

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Open your bible with me to Acts 5

We have been going through the book of Acts and looking at how the Holy Spirit manifested Himself and worked in the early church.

We saw it through the speaking in tongues and the boldness of Peter as he stood before the crowds and the Sanhedrin and preached the gospel to them – with the emphasis on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We saw last week the beginning of persecution as John and Peter were warned about preaching Jesus to the people in Jerusalem.

They were threatened –

And how did they respond to the persecution – they prayed.

Not that God would take away the persecution but that God would give them the strength and boldness to continue to do the work that the church was called to do.

And toward the end of the chapter we saw another response of the early church as they took care of each others need.

So, the early church passed their first test.

In our study this evening, we are going to see a different type of threat to the early church – we are not going to see another threat from the religious rulers -

This threat is going to come from within the church.

And this time, God takes care of the threat Himself.

Let's pray...

Now, from our study last week, you might remember that the one of the things that occurred in the early church was that their relationship with Jesus had radically changed their relationship others.

They responded to the gospel by having a fervent concern for each other.

When there were needs among them, they simply met them as each was able.

They were all one – there was unity.

And that unity was a byproduct of following Jesus.

It was spontaneous, it was sincere and it was completely voluntary.

And the scriptures provided an example of an individual in the Barnabas – as he sold his land and brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles to supply the needs of those in the early church.

[Act 5:1-11 NKJV] 1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

So, chapter five begins with Dr Luke making a contrast from what happened at the end of chapter four (Barnabas) and what Ananias and Sapphira did.

Ananias = "whom Jehovah has graciously given"

Sapphira = "beautiful", or "a sapphire"

It's ironic that outwardly they had such beautiful names, but inwardly they were just the opposite.

2 And he kept back [part] of the proceeds, his wife also being aware [of it], and brought a certain part and laid [it] at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira – they sold a possession – they take a portion for themselves and then they bring the other portion to the apostles.

Now, I want you to notice that nowhere in the scriptures are we told what percentage they kept back.

It could have been 5%, 20%, 50% or 80% -

And the reason that we are not told is because it doesn't matter how much they held back – that is not what's going to get them in trouble.

Let's say for illustration purposes that they sold their land for \$100k and they decided to give the early church \$5k –

It was their land – they were free to give or not give as they pleased.

Anything they gave would be wonderful if it'd been given with a pure motive of just wanting to help the needy.

The problem is that they brought the money to the apostles feet and they made it appear that they had brought all of it for the church.

In other words, they had seen the reaction that Barnabas got when he sold his land and brought the money to the apostle's feet.

Ananias and Sapphira – they wanted that reaction for themselves.

It was an attempt on their part to buy a reputation as generous & caring.

Instead of actually being generous, they tried to buy the appearance of it.

They were hypocrites.

3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back [part] of the price of the land for yourself? 4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Peter wasn't fooled by Ananias' deception.

He was given a Word of Knowledge about his charade & he called him on it.

No one had said Ananias & Sapphira had to sell their plot of ground.

No one compelled or coerced them to give.

Peter provides Ananias with the diagnosis of his problem – he allowed Satan to fill his heart.

Turn with me to the gospel of John 8

[Jhn 8:44 NKJV] 44 "You are of [your] father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [resources], for he is a liar and the father of it.

Jesus said it – The devil is a liar & the father of lies.

Those who walk in deceit, those who practice deception live under the influence of hell.

While we have read repeatedly that the early church was filled with the Holy Spirit – here Ananias and Sapphira are filled with a lying spirit.

Now, this doesn't mean that they were demon possessed – because 1 John 5:18 tells us that a true believer cannot be possessed.

It only means that they allowed themselves to be influenced.

And one of the ways they were influenced was by the envy they had in their hearts.

I want to be recognized – I want the glory.

But instead of repenting of the envy they had, they began to think of what they could do to claim some of the praise that was going to God.

Note how in verse 3, they lied to the Holy Spirit, and at the end of verse 4 - Peter says they lied to God.

That's because the Holy Spirit IS God.

This phrase shows us the deity of the Holy Spirit.

5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell - "On his knees, repented of his hypocrisy, and gave the full amount. All rejoiced & God added another thousand to the Church!"

That's what we expect; but, it's not what happened . . .

5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried [him] out, and buried [him].

First of all, Peter didn't put Ananias to death.

Peter was simply the messenger.

God is the one who pulled the plug on Ananias.

