as many signs and wonders are done by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Words to notice

- KJV **“child”** again renders *pais*, which can also emphasize God’s servant.
- The syntax joins the signs to God’s hand and Jesus’ name, maintaining both divine action and Christ’s authority.

Do not miss

- The prayer for signs belongs to the apostolic Jerusalem witness and is answered through the apostles in the following chapter.
- Do not detach the signs from the message, audience, and authorized witnesses Luke identifies.

Acts 4:31

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

What does the passage say?

- **“When they had prayed”** presents an immediate divine response.
- **“The place was shaken”** is a physical sign of God’s presence and power; Luke does not say the believers manufactured an emotional atmosphere.
- **“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost”** extends enablement for witness beyond Peter alone.
- **“They spake the word of God with boldness”** directly fulfills the central request of verse 29.
- The answer gives courage amid continuing opposition rather than removing all hostile authorities.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 2:1-4** - The gathered disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke as he gave utterance.
- **Acts 4:8** - Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost for his answer to the rulers.
- **Acts 16:25-26** - Another prayer setting in Acts is accompanied by a divinely caused earthquake.

Words to notice

- The repeated filling should not be confused with a second Pentecost or a second reception of the Spirit. It is fresh enablement for speech.
- **“Boldness”** completes the chapter’s threefold emphasis in verses 13, 29, and 31.

Do not miss

- The clearest answer to the prayer is not the shaking but the speaking. God’s servants do what the rulers forbade.
- Do not make a shaken building the necessary evidence of every Spirit-filled prayer meeting.

Acts 4:32

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

What does the passage say?

- **“The multitude of them that believed”** recalls the rapid growth of verse 4 while emphasizing unity within a large company.
- **“One heart and of one soul”** describes shared purpose, affection, and life rather than the erasure of personal identity.
- Believers refused to treat possessions as resources reserved only for private benefit.
- **“They had all things common”** continues the Jerusalem practice introduced in Acts 2:44-45.
- The arrangement is described as a willing expression of unity, not as confiscation imposed by civil government.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Deuteronomy 15:4-11** - Israel’s law anticipates care for the poor and the ideal that there be no poor among the covenant people.
- **Acts 2:44-45** - The earlier Jerusalem company sold possessions and distributed according to need.
- **Acts 5:4** - Peter’s words to Ananias confirm that property and sale proceeds remained under the owner’s control before they were given.

Words to notice

- KJV **“ought”** here means anything, not obligation.
- **“Common”** means shared or available for common use; the text does not say personal stewardship ceased to exist in every respect.

Do not miss

- The property practice reflects kingdom-oriented unity and confidence in the apostolic program at Jerusalem.
- Do not label the arrangement either modern state communism or ordinary capitalism. Luke describes voluntary sharing administered by the apostles within a particular believing community.

Acts 4:33

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

What does the passage say?

- **“With great power”** describes effective, divinely enabled apostolic testimony.
- **“The apostles”** are the authorized resurrection witnesses chosen and commissioned by Christ.
- The central witnessed claim remains **“the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”**
- **“Great grace was upon them all”** describes God’s abundant favor resting upon the whole believing company.
- Verse 33 stands between the statement of unity and the statement that none lacked, joining witness and communal life.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 1:8, 21-22** - The apostles receive power and bear qualified witness to the resurrection.
- **Acts 2:32; 3:15** - Peter repeatedly says the apostles are witnesses that God raised Jesus.
- **Acts 6:8** - Stephen later ministers with faith, power, wonders, and signs.

Words to notice

- **“Gave ... witness”** means they continued rendering testimony, not that they transferred a possession called witness.
- **“Grace”** should retain its broad sense of divine favor here; the verse does not by itself announce Paul’s later dispensational ministry.

Do not miss

- Luke keeps resurrection proclamation at the center even while describing generosity and social care.
- Do not use the word **“grace”** alone to relocate Acts 4 into the later mystery program. The actors, message, signs, and setting remain those of the Jerusalem apostles.

Acts 4:34

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

What does the passage say?

