

Acts 4:29-5:16, Answers to Prayer
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A. Overview

1. We sometimes think that answers to prayer should come like hamburgers at MacDonalds: place your order and over the counter it comes, nicely bagged, complete with fries and a shake.
2. Corrections to this vision
 - a) Prayer is at least as much praise as request (as we saw last time).
 - b) God's answers to our requests often are indirect, delayed, and involve things we would never have anticipated. (this week's study)
3. Outline:
 - a) 4:29-30, The believers make several requests:
 - 1) oversight of persecution;
 - 2) boldness in their preaching;
 - 3) signs, wonders, and healings.
 - b) 4:31 One request is answered (for boldness).
 - c) 5:12-16, Another request is answered (signs, wonders, and healings).
 - d) 4:32-5:11, In between, other things happen too.

B. 4:29-30, The Requests

Knowing that they have such a powerful despot, and having submitted themselves willingly under his rule, they now bring requests appropriate to one with such power as they have just described. Three requests:

1. 29a, "Behold their threatenings." Not inviting God just to be aware of them, but to "supervise them" and keep them under control. We will see the effect of God's supervision in the following chapters.
2. 29b, "Give us boldness to speak." They will not be silenced; nor can they rely on their own boldness, in itself no greater than ours. They need "the spirit of ... power," 2 Tim. 1:7, which they already experienced in ch. 2.
3. 30, "While you stretch out your hand for healing and for the performance of signs and wonders." AV sees this as the MEANS of their boldness, but then how can we be bold if God doesn't do miracles? Better understood as what God will do WHILE they are boldly speaking. Having seen the impact of the healing of the lame man and the miracles of pentecost, coupled with preaching, they ask that this coupling might continue. NB: Emphasis here on *public* wonders.

The clue to this passage is that God begins to answer their requests, but does not do so all at once. Boldness comes right away; we don't see the signs, wonders, and healings until 5:12; and interesting things happen in between.

C. **4:31-35, God Begins to Answer Prayer**

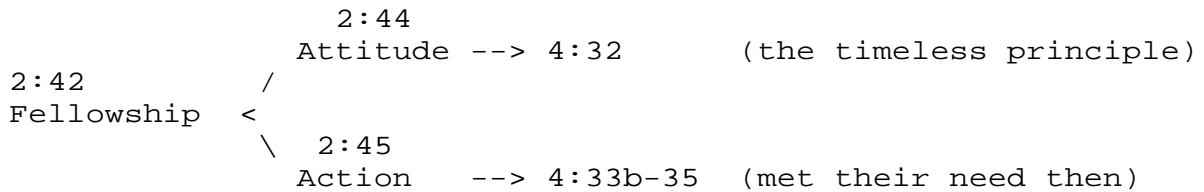
Luke begins with an answer to one of their requests, but then shifts to an unexpected subject, the community of goods in the church. Note the transition:

1. 31, Bold Speech
2. 32, Common Goods (cf. 2:42-45).
3. 33a, Back to boldness of speech! Luke wants us to understand clearly that this request has been granted.
4. 33b-35, Back again to Common Goods! Twice Luke sets us up to expect some information about the other requests; twice he takes us on what appears to be a detour.

In fact, we will come back to the requests in 5:12. But the digression is critical. Their prayer was focussed entirely on their outward ministry, which 33a describes as "great boldness." But they also need "great grace," 33b, consisting of two essential inward characteristics of a healthy church, without which the outreach will be of little value. Superficially, these characteristics are often seen as mutually contradictory. Luke has so skilfully blended them that we recognize them as inseparable. They are our love for one another, and our fear of impurity.

D. **4:32-37, The Church's Inner Love**

Three paragraphs successively amplify the community of goods through which the early believers showed their love for one another. The first two speak in generalities, and amplify the pattern already laid down in 2:42, 44-45.



The third paragraph gives a specific example of this action.

1. 32, Their Attitude.

Like 2:44, this verse displays two aspects of their attitude: their oneness in general, and the attitude that gave them toward material things.

