

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 5.18.2025

PART 14 - SIN'S SEVERITY

I. INTRODUCTION

Main Point: God cares for and acts to protect the purity of his Church, calling his people to live with honesty, integrity, and holy fear before him.

Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

II. SINFUL ACTIONS

- We have seen the perils to the Church from without as the apostles faced opposition.
- Now we will see perils from within the Church.
- Satan was deploying his strategy to interrupt the progress of the Church.
- The early church was marked by unity, generosity and grace that spurred them to action.
- They had so radically oriented their lives around Christ and his gospel, that they lived truly open-handed lives taking care of one another.
- And forever memorialized in Scripture is this amazing example of gospel-fueled generosity in the actions of Barnabas.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA'S HYPOCRISY

- Notice our passage today begins with the word “but”—the conjunction clues us that a stark contrast is being drawn to the example of Barnabas the Levite.
 - We are introduced to a husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira.
 - At first glance, they are doing exactly what Barnabas did, selling a piece of property that they owned and bringing proceeds to lay at the feet of the apostles.
 - But that is where the similarities between the two of them ends.
 - With his wife’s full knowledge, Ananias kept back some of the proceeds of the sale and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.
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- The implication being that he made it appear as if he was giving 100% of the proceeds.
 - What’s really the problem here?
 - Peter makes it clear that the property was their own to do with whatever they wished, they were not being forced by the apostles to sell their property.
 - And after having sold it, they were not under any obligation or compulsion to give away any or all of the proceeds.
 - So there is definitely more to this than withholding some of the proceeds.
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- Notice the verb Luke uses in v2, translated as “he kept back for himself.”
 - The verb used means to “hold back, refuse to hand over, and steal”
 - The only other time this verb is used in the NT is in Titus 2:10 where Paul instructs bondservants not to steal, so that they may adorn the teaching of God in everything.
 - Which leads us then to assume that before the property was sold, Ananias and Sapphira likely pledged to give to the church the entire proceeds from the sale.
 - The verb is also used in the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, in Joshua 7 of the sin of Achan, who stole some of the devoted things that were to be consecrated to God after the conquest of Jericho.
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- In bringing some and not all that had been committed, they were guilty of theft.
 - They wanted a glowing reputation like that of Barnabas, they wanted to be known for their radical and sacrificial generosity, without actually having to be and do that.
 - Their motives were impure and sinful.
 - We’re not told how but Peter knows that Ananias has lied about the amount, claiming it was the whole and not a part of the proceeds.
 - Peter discerns the fingerprints of Satan behind the sinful and hypocritical actions of Ananias.
 - Satan has an active role in Ananias’s deception.
 - What does it mean that Satan has filled his heart?
 - It suggests that Ananias allowed this evil influence into his heart.
 - He wanted personal glory under false pretenses.
 - Satan tempted him but ultimately Ananias was lured and enticed by his own evil desires. (James 1:14)
 - Ananias is morally culpable and responsible for his sin and yielding to Satanic influence.
 - We cannot forget we have a real enemy who wants to sabotage the Church.
 - We need to be continually on the alert against the schemes of the evil one who seeks to break the unity of our fellowship.
 - Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11)

- We have a real adversary who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” We are encouraged to “be sober-minded and watchful.” (1 Peter 5:8)
- Ananias should have been filled with the Spirit, instead Peter says that, “Satan has filled (his) heart...”, coming under his influence.
- Who is influencing your heart?
- You are always being influenced, either by the Spirit of God, or by the Father of lies and this world system that is under the sway of our enemy.
- Satan destroys through love of money, falsehood and hypocrisy. He tempts those within the church to act in unwise and ungodly ways.
- He tempts people to think that sin is not a big deal.

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Ananias lied "to the Holy Spirit..."
- Peter accused him of theft and deceit.
- The act was against the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is lied to, he is a person, not a thing, not an impersonal force.
- He is God. Peter assumes the deity of the Holy Spirit. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God, as we see in v4, “you have not lied to man but to God.”
- What Ananias and Sapphira did was not just a sinful action directed toward men—it was a direct offense against God himself.
- Rebellion against God’s people is rebellion against God himself.
- 1 Thess 4:6-8 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
- Hypocrisy is destructive to the fellowship of the Church.
- Jesus railed against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who made a show of their giving because they wanted the praise of men. (Matthew 6:1-4)
- We need to be on guard against greed, against wanting the praise of others, against the love of money which is a root of all kinds of evil.
- We need to see that lying is a big deal.
- We need to speak the truth. We are people of the truth.
- Jesus taught that Satan “is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44). There is no truth in him.
- We are most like the devil when we lie.
- When we speak what is false, when we tell "white lies" or half-truths, we are reflecting Satan and not the glory of the One who is the Truth.
- God is truth. He never lies and it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2). That would be contrary to his nature.
- We must speak the truth in love.
- We must be honest and truthful in all of our dealings.
- We cannot be one person in our work life and a different one when we are around Christians.
- We cannot be pretenders, pretending we are more spiritual than we are.
- We can fool others—we cannot fool God. He sees our heart.
- We have to walk in the light as he is in the light.
- Integrity is being whole and undivided. Being the same person whether you are around people or when no one is watching you.
- Integrity is consistency of right behavior, words, thoughts, deeds, and actions.

