

## Acts, Sermon #11

Acts 5

The Jerusalem church, the very first church is doing well. They are unified on a central person, witnessing of that person, sacrificially giving and great grace is upon this congregation. However the church is not without its troubles.

In Acts 4, they were persecuted.

Today, pretension from within, that's chapter 5.

I've entitled today's message: "**Beware of Religious Hypocrisy**"

Let us stand for the reading of God's Word

Acts 4:34-5:11

Let us pray

You may be seated.

## “Beware of Religious Hypocrisy”

This is the story of two men, Barnabas and Ananias. God intends for us to compare and contrast these two men.

A large donation to the church was given by these two men. Externally and visibly it looked the same. Yet there was a tremendous contrast between them, visible only to the eyes of God, but soon made apparent to the entire church.

This passage is intended by God to teach us a lesson. What is this lesson? What would you say the lesson is? How would you express it? How would you say it?

It is found in the last phrase of vs. 4 when Peter spoke to Ananias.

Vs. 4e

Those words are the last words Ananias heard. He took those words to his grave and the result of that lesson when fully learned are given to us two times, once at the end of vs. 5 and again in vs. 11.

The lesson caused a healthy fear regarding religious hypocrisy; this alarmed people about the sin of hypocrisy.

But **first**, the Bible showed us a sincere gift and giver.

- Barnabas was singled out of the many who were voluntarily making large contributions to the church.
- What Barnabas did and what others did became the backdrop of what happened in chapter 5.

Sin can take good things and twist them and make the good thing evil, i.e. alcohol, physical intimacy. These large gifts to the church were good yet a couple turned it into evil.

What does that tell us about ourselves? At anytime, anyone can take a good thing and turn it into a sin.

Let me make this real clear. Ananias and Sapphira were not punished because they did not contribute financially. They did give. They were not punished because they did not give everything as Barnabas did.

Vs.4

Voluntary giving – They were gifts from the heart – no one compelled these church people to give and or asked them to give such large gifts.

Peter says to Ananias – Your private possessions were your own private property.

- Even after it was sold, the money was still Ananias'.
- He had complete disposal of the income and it was up to them as to what to do with it.

Vs. 4 – the answer to Peter's questions are yes.

- They could have kept the money.
- They could have given some of it.
- They could have tithed on it, etc.

What exactly did Ananias and Sapphira do?

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was the lie that the partial price they gave to the church was the whole price. That when they gave a part somehow verbally or by their actions, they gave people the idea that they gave all.

This is the impression they gave to the apostles. The sin in the passage is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is lying. Peter calls it just that, lying, hypocrisy, duplicity, deception, insincerity, self righteous, phony, two faced, dissembler, pretender.

What would cause people to do this? Why did they decide to do this? Pride, attention, personal gain, seekers of human glory, we do not know.

II. Notice 2ndly –the steps that led to their sin. They are in the passage.

- The initial source of this was the Devil, vs.3.

- Here is a church filled with the Holy Spirit of God, 4:31, yet still susceptible to the suggestions of Satan.

A wicked spirit can suggest something to a human spirit just as directly as a wicked person can suggest to a Christian. This is recorded for us.

Satan furnished the idea.

This means that not all of a person's thoughts are his own.

How important is it to recognize when something is of the Spirit of God, or when something is satanically suggested?

- How will we know if it is from the Devil?
- It will always have in it, the element of the lie. Satan is the father of what? Lies.

The first time humans encounter Satan in Genesis 3, he used this kind of deceitfulness. The first sin started with a suggestion from Satan.

Yet Peter speaks to Ananias as if it is his fault. Why, why hath Satan filled your heart with this, vs. 3?

As if Ananias could have resisted it. As if he is responsible for the growth and festering of the satanic suggestion.

**1<sup>st</sup> step** – satanic suggestions. The second step is in vs. 4, where Peter said to him, why hast thou conceived this thing?

- Why have you allowed this to be placed on your heart?
- Why have you given birth to this lie in your heart?

So what we have is the initial suggestion or seeds of the wicked one and then it takes conception in the mind of Ananias and then there is according to vs. 9, a marital agreement about it.

Vs. 9a

Ladies, let me ask you something. Is it the will of God that you always obey your husband? The answer is, absolutely not!

Sapphira made a fatal mistake when she agreed together with her husband. Ladies, there is a point to where submission stops and anyone who teaches you otherwise is leading you into error.

You know our church. We strongly emphasize the woman's role, as a woman, wife and mother at home. But when it comes to clear disobedience to the Word of God, to the known will of God, you as a wife cannot enter in to that. You must protest, entreat, pray and weep but you do not partner with rebellion against God.