- a) The general oneness of the believers. Recall that our Lord prayed for this as a sign to the world, John 17:20-23. The believers here are concerned for bold speech and flashy signs; they need to display deep love as well.
 - 1) 2:44, they were "together." It's not for nothing that the church in the NT is called an "assembly."
 - 2) 4:32, "one heart and one soul."
 - 3) Often, "one mind," *homoqumadon*.
- b) Their attitude toward material things. Both 2:44 and here we read that they had all things common. Here we see that attitude explained: no one took the attitude that anything he

had was his own. This ought to be our attitude today as well.

2. 33b-35, Their Action.

2:45 reported the sale and distribution of property. Here we see the mechanism: done via the apostles.

Should we do this today? Two things to observe:

- a) Not a universal NT custom. 1 Cor. 16:1 shows that in Corinth, believers did not maintain a public treasury, but managed their stewardship individually.
- b) Having apostles to guide in the distribution would seem to be an important protection against obvious abuses.

We need to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading as to *how* we demonstrate our oneness in material things. But there is no excuse for ignoring the underlying responsibility of being one with each other and holding our property, not as private wealth, but with a view to stewarding it for the Lord. We do not truly love one another if we are not ready to put our money where our mouth is. Cf. James 2:15,16.

3. 36-37, The Example of Barnabas

Here we see an example of the operation of this practical expression of love in the church. Luke gives us a long description of this individual, who will play an important role later in Acts. Note:

- a) His nickname, "Son of consolation/encouragement." His money is not the only way he showed his love for other believers. Just as it is wrong to think we can love others but selfishly hold our money close, it is also wrong to think that lavish gifts can substitute for a cold heart.

Corresponds to 2:44; 4:32.

- b) His tribe: a Levite. What a contrast between his behavior and that of others with links to the temple! Under the law, he was entitled to *receive* gifts from the people. As a believer, he seeks to *give* gifts.
- c) His family (better than "country") was from Cyprus. As a result of the dispersions of the captivities, many Jews lived out of Palestine. Was he one who was saved while visiting Jerusalem at Pentecost, and now stays on? The point of this description seems to be that though his deepest roots are not here, yet he devotes his goods to his Christian brethren. The spiritual relation is thus stronger than the physical one.

The love of believers for one another, as manifested in their material sharing, is one essential element of the "great grace" that God gave them, an inner quality needed for their outward testimony. There is another, as we see in the next episode.

E. 5:1-11, The Church's Inner Purity

Barnabas' example no doubt excited great admiration among the believers, and one couple in particular was so eager to receive the same stature that they were led into deception. Their story has two paragraphs, each describing a lie, an apostolic rebuke, God's judgment on the sinner, and the effect on the church.

1. 1-6, Ananias

- a) 1-2, The Lie is very casual. Ananias seems to say nothing, but by his actions leads those in the church to think that he is being as generous as Barnabas, when in fact he has kept back some of the price.
- b) 3-4, The Rebuke: Peter makes several important points here.
 - 1) Ananias was under no moral obligation to sell his property and give the money to the common fund. Recall the distinction above between Attitude and Action.
 - 2) Ananias no doubt thought he was trying to fool the church; Peter points out that he is really deceiving the Holy Spirit. Extend this to other sins as well. When we sin against the church, we sin against the Lord of the church, and in the eyes of his Spirit who indwells us.
 - 3) Note in passing how Peter equates the Holy Spirit (v.3) with God (v.4). This text is one of the classical proof-texts for the deity of the Holy Spirit.
- c) 5a, 6: The Judgment: instant death. Burial followed immediately, to avoid disease from decomposition in the heat. Done so suddenly that his wife didn't even know that he had died.

We do not generally see God's judgment as dramatically today, but one has known of cases of physical illness and death that seem to be related to clear sin against the Lord.

- d) 5b, The Fear: no contradiction between this and the love of the previous chapter. When we really see God in his holiness and ourselves in our sin, there must be some degree of fear, as well as gratitude for the deliverance we have in Christ.

It is terrifying to think how a deed outwardly good can merit God's judgment because of the hypocrisy of the heart! How carefully we must search our own hearts before the Lord. It is wrong not to do good; it is also wrong to do it for the wrong reason.

2. Sapphira

- a) 7-8, The Lie. More direct and verbal than Ananias', but confirms Peter's insight.

