

Acts 5:1-16 FEFC

Keeping Up With The Barnabas's

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Last week we read about the unity and the generosity of the believers in Jerusalem. This generosity was called the grace of generosity. Spirit breathed generosity is a picture of God's grace that is given lavishly and freely to those who receive Christ.

READ THE TEXT

Acts 5 (NIV)

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.**2** With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. **3** Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?**4** Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. **6** Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. **7** About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the

door, and they will carry you out also.”

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

PREACHING THE TEXT

We are studying chapter 5 this week, however we have to back up and include Chapter 4 verse 36&37 in order to understand the context of this story. Chapter 4 verse 36&37 tells us that Barnabas sold a field and gave it to the apostles to distribute to those who needed financial assistance.

And then in chapter 5 we read about Ananias who "also" gives the same exact gift. Ananias and his wife saw Barnabas give his gift and they also saw all the prayers of thanks and all the loving affection given to Barnabas.

And longing for the same kind of loving affection and good standing they follow suit and copy Barnabas and they also sell land and bring the money to the apostles to distribute. They pretend to bring all the money they received for the sale of the property. They came up in front of all the believers in a worship setting

and said something like this;

“here’s all the money that we received from the sale of our property. The Lord told me to do this just like He told Barnabas. And here is 100 percent of the money.” Meanwhile he had part of the money stuffed in his sock or hidden back at the house.

It was not really on their heart to sell the field and give all the money. They wanted the applause and praise and affection but they loved the money more than they loved the Lord or those in need.

Their gift was not about what the Holy Spirit told them to do. It was not an act of love and obedience. It was an act of using God’s church to give their reputation a boost.

This is a temptation for many people. At home we are just the guy that forgot to take out the trash. There are no heros at home. But in God’s church some people work really hard or do extraordinary things for the misguided purpose of elevating their status. Serving God out of a full heart is great. Serving without string and without trying to manipulate others is great. But some people use the church to gain a name for themselves or to fill a void of feeling insignificant at home or work or school.

Let’s dig into the text beginning at Acts 4:36

4: 36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

Barnabas showed us an example of giving all we have first to God and then directing our resources wherever God tells us to. Barnabas is specifically named as an example of what that looks like. We learned last week that no one in the church considered their property as belonging to themselves. All they had really

belonged first to God. And God directs us what to keep and what to give and where it should go.

When someone else has a need, then because of God's heart that is in me, I can't help but take on your need as my own. And so out of love I ask God what He wants me to do to help those in need.

Remember giving was never forced. Giving was always to be Spirit led. Not every person in the church was led to sell his or her assets.

Barnabas is lifted up as an example of how this kind of radical love plays out in everyday life when someone is led to be generous. Barnabas followed the Spirit of God and gave from a full heart. The pattern for us is to get full from the love of Christ and then serve without strings and give to others without needing to receive a standing ovation.

Acts 5

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

It does not appear that God came up with this plan for Ananias. Ananias seemed to be the one that initiated the action in his own mind.

If Ananias had said; *"hey I sold a field and only want to donate half of the proceeds to the church"* there would have been no problem. He could have donated 1 percent to the church and that would have been no problem. Or he could have donated nothing and been honest about it and he would have been okay.

But he was not honest. He lied and make it look like God had told him to give the same gift as Barnabas. And he did this in front of the entire church and in front of the Spirit of God.

3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?4 Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

SATAN HAS FILLED YOUR HEART

We learn that sometimes our sin involves the temptation of Satan. This man wanted to be well thought of and his ego and reputation were probably more important to him than His relationship with God.

Satan capitalized on this man's weakness. Ananias did not deal with his ego problems, and his truth telling problems. A good way to get Satan to climb on your back is to have unconfessed sin and dishonesty in your life. And a good way to get Satan to play you is when you do not know your identity in Christ.

IT WAS AT YOUR DISPOSAL (just be honest)

God does not use shame or pressure to get us to contribute. We are called to give an amount that we set aside after searching our hearts and consulting with The Lord. God loves a cheerful giver.

If you are not at a place where you can give a lot to the needs of others. Or if you are at a place where God needs to give you more generosity in your heart, just be honest about where you are at. God can deal with honesty.

GIVING IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP, OUR GIVING IS TO GOD

If God The Holy Spirit really told ananias to sell his property then God would have also given him the faith and spiritual victory to give it all with joy rather than holding some back.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Ananias is using God's church to keep up appearances. For some reason he wanted people to think well of him. Perhaps he ran a shop and wanted all the church people to visit his shop. His good reputation would bring favor and more customers. Or perhaps he just needed to hear people tell him how wonderful he was. The text does not give all those details. But here is something we do know. Barnabas was led by the Lord to sell a field and give all the proceeds to those in need. I assume this was something that the Holy Spirit put in His heart to do.

