

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Fortieth Week - Seventh Day

SHARING ALL THINGS

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:32-35).

Before the day of Pentecost there were at least 120 disciples at Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 were added to the church. Also many of those who "heard the word" after the miracle at the Beautiful Gate believed, the number being about 5,000. This makes a total of 8,120 souls; but besides these we are told that the Lord had "daily added to the church such as should be saved." We may, therefore, safely conclude that the church at Jerusalem comprised even now not fewer than ten thousand members. This was the primitive church, and it is deeply interesting to inquire into its state and examine the principles by which it was animated. The record before us affords some interesting materials for such an inquiry.

From this record it appears that the lives and manners of the new converts assumed a character in perfect conformity with the first principles of the religion into which they had been led--that of *charity*, the love of mankind founded on the love of God through Christ. We behold nothing but that happy community of sentiment which is the ornament and perfection of the Christian church. They had been saved from the entanglements and dangers of a perverse generation and gathered themselves closely around the apostles and early disciples of Jesus--this Jesus whom they now recognized as their Lord and their Redeemer. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine--hearing the way of salvation; in fellowship--manifesting the proper fruits of the Spirit; in the breaking of bread--an unrestrained hospitality; and in prayers--presenting their united petitions to their Heavenly Father through Him alone who makes prayer acceptable, and who had promised that whatever they should ask the Father in his name He would bestow.

We are next informed that they who "believed were together, and had all things common." This statement cannot mean that they assembled together in one place and at one time, for their number was too large for such a meeting. Nor can it mean that they gave up all interest in the

property they possessed, for we soon afterward find that some sold such possessions as they had in order that the proceeds might be disbursed to relieve the needs of the poorer brethren, which they could not have done had they literally had *all things* common before.

Now it is certain that in the time of our Savior the apostles held their money in a common fund, Judas being their treasurer. They regarded themselves as a family having common needs, so that there was no use or reason in their possessing property by themselves. Yet even then the apostles themselves did not relinquish all their private property. The Galilean fishermen did not sell their most valuable possessions, their boats, for we find them engaged in fishing even after our Lord's resurrection. It appears also that John retained some property, thus enabling him to offer a home to the mother of Jesus.

It is clear, therefore, that Jesus did not command the apostles to give up their property into a common fund, and it is equally clear that the apostles themselves did not require it either; for we shall presently hear Peter asking one who had dealt perversely in this matter, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power?" Hence, it was an entirely voluntary act of brotherly love and self-sacrifice prompted by the pressing needs of the infant church, and as such it did not exist afterward. On the contrary, the practice then laid down was that everyone should lay aside week-by-week some portion of his earnings for the poorer brethren, "as the Lord had prospered him." We read of such collections among the churches in Asia Minor and Greece, and Paul himself was greatly involved in this activity.

This constant remembrance of the Christians in Judea by those in foreign parts points to some peculiar cause of destitution that did not exist elsewhere in the same degree. It is not difficult to find this cause. The converts in Judea "suffered the loss of all things" by the mere fact of their allegiance to Christ. They were dismissed from their employments as workmen and servants, suffered losses as traders, and were cut off from Jewish charities. This produced a state of destitution that rendered extraordinary exertions necessary on the part of their more prosperous brethren; and how nobly they responded to the demands of this great emergency is shown in the record before us.

It is a picture of cheerful and happy unanimity prevailing in the infant church, and it raises a sigh for that day when we may behold one like it again: "*Now the multitude of those who believed were of **one heart and one soul**; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own.*" They possessed as not possessing, regarding all as held in trust for the Lord's service--and being always ready for any claims which that service might make.