- **“Neither was there any ... that lacked”** states the practical result of the believers’ unity and generosity.
- The wording recalls the covenant ideal of Deuteronomy 15:4 that no poor person should remain among Israel when God’s commands are obeyed.
- Owners of lands or houses sold property as needs arose.
- **“Brought the prices”** means they brought the sale proceeds for apostolic administration.
- The verse describes those who acted in this way without stating that every believer sold every residence immediately.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Deuteronomy 15:4-8** - Israel was commanded to open the hand so that the needy brother did not remain destitute.
- **Luke 12:32-34** - Jesus tells the little flock to sell possessions, give alms, and seek the kingdom treasure.
- **Acts 2:45** - Believers sold possessions and goods and distributed them as every man had need.

Words to notice

- **“As many as were possessors”** identifies a class of property owners participating in the practice; it need not mean every sale occurred on one day.
- **“Prices”** means the sums received, not the asking prices or property valuations.

Do not miss

- Generosity is measured by the elimination of genuine lack, not by a performance of poverty for its own sake.
- Do not impose this historical arrangement as a universal salvation requirement. Acts 5:4 will confirm the voluntary control involved.

Acts 4:35

And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

What does the passage say?

- **“At the apostles’ feet”** signifies submission of the funds to their recognized authority and administration.
- The apostles initially oversee both doctrinal witness and material distribution within the Jerusalem company.
- **“Unto every man”** describes individual care within the multitude.
- **“According as he had need”** makes actual need, not equal payment or social status, the basis of distribution.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 2:45** - Distribution had already been made according to each person’s need.

- **Acts 5:1-2** - Ananias and Sapphira imitate the outward act of laying proceeds at the apostles’ feet while lying about the amount.
- **Acts 6:1-4** - Growth later requires delegated oversight of the daily ministration so the apostles can prioritize prayer and the word.

Words to notice

- **“Distribution was made”** is passive, focusing upon the orderly result rather than naming every administrator involved.
- **“Need”** refers to lack or necessity, not every desire.

Do not miss

- Spiritual unity produces accountable material care under recognized leadership.
- Do not idealize the administration as incapable of practical strain; Acts 6 records a genuine complaint that requires structural attention.

Acts 4:36

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

What does the passage say?

- Luke moves from the general practice to a named positive example.
- **“Joses”** is his personal name in the KJV text; the apostles give him the surname **Barnabas**.
- **“The son of consolation”** characterizes him as an encourager or one associated with strengthening others.
- **“A Levite”** places him within Israel’s priestly tribe, though Luke does not say he served as a priest.
- **“Of the country of Cyprus”** identifies him with the large island in the eastern Mediterranean and prepares for his later ministry beyond Jerusalem.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 9:26-27** - Barnabas receives Saul when other Jerusalem disciples fear him and brings him to the apos-

ties.

- **Acts 11:22-26** - Barnabas encourages the believers at Antioch and brings Saul there to teach.
- **Acts 13:1-4** - Barnabas and Saul are sent from Antioch by the Holy Ghost for a later work.

Words to notice

- The Textus Receptus reads **“Joses,”** followed by the KJV. The principal critical text reads **“Joseph,”** explaining the form in many modern versions.
- **“Consolation”** may include encouragement, exhortation, comfort, or strengthening according to context.

Do not miss

- Barnabas is introduced first through generous service, not public prominence. His later ministry fits the character named here.
- Numbers 18:20-24 concerns the Levites’ tribal inheritance; it does not settle every question of individual property ownership. Leviticus 25:32-34 recognizes Levites’ houses and regulates their sale. Luke does not locate Barnabas’ land, so his Cypriot origin should not be treated as proof that the land was in Cyprus.

Acts 4:37

Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

What does the passage say?

- Barnabas owns a piece of land and willingly sells it.
- **“Brought the money”** indicates that the transaction was completed and the proceeds delivered.
- **“Laid it at the apostles’ feet”** places his gift under apostolic authority for distribution according to need.
- Luke’s concise description presents Barnabas as a concrete example of the unity and generosity described in verses 32-35.
- His transparent act prepares a deliberate contrast with Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5.

Cross-references worth marking

- **Acts 4:34-35** - Barnabas personally exemplifies the property sales and distribution just described.

- **Acts 5:1-4** - Ananias brings only part while pretending otherwise; Peter says the property and money had remained under his authority.
- **2 Corinthians 8:12** - Paul later teaches that a willing gift is accepted according to what a person has, not what he lacks.

Words to notice

- The Greek refers simply to a field or piece of land; the location and value are not stated.
- The verse does not say Barnabas gave under compulsion or gained a saving status by the sale.