But then Ananias copies yesterday's revelation. He copies what God told someone to do in the past without discerning what God is actually telling him and his wife to do in the present. He is copying the patterns of the past even when God is not working that way right now. He is manufacturing in the flesh and by his own efforts a pattern that God gave someone else. But now God is not in it. And even a demon could sell a field and pretend to give the full amount to the poor. And because his heart is not really in it, he did not have the faith to actually give away the whole gift.

We are in danger when we simply do familiar patterns without first checking with the Lord. We need to be in God's word and using spiritual discernment through prayer. Otherwise we will just copy what we have seen and it will have no life or power or favor from the Lord.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS PERSONAL

There is also a great rabbit trail in this passage. This is one passage that is very useful to show that the Holy Spirit is not a force. The Holy Spirit is personal. You don't lie to a force. Rather you lie to one who has the reasoning capacity to recognize a lie and think up a response and initiate action and communicate to the Apostles.

So what happened when the apostles call Ananias on his lie to God the Holy

Spirit?

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Let's be honest. This is a spooky verse. This is a New Testament passage. But this looks like something that would happen in the Old Testament. The truth is that God is still the same God of holiness that He has always been. We often fall into the trap of believing that because God's grace has been revealed in Jesus Christ that He is no longer the God of Holiness. But God is the same forever. His grace is revealed but His holiness stands.

We the church rarely highlight the holiness of God. We are reluctant to remind people that God will not be mocked. We forget that Jesus Christ is the same God of holiness that appeared to Moses and caused him to go blind and shine with the brilliance of God's glory.

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

This passage is not speaking about the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not speaking about the truth that when God looks at us He sees the righteousness of Jesus. This passage speaks to our behavior. We are not only called to pray the prayer of surrender. We are called to live the life of surrender and obedience. And if we really want revival the cost is obedience and holiness. That is no shortcut or fancy prayer that will bypass the requirement that we live as though we are dead to sin and live with a holy fear of God.

GREAT FEAR

This passage says "great fear seized all who heard what had happened."

And that is my reaction and perhaps yours today as we read this passage.

Today is a good day to be honest with God and honest with one another. Today is a good day to make sure we are not trying to use the church to make us feel important. Today is a good day to check ourselves and make certain that when we say God is leading us to do something we trust God and obey Him.

THE EFFECT ON THE CHURCH

One commentator seemed to be shocked at God's instant judgment. He suggested that Ananias had a heart attack from a troubled conscience. I don't know why people try to explain away the holiness of God and His judgment of sin. I think this explanation is just silly. If he had a heart attack it would have said so in the text.

God will judge sin. This couple claimed to be a part of the church. God's holiness is nothing to take for granted. God gave us life and He reserves the right to remove us when He wants. In fact this is not the only place that God appears to judge sin immediately.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

27 So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

31 But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. 32 Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally

condemned with the world.

So here is another example of God passing immediate judgement on His own people through immediate physical consequences. Some people brought in food for the church potluck. Some of the bread and wine were supposed to be saved for a communion ceremony.

But some hurried and chowed down the best food and then chugged down all the good wine leaving little or nothing for the poor or the communion service.

They were knocking back the bread and wine never thinking about the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Communion turned into something that was no better than an eating contest. They were putting the Spirit of God to test perhaps thinking that God's grace and love would prevent God from punishing sin.

God immediately judged some whom were sick and others who even died as a result of not carefully examining themselves in front of the Lord and focusing on the body and blood of Christ.

The text tells us that God judged sin among His people for the purpose of waking them up spiritually and saving their souls in the end.

The third example of sin that leads to death is found in 1 John 5:16.

1 John 5:16 If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death.

According to Christian Apologetic and Research Ministry: *"The meaning of verses 16 and 17 is debated among Christians. There is no absolute consensus on what this means. But, generally speaking, we conclude that there are sins that people can commit which God takes seriously enough so as to end their lives."*

In these passages and in others that I did not mention it appears that God is

more interested in getting you to heaven than giving you a long life. Further, not everyone who is sick is under God's judgment. In fact most sickness can be explained by the fact that we live in a fallen world in which our bodies are not glorified like they will be at the return of Christ. Our bodies are fading away. And that is why it is imperative that we build up our soul and spirit in Christ. We will get a new body one day. A perfect body that will live forever and a body that will not be susceptible to sickness and disease.