- b) 9, The Rebuke. Now the sin is described, not as lying to the HS, but as tempting him. A child will sometimes test a parent, to see how much he can get away with. Here, early in the history of the church, a sinful couple tries to see how much they can get away with. The harshness of the response is God's indication that he will not be trifled with.
 - c) 10, The Judgment: immediate death and burial, as with Ananias.
 - d) 11, The Fear. After 2:47, this is the next ref. to *ekklhsia*. God both adds to the church and takes away.
3. The lesson: God's church must be pure if it is to be powerful. Some find Peter here unnecessarily harsh, but recall how Luke builds this episode out of the love gifts of the previous chapter, as though to say to us, "Don't think that love is incompatible with discipline." It is not love to tolerate sin in one another.

Compare the story of Achan in Josh. 7, where a lack of inner purity in the assembly of God's people hindered them in their outward responsibility (in that case, conquering the land). So here, before the request of the church for an outward impact can be granted, God must deal with the impurity in their midst.

With the church confirmed in its inner love and purity, God can now answer the second part of their request, for a dramatic impact on those around them.

F. 5:12-16, God Answers More of the Prayer

The AV has accurately perceived an important clue to the structure of this paragraph. Note the parentheses around 12b-14. In fact, the paragraph is chiasitic, describing the miracles for which the church prayed in ch. 4, the spiritual state of the believers, and the response of unbelievers.

- 1. 12a, 15, The Requested Miracles. v.15 makes no sense after 14. Widespread conversions are not reason for people to bring their sick friends out into the streets. But the signs and wonders of 12a are such a reason, and together 12a and 15 fulfill the request of 4:30.
- 2. 12b, 14, The Life of the Believers: united and growing, marked by oneness with each other and faith in the Lord.
- 3. 13, The Response of Unbelievers. Two points mentioned.
 - a) They did not dare associate themselves with the church. With the news of Ananias and Sapphira fresh in town, they fear to associate hypocritically with believers. How different now, when people will seek social membership in a church even when they do not truly believe!
 - b) They magnified the believers. This is of course inappropriate.

Only the Lord is worthy to be magnified, as the use of the word throughout the NT (except 2 Cor. 10:15) shows. But when we live as the Lord commands us, we will have "a good report of those who are without," 1 Tim. 3:7, and even those who persecute us will be ashamed because of what they know to be true of our lives, 1 Pet. 3:16. Not knowing the Lord, unbelievers can only magnify us.

Summary

1. Heaven is not a hamburger stand, and prayer is not ordering something and expecting to get it right away. God will work his glory through us, but will often take us down paths we do not expect.
2. Our outward impact as a church depends on our inward life. We must be marked by sharing love and holy purity. This is the means the Lord has ordained to attract others to himself.

Psalm: 133, "Behold How Pleasant And How Good"

Analysis

A. 4:29-30, The Request

1. 29 kai\ ta\ nu^ⁿ, ku/rie, e)/pide e)pi\ ta\s a)peila\s au)tw^ⁿ,
2. kai\ do\s toi^^s dou/lois sou meta\ parrhsi/as pa/shs lalei^ⁿ to\n lo/gon sou,
3. 30 e)n tw^[|]
 - a) th\n xei^^{ra}/ [sou] e)ktei/nein se
 - 1) ei)s i)/asin
 - 2) kai\ shmei^^a kai\ te/rata gi/nesqai
 - a> dia\ tou^ o)no/matos tou^ a(gi/ou paido/s sou)Ihsou^.

B. 4:31-35, Great Power and Great Grace

Alternating transition, ABAB, A = boldness (first half of the answer to the prayer, second half in 5:12ff), B = something new. (Alternatively, Meyer sees 33a as internal teaching in the church.) Function of interrupting the answer in this way:

1. Commonality of Goods (through ch. 5), amplifying 2:42,44,45
2. Relation to the principle of answered prayer. Was this the kind of "signs and wonders" for which they were asking? Something new in the experience of the church--not only persecution without, but impurity within.
3. Relation of their love for one another within to their testimony without (v.33).

Analysis:

1. 4:31, Bold Speech

- a) 31 kai\ dehqe/ntwn au)tw^ⁿ e)saleu/qh o(to/pos e)n w(^| h)^^{san} sunhgme/noi,
- b) kai\ e)plh/sqhsan a(/pantes tou^ a(gi/ou pneu/matos,
- c) kai\ e)la/loun to\n lo/gon tou^ qeou^ meta\ parrhsi/as.