III. SWIFT JUDGMENT

- Upon hearing Peter's words, Ananias drops dead.
- This is extreme, terrifying, swift judgment that befalls him.
- It reminds us of OT examples of the improper offerings that were presented which resulted in immediate death by the hand of God. (Nadab and Abihu, Lev 10; Korah's rebellion, Numbers 16).
- And it happens not just once but twice in the span of three hours.
- Sapphira comes in unaware of her husband's fate and Peter confronts her.
- Peter gives her an opportunity to come clean but she repeats the lie.
- They had tag-teamed to commit this act of deception and theft and "test the Spirit of the Lord."
- Sapphira had her own moral agency, and is culpable for being complicit with her husband in this act of deceit and hypocrisy.
- Peter pronounces that the same fate will befall her, those who had buried her husband are standing at the door ready to carry her out.
- She immediately fell down dead and was carried out and buried.
- The method of this swift burial in that culture was common for dishonorable deaths.
- The unholy is removed from the holy. Evil is purged from the midst of their camp.
- Why don't we see this kind of swift judgment now?
- Surely in the context of a church community there are people who lie and act hypocritically, why aren't people dropping dead every time we gather?
- This was a unique moment in redemptive history—this was the new temple community and God was acting to purify his newly born church.
- Were Ananias and Sapphira believers? Yes, I think we could assume they were. They were part of the church.
- There is no indication that they were given an opportunity to repent due to the immediacy of the judgment.
- So we could look at this as an act of temporal judgment, not eternal damnation for Ananias and Sapphira.
- But having said that, we cannot leave this passage thinking, God winks at sin.
- We cannot think that one little lie is not deserving of God's wrath and holy justice.
- Sin within the church is no small matter to him.
- God is holy and God is concerned with our personal holiness.
- God is concerned with preserving the purity of his Church.
- Don't mistake God's patience and long-suffering with indifference.
- The truly amazing thing is not that God killed Ananias and Sapphira for conspiring to lie to the Holy Spirit, but that God has not executed his holy justice on all of us.
- The truly amazing thing is that God has shown us grace by sending His Son, who was punished for our sin.

IV. SANCTIFYING FEAR

- I think we are all struck by the severe nature of the judgment but we really should be struck by the severe nature of sin—the severe nature of our own sin.
- All sin is an affront to God.

- *“Every sin is an act of cosmic treason, a futile attempt to dethrone God in His sovereign authority.” - R.C. Sproul*
- We have to look at all of our sin and see it for what it truly is—a personal offense to God deserving of his just wrath.
- What we need is exactly what the outcome was for the church after this terrifying judgment came upon the hypocritical couple.
- “And great fear came upon all who heard of it.” (5)
- “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.” (11)
- This is the first time the word “church” is used in Acts.
- (Gr: *Ekklēsia*) - this is the assembly of the saints, the community of God’s people, God is zealously guarding and purifying his church.
- Great fear came upon all—Why? God is not to be trifled with. He is holy.
- Proverbs reminds us that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 1:7)
- If we don’t stand in reverential awe of God we are fools; we are unwise.
- We should stand in awe and wonder at his holiness, at his blazing purity, his power and might.
- We should fall to our knees and cry out to God to purify our hearts, to cause us to live in the sanctifying fear of the Lord.
- To confess and repent of our sinful hypocrisy, dishonesty, and lack of integrity.
- To renew in us a desire to pursue holiness and purity before God and others.
- To help us to live with holy fear and reverence of him that leads to obedience and awe.
- We need to be reminded of our daily need of the gospel, to apply it to our own hearts.
- The gospel frees us from pretending and living hypocritically, from seeking approval, from performing to be seen by others.
- Christ has freed us from our idolatry of self and idolatry of stuff.
- We have been delivered from the domain of darkness and brought into his kingdom of light.
- We have been freed from the desire to lie and deceive and steal.
- We have been shown immense generosity so that we can live generously.
- Let this story drive you to Christ.
- Let it remind you of just how much you need the gospel of grace.
- Here is the beauty of the gospel message.
- Jesus will purify his church.
- Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
- He loved us and gave himself up for us.
- He died for hypocrites, liars, and pretenders like us.
- And he will see to it that we are presented to him on that Day, in splendor, clean, without spot or wrinkle—pure and holy as He is!

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?

- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?