Turn with me to Joshua 7

Because I see many similarities between Ananias here in the book of Acts and an individual who suffered the same fate here in Joshua.

So, in the book of Joshua, the Children of Israel have finally crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the first city they across was the city of Jericho and God had given Joshua the battle plan on how they were to conquer Jericho.

And part of the instructions that the Lord gave to Joshua was that all the spoils of the victory were going to belong to the Lord.

It was the first fruits – so they were all His.

Achan, as the walls some tumbling down – he takes some of the spoils.

And as a result of him taking the spoils, the Children of Israel suffer defeat – and God tells Joshua that the reason they suffered defeat was because there was sin in the camp.

So, we are going to pick it up in verse 19.

The Children of Israel were lined up and Joshua starts excusing tribes and families until there was one left – Achan.

[Jos 7:19-25 NKJV] 19 Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide [it] from me." 20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: 21 "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. 23 And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. 24 Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

Now, what are the similarities –

Jericho was the first battle that the Children of Israel encountered when they came into the Promised Land.

Achan, took away from God's glory by taking something that belonged to Him.

So, God judges Achan and cuts him off so that the rest of the Children of Israel will not be polluted by what he did.

Ananias is cut off here in Acts 5 for the same reason.

He took something that belonged to God (glory) and rather than allow his hypocrisy to pollute the church – God dealt with him directly. God allowed Achan to be killed by the Children of Israel but He took care of Ananias – Himself.

7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

So three hours after Ananias has dropped dead, Sapphira walks in – and she has no idea of what has just happened to her husband.

These were three hours where she could have repented for conspiring with her husband.

These were three hours of grace that were given to her to make the right decision.

8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

I picture Sapphira walking in and there is a pile of cash on the floor and Peter is pointing to it as he asked her the question.

And how did she answer – with a lie.

She said, yes. That is all the money that we sold our land for.

9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband [are] at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying [her] out, buried [her] by her husband.

Sapphira willingly conspired with her husband.

The same charge that Peter made against Ananias, he bring before Sapphira.

To test the Spirit of the Lord is to tempt God.

[Deu 6:16 NKJV] 16 "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted [Him] in Massah.

The idea here is that someone wants to see how far they can get away with something –

That is what Ananias and Sapphira were doing – they were deliberately disobeying God and trying to see how much they could get away with.

So Peter tells Sapphira that the young men who had just carried out her husband three hours earlier – they are back to carry her dead body away and she falls on the floor and dies.

Church - God is holy. He abhors sin in all its many forms.

But one of the most sinister & damaging forms of evil is hypocrisy because it's evil wearing a mask of good.

Hypocrisy not only damns the soul of the hypocrite,

It drags others with it by misrepresenting what's good & right.

Hypocrisy pretends to be good while all the while being bad.

In the end, hypocrisy defames the good & causes the innocent to doubt the reality of Goodness.

Hypocrisy is a dangerous spiritual cancer – And God used radical treatment here by cutting it out.

That is why when we read the gospels – we see example after example of Jesus being stern against the hypocrites.

Jesus was not stern with the woman who was caught in adultery

He was not stern with the Samaritan woman at the well – who had five husbands and a boyfriend on the side.

He was not stern to the tax collector

But to the Pharisees – the ones who pretended to be righteous – Jesus was stern with them.

So then the question becomes if God hates hypocrisy, why don't all hypocrites drop dead? Why just Ananias & Sapphira?

Why don't we have religious frauds dropping all the time at church.

Because the God who's holy & hates hypocrisy is also merciful & gracious & would rather we repent of hypocrisy than face the fierceness of His wrath against it.

If God treated ALL hypocrites the way He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, the Church would be really small.

We can thank God He doesn't deal with all hypocrites like this.

But He DID deal with them this way – Why?

So we'd NOT FORGET that our merciful, gracious God is ALSO HOLY!

11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

In our study last week in Acts 4 – the church was characterized with having great power and great grace – but after the events of the first eleven verse here in chapter 5

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We find the church moved to great fear.

[Heb 12:28-29 NKJV] 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God [is] a consuming fire.

When we truly understand what grace is –

That we are saved only by grace through faith through the work that Jesus did on the cross.

Our response to that grace will be to serve God with reverence and fear.

And that is what happened to the early church –

After hearing about what happened to Ananias and Sapphira -

A new respect for the holiness of God came upon the church.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. 25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. 26 May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

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