2. 4:32, Common Goods

- a) 4:32 Tou^ de\ plh/qous tw^n pisteusa/ntwn h)^n kardi/a kai\ yuxh\ mi/a,
- b) kai\ ou)de\ ei(^s ti tw^n u(parxo/ntwn au)tw^| e)/legen i)/dion ei)^nai,
- c) a)ll' h)^n au)toi^s a(/panta koina/.

3. 4:33a, Bold Speech

kai\ duna/mei mega/lh| a)pedi/doun to\ martu/rion oi(a)po/stoloi th^s a)nasta/sews tou^ kuri/ou)Ihsou^,

Does this imply miracles (so Bruce?) In the plural, *dunamis* is often used to indicate miracles; but the singular also includes our inner strength, given by the Spirit. Better to see miracles as one among many possible manifestations of the power that all believers have through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). (cf. Rackham)

Cf. 1 Thess. 1:5; Acts 1:8; 6:8 (linked with miracles); 10:38 ("), Rom. 15:13 (yields hope), 15:19 (miracles), 1 Cor. 1:18 (preaching of the cross), 1 Cor. 2:4,5 (power of Paul's preaching), 2 Cor. 6:7, 12:9, Eph. 1:19 (raised and seated with Christ in heavenly places), 3:7 (manifested by salvation), 3:16 (result of the Spirit's internal work), Col. 1:11 (yields patience and longsuffering with joyfulness), 2 Tim. 1:7, 8 (enables us to bear suffering), 3:5 (form vs. power of godliness), REv. 3:8 (strength)

4. 4:33b-35, Common Goods

- a) xa/ris te mega/lh h)^n e)pi\ pa/ntas au)tou/s.
- b) 34 ou)de\ ga\r e)ndeh/s tis h)^n e)n au)toi^s:
- c) o(/soi ga\r kth/tores xwri/wn h)\ oi)kiw^n u(ph^rxon, pwlou^ntes e)/feron ta\s tima\s tw^n pipraskome/nwn
- d) 35 kai\ e)ti/qoun para\ tou\s po/das tw^n a)posto/lwn:
- e) diedi/deto de\ e(ka/stw| kaqo/ti a)/n tis xrei/an ei)^xen.

C. 4:36-5:11, Amplification of the Common Goods

1. 4:36-37, Barnabas:

- a) 36)Iwsh\ f de\
 - 1) o(e)piklhqei\s Barnaba^s a)po\ tw^n a)posto/lwn, o(/ e)stin meqermhneuo/menon ui(o\s parakh/sews,
 - 2) Leui/th's,
 - 3) Ku/prios tw^| ge/nei,
 - 4) 37 u(pa/rxontos au)tw^| a)grou^
 - 5) pwlh/sas
 - h)/negken to\ xrh^ma
- b) kai\ e)/qhken pro\s tou\s po/das tw^n a)posto/lwn.

2. 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira

a) Ananias

1) The Lie

- a> 5:1)Anh\r de/ tis (Anani/as o)no/mati su\n Sapfi/rh| th^| gunaiki\ au)tou^ e)pw/lhsen kth^ma
- b> 2 kai\ e)nosfi/sato a)po\ th^s timh^s, suneidui/hs kai\