Do not miss

- Genuine generosity is truthful, willing, and entrusted for the good of others.
- Do not end the chapter with an abstract economic system. Luke ends with a person whose character and service will matter throughout Acts.

Text And Translation Helps

- **Servants (v. 29) and holy child (v. 30):** The believers call themselves God's servants using *doulos*, the word for a servant or bondservant. Jesus is called *pais*, which can mean child or servant. The KJV's "holy child Jesus" describes the consecrated Jesus through whose name the signs occur; He is not being described as an infant.
- **Filled (v. 31):** Luke has already recorded filling in Acts 2:4 and 4:8. This passage describes renewed enablement for witness; it does not say the company has just received the Spirit for the first time.
- **Ought (v. 32):** Anything. Read the sentence as "anything of the things which he possessed." The word does not express an obligation here.
- **Prices (v. 34):** The money received from the sales. The proceeds are brought and distributed; an estimated property value is not being donated.
- **Joses / Joseph (v. 36):** The Textus Receptus and KJV read Joses; the SBL Greek New Testament reads Joseph. Both identify the man whom the apostles named Barnabas. Compare the [Greek texts of Acts 4:36](#).
- **Consolation (v. 36):** Comfort or encouragement. Luke supplies the meaning of Barnabas's name, and his later actions illustrate that character.

Common Ideas To Test

- **"Real faith always asks God to remove the danger."** These believers ask Him to behold the threats and give boldness. The answer equips them to speak while the opposition remains. Paul similarly requests boldness in Ephesians 6:18-20.
- **"Every Spirit-filled gathering must shake the building."** Luke records a particular answer to this prayer. The explicit result is bold speech; the account supplies no command to reproduce a physical shaking.
- **"Great grace means Paul's distinctive ministry has begun."** Grace means favor and must be read in context. Here the Jerusalem apostles bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus. The word alone does not establish a change of dispensation.
- **"The believers abolished property ownership by force."** Acts 5:4 says Ananias retained control of his land and its sale proceeds. The sharing is willing and administered by the apostles, with actual need governing distribution.
- **"Every Christian must sell everything to be saved."** This passage describes the Jerusalem company's conduct, not a universal salvation condition. For giving in Paul's ministry, compare 2 Corinthians 8:12-14 and 9:7: willingness, provision for others, and giving without compulsion.
- **"This is just an ordinary charitable collection."** Luke's account belongs with the kingdom expectations and Jesus' instructions in Luke 12:32-34. Willing giving does not remove that setting. For example, a believer can willingly carry out an instruction; voluntary action and obedience are compatible.
- **"Barnabas proves generosity guarantees perfect conduct later."** His gift is a genuine positive example. Galatians 2:13 will nevertheless record his participation in dissimulation. Follow the whole account of a person rather than turning one good act into a claim of infallibility.

Session Summary

- The company requests boldness and divine confirmation of the witness in Jesus' name.
- God answers with Spirit-filled speech; the rulers' prohibition does not silence His word.
- The apostles' resurrection testimony remains central within the united company.
- Property proceeds are entrusted to the apostles and distributed according to need.
- Barnabas supplies a named example of generosity, preparing the contrast with Ananias and Sapphira.

For Long-Term Study

Mark these themes as Acts unfolds

- Threats, prayer, and boldness: Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-29; 13:46.
- Apostolic signs and the message they confirm: Acts 3:6-16; 4:30; 5:12-16.
- Material care and its administration: Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 5:1-4; 6:1-4.
- Barnabas's developing role: Acts 9:26-27; 11:22-26; 13:1-4; 15:36-39.

Questions to keep asking

1. How does the request in verse 29 answer the council's command in verse 18?
2. Which words in verse 31 directly answer the prayer?
3. Why does Luke place resurrection testimony between descriptions of unity and material provision?

4. What distinguishes distribution according to need from equal payments to everyone?
5. What does Acts 5:4 establish about ownership and willing giving?
6. How does Luke 12:32-34 illuminate the Jerusalem practice, and how does 2 Corinthians 9:7 instruct believers in Paul's ministry?
7. What does Luke tell us about Barnabas, and what details about his land remain unstated?

One sentence to remember

The Jerusalem company answers threats with prayer, receives boldness for witness, and expresses its unity through willing provision for those in need.

Teaching text: [Acts 4:29-37, King James Version](#).