I don't want anyone to lay a guilt trip on those who are sick. If there a sin that leads to death God will make it obvious. We will not have to guess and blame victims. The point of these passages is that we can not take the holiness of God for granted.

Let's jump back to our text and see what happens to Ananias' wife Sapphira.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." 9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

Sapphira was given the opportunity to come clean and tell the truth. But instead not realizing her husband fell dead under the immediate judgment of his sin, she went along with lie.

Again, like her husband, she was dealt instant judgment for her sin. If you know about a sin but do not call it out or speak the truth that is not a good thing.

Both Ananias and Sapphira used the church in order to advance their own reputation and purposes. They were not looking for ways in which Jesus would

be glorified. They were looking for ways in which they would be glorified. God would not allow his church to be threatened by those seeking glory for themselves. And the primary sin named in the text is that they lied to The Holy Spirit. They tried to deceive everyone and perhaps they thought that the Spirit of God whom was at work in the church would not call out that sin. So they tested God's patience and holiness.

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Can you imagine if God always gave us what we deserved? I would say that great fear would be an appropriate reaction. Lucky for us God is usually patience with us. However, this text reminds us that we are walking a dangerous tightrope if we count on God to be patient forever while we look past His glory and holiness. What happens after God purifies his church of sin?

12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

THE RESULT OF HOLINESS

If you want more God sightings, know that it begins with holiness. And holiness begins with confession and repentance and total honesty and transparency.

Often we look to the latest technique to help grow our church. There is nothing wrong with organizational techniques. However God grows His church when people respond to the word of life and the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.

When God's people love God more than the desires of the flesh or the applause of men look out.

If we want God to move in power in this church then we must deal with our hidden sin of pride or pornography or gossip or slander or even ministry that has been done in the flesh with the wrong motives.

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE TEMPLE

Okay, so we know that huge gatherings of the church occurred in the temple courts that we looked at a few weeks ago. These temple courts held up to 50,000 people.

The apostles did signs and wonders and continued to do miracles. But no one else dared to join them. Because of the context, I think this means that no one dared to join them without seriously thinking about it.

No one like Ananias and Sapphira joined them. No one casually joined them if they had mixed motives and loyalties. We know this because of the next sentence which states.

14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Only those who truly believed and who had pure motives joined them. Not only did a few people join them, it says "more and more believed." This is a reference to multiplication. The last we knew 5000 men and their families joined the church. Now, more and more; an exponentially growing number joined them. And none of them had mixed motives. They did not come just to make more business contacts or to get pats on the back for doing good works in the sight of other people.

What happens when people come to Christ without mixed motives? What happens when God purifies His church? What happens when we confess our sin

and turn to God? The answer is in verse 15

15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

AS A RESULT

This paragraph begins with the words; "as a result." As a result of what? As a result of people coming to Christ and living with a healthy fear of our holy God people were healed and set free. The power grew in the church after the church was purified and sifted.

I am not saying that God is going to work in exactly the same way as He did in the Jerusalem church.

But I am saying that as we deal honestly with our sin and let go of the things that we love more than Jesus God will reward us. He will give us the privilege of being part of an amazing time of refreshing and revival.

SUMMARY

Do you want a case of God to break out? Do you want God sightings and do you want people to come to Christ hand over fist? Then confess your sins to one another and God will heal you and forgive you and move in power in His church.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news but churches sometimes fade in power and influence because of hidden sin and mixed motives. Sometimes churches fade in power because people come to serve themselves and be well thought of and use God's church to lift up their own ego or reputation.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

God wants us to deal with our sin honestly today. Let's not put God to the test. Let's not hold onto our pride or jealousies or gossip or whatever God is bringing to your mind right now.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are you envious of the ministry or the life that God has given someone else?
2. Are you envious of the encouragement that others have received for their acts of obedience? If so what are you going to do about it?
3. Do you feel like you need to keep up appearances and convince others that you are a good Christian person?
4. Do you hate your sin enough to confess it and be honest about your struggle?
5. Some of you have been playing church. You said the prayer a long time ago but you are not living like God is holy. Is God calling you to die to yourself today and live for Him? If so I want to pray with you after the service.

Comment (HALEY: Do Not Put This In The Slides)

I am not here to confess your sin. I am willing to love you for free without strings. But if God is speaking to your heart today, do not harden your heart. Follow through on what He is telling you to do. If we claim to be God's people then we are called to be holy like He is holy.