There was a mutual agreement on their part.

Then there was the sale of the property and the bringing of it in and this pretense that is told us in verses 2 and 3, keeping back a part of the price of the land. Peter uses a word here for embezzle.

They acted as if they gave all, total commitment and it was a lie. Were it not that they were dealing with God, they would have gotten away with it!

Behind the scene, Peter says there were two sins against the Holy Spirit.

1. Vs. 3, they lied to the Holy Spirit. That means when a believer misrepresents his "surrender to God" to the church, it is a misrepresentation to the Spirit of God, to God Himself.

**A lie to the people of God is counted as a lie to God.**

Just like when the world persecutes us, they persecute God. Just like when I extend a cup of water in Christ's name, it's as if I have done it unto Christ. Sin against the church is sin against Christ. It was lying to the Holy Spirit!

We can get away with this sin, sometimes for years. There are people on the mission field, in the pastorate, on church boards or in the pew, play an instrument, teach a S. S. class, but the Holy Spirit knows.

The lie is not just to the church or your family. It is a lie to the Holy Spirit, vs. 3. It is a lie to God, vs. 4, trinity.

The **second** sin was that they had agreed together to test the Spirit of God, vs. 9.

- This was a lie to the Holy Spirit. He knows, so it becomes a test, a challenge, of whether or not the Holy Spirit will deal with it.
- This is what is so heinous about religious hypocrisy. We know that God knows! Be honest with God.

This story takes place on the human level in the church but also on the invisible level. You have two spirits at work, two kingdoms and two personalities.

- You have a dark, sinister, wicked spirit.
- You have a clean, holy, pure spirit, filling the church to witness of Christ boldly, and these two spirits are in conflict.

Barnabas is yielding to one and Ananias is yielding to the other. We are not wrestling with flesh and blood.

When we are tempted to be dishonest about what is going on in our life, tempted to have a secret, hidden side, to have our Friday nights and our Sunday mornings, realize what is going on. There is a war and wrestling going on between two spirits.

God judges this!

It was a judgment without opportunity of repentance; notice the death dealing judgment of God. According to vs. 5, Ananias literally died while Peter was still speaking. BANG! He's gone. God does that sometimes – Uzzah; God smote him for his error and he died by the Ark of God.

Now Sapphira had opportunity, vs. 8.

Peter said, I'm going to ask you a question. Did you sell the land for so much? She had opportunity to tell the truth, to confess, to repent, to be honest with God.

Every once in a while when God deals with someone like this, we are shocked. What should be shocking to us is that any of us are alive.

What is the penalty for sin? What is the penalty when a Christian sins, with premeditation, with presumption?

When we literally run through all the barriers of the Spirit of God, our own conscious, and other believers and still we do it anyhow, what is the penalty for that?

There were sins in the church.

A church filled with the Spirit

A church boldly proclaiming Christ

A church focused on Christ and His mission

A church unified and full of grace.....then these two people

Why did God do this? The reason is given in vs. 5 and vs. 11. So that others may fear and be sincere, be transparent, a healthy fear that should possess us before our God.

God made an example of this couple to the church.

Someone asked, why doesn't God do this anymore? Who's to say that God does not do it? I Cor. 11:30, "Because of your hypocrisy at the Lord's table, many of you are sickly and weak and many will die."

Luke 12:2-3 – Jesus said, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees

*<sup>2</sup>For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. <sup>3</sup>Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*

Is there hypocrisy in my life? Am I pretending to be one thing, but in reality it is a lie?

- Am I portraying something to my wife and kids?
- Am I pretending?
- Are we entirely right with God?

This passage is here to create in us an awe of God and a purity in the church.

Is there any hypocrisy in us?

Religious hypocrisy is dangerous in the church and God proved it to us. Beware!

**Let us stand for closing invitation.**

Every eye closed.

They schemed together, collusion of a couple; they lied and died, pretending to surrender all but were deliberately holding back, faking surrendering all to God.

There is no such thing as secret sins

A believer was influenced by Satan and we saw God's displeasure with sin.

Especially dishonesty and hypocrisy

God is at work in His church. The Holy Spirit is at work in His people.

We need to come clean. We need to be honest as we stand before God.

There is something in us that wants to impress people, causing us to pretend or lie and be something that we are not.

Beware lest we meet the same consequence as Ananias and Sapphira.

God is real. The Holy Spirit of God is at work convicting men of sin and convincing men to trust in the only Savior from our sins.

Jesus Christ crucified, buried and risen again