- th^s gunaiko/s,
c> kai\ e)ne/gkas me/ros ti para\ tou\s po/das tw^na)posto/lwn e)/qhken.
- 2) The Rebuke: quote p
a> quote f: 3 ei)^pen de\ o(Pe/tros,
b> quote:
1> (Anani/a,
2> dia\ ti/ e)plh/rwsen o(Satana^s th\n kardi/an sou yeu/sasqai/ se to\ pneu^ma to\ a(/gion kai\ nosfi/sasqai a)po\ th^s timh^s tou^ xwri/ou;
3> 4 ou)xi\ me/non soi\ e)/menen
4> kai\ prage\n e)n th^| sh^| e)cousi/a| u(ph^rxen;
5> ti/ o(/ti e)/qou e)n th^| kardi/a| sou to\ pra^gma tou^to;
6> ou)k e)yeu/sw a)nqrw/pois a)lla\ tw^| qew^|.
- 3) The Judgment: 5 a)kou/wn de\ o((Anani/as tou\s lo/gous tou/tous pesw\n e)ce/yucen:
- 4) The Fear: kai\ e)ge/neto fo/bos me/gas e)pi\ pa/ntas tou\s a)kou/ontas.
- 5) The Burial
a> 6 a)nasta/ntes de\ oi(new/teroi sune/steilan au)to\n
b> kai\ e)cene/gkantes e)/qayan.
- b) Sapphira
1) The Lie
a> 7)Ege/neto de\ w(s w(rw^na triw^na dia/sthma kai\ h(gunh\ au)tou^ mh\ ei)dui^a to\ gegono\s ei)sh^lqen.
- 2) The Lie and the Rebuke. interchange p
a> quote p
1> quote f: 8 a)pekri/qh de\ pro\s au)th\n Pe/tros,
2> Ei)pe/ moi, ei) tosou/tou to\ xwri/on a)pe/dosqe;
b> h(de\ ei)^pen, Nai/, tosou/tou.
c> quote p
1> quote f: 9 o(de\ Pe/tros pro\s au)th/n,
2> quote:
a: Ti/ o(/ti sunefwnh/qh u(mi^na peira/sai to\ pneu^ma kuri/ou;
b: i)dou\ oi(po/des tw^na qaya/ntwn to\n a)/ndra sou e)pi\ th^| qu/ra|
c: kai\ e)coi/sousi/n se.
- 3) The Judgment
a> 10 e)/pesen de\ paraxrh^ma pro\s tou\s po/das au)tou^
b> kai\ e)ce/yucen:
- 4) The Burial
a> ei)selqo/ntes de\ oi(neani/skoi eu(^ron au)th\n nekra/n,
b> kai\ e)cene/gkantes e)/qayan pro\s to\n a)/ndra au)th^s.
- 5) The Fear
11 kai\ e)ge/neto fo/bos me/gas e)f' o(/lhn th\n e)kklhsi/an kai\ e)pi\ pa/ntas tou\s a)kou/ontas tau^ta.
After 2:47, this is the next ref. to *ekklhsia*. God both adds to the church and takes away.

D. 5:12-16, Second Half of the Answer to Prayer

12b-14, cf. 2:46-47. Overall, chiastic:

1. Apostolic miracles: the requested signs and wonders
12 Dia\ de\ tw^n xeirw^n tw^n a)posto/lwn e)gi/neto shmei^a kai\
te/rata polla\ e)n tw^| law^|:
2. Life of the Believers (2:46a):
kai\ h)^san o(moqumado\n a(/pantes e)n th^| Stoa^| Solomw^ntos.

homoqumadon: applied
a) to apostles: 1:14, 2:1
b) to broader company of believers: 2:46
c) unclear: 4:24; 15:25
d) unbelievers: 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29
3. Response of the Unbelievers: contrast p
a) 13 tw^n de\ loipw^n ou)dei\s e)to/lma kolla^sqai au)toi^s,
1) laos: mostly the Israelites in general in Acts, rather than
believers, but cf. 15:14. In general, the "people" are the
ones to whom preaching is done.
2) kollasqai: What Saul tried to do with the disciples (9:26)
or Philip to the chariot (8:29) or Peter to Cornelius
(10:28); response on Mars' Hill (17:34).
b) a)ll' e)mega/lunen au)tou\s o(lao/s:
4. Life of the Believers (2:47b):
14 ma^llon de\ proseti/qento pisteu/ontes tw^| kuri/w| plh/qh
a)ndrw^n te kai\ gunaikw^n,
5. Apostolic miracles: the requested healings
The *wste* does not flow smoothly from v.14, but it would be a
natural continuation of 12a. Perhaps 12b-14 are a parenthesis?
Thus AV punctuation!
a) 15 w(/ste kai\ ei)s ta\s platei/as e)kfe/rein tou\s
a)sgenei^s kai\ tiqe/nai e)pi\ klinari/wn kai\ kraba/ttwn,
i(/na e)rxome/nou Pe/trou ka)\n h(skia\ e)piskia/sh| tini\
au)tw^n.
b) 16 sunh/rxeto de\ kai\ to\ plh^qos tw^n pe/ric po/lewn
)Ierousalh/m, fe/rontes a)sgenei^s kai\ o)xloume/nous u(po\
pneuma/twn a)kaqa/rtwn,
c) oi(/tines e)qerapeu/onto a(/pantes.