

Ministry of Grace Church

The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 5

Preface:

In the previous chapter, we learned that after healing a man who had been crippled from birth, Peter and John were arrested by the Sanhedrin for preaching that Jesus was raised from the dead. The Sanhedrin couldn't condemn them for the healing, but they ordered Peter and John to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus.

After they were released, they gathered with the church and they all prayed. In their prayers they recognized God is sovereign and that His plan sometimes includes believers facing opposition. Then, they prayed for God to give them boldness in their witness to others.

Luke ended chapter 4 saying that those who owned lands and houses sold them to support the needs of the members of the church. He specifically mentioned a man named Joseph, who was also called Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement." (Slide 2) Barnabas sold a field which he owned and gave the proceeds of the sale to the apostles for the care and support of the church.

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:1-11

¹But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and 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. ³But 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? ⁴While 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." ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹But 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." ¹⁰Immediately 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. ¹¹And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Notes:

Barnabas was known as a person who encouraged others. His focus was always on others, instead of himself. He was a living example of what Christ taught the Scribes when one of them asked Him which commandment is the most important of all:

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

(Mark 12:29-31)

Given his nickname, Son of Encouragement, it seems to me that the reason Barnabas sold his property and gave the proceeds to the church, was to encourage those in the church who were financially in need. This was a true demonstration of loving his neighbor as himself.

Ananias and Sapphira also sold their property and gave money to the church, but they were severely judged for it. So, what’s the difference? The first obvious difference that we see is the fact that Ananias and Sapphira did not give all of the money they got from the sale, only part of it. So – what’s wrong with that? Wasn’t the property theirs to keep or sell? Yes, of course it was. (Slide 3A) Wasn’t the money they got from that sale theirs to do with as they pleased? Yes, of course it was. Peter even agreed with this:

While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? ... (Acts 5:4)

So, what did they do wrong? Notice what Peter said next?

You have not lied to man but to God.

Apparently, they lied concerning something about the sale. And, when his wife, Sapphira, appeared before Peter, he said this to her:

... “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? ... (Acts 5:8-9)

Based on these two passages, we see that Ananias and his wife sold the land and agreed to keep back part of the sale. Again, there’s nothing wrong with that. (Slide 3B) But – they apparently told Peter that what they gave to the church was the full amount of the sale. And, Sapphira also knew that they had only given a portion of the sale to the church. (Slide 4A) They lied about how much profit they got from the sale. Why? We don’t know for sure, but we can guess that they wanted people to think of them as just as righteous as Barnabas. This would imply that they were more concerned about what others thought of them than they were about helping those in the church who had need. Their focus was selfish. Peter made it very clear that they had lied to the Holy Spirit.

Now, here’s another question we have to ask ourselves. Why did God judge Ananias and Sapphira so severely? They apparently were saved, since they were members of the church, although we don’t know for sure. What we do know is that their sin seems to have been motivated by pride. And in the book of Proverbs, we are told:

... Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

The worst part of their sin, however, was the fact that they lied to the church and the church leadership, which Peter said is the same as lying to God. (Slide 4B) It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our

profession is backed up by our practice. When others see you, do they see a person committed to his or her faith? Or do they see a person who pretends to be committed to his or her faith? There's a difference between someone who goes to church every Sunday and someone who demonstrates their faith in the way they treat others.

Finally, does it seem to you that God was overreacting to the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Consider this, there are a number of examples in the Bible where God's judgement is more severe at the beginning of a new period of His dealing with man. In **Leviticus 10:1-20** we see that God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to present an unauthorized offering to the Lord. This occurred just after the law was given and God spelled out His requirements for sacrifices at the Tabernacle in the wilderness. And, shortly thereafter, in **Numbers 16:1-32** when God had instituted the leadership of Moses - Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were sent straight to Sheol because they challenged Moses' leadership. He also had Achan killed for keeping some of the spoil when Jericho was defeated, contrary to what God had ordered (see **Joshuah 7:1-26**). This occurred just as the Israelites were entering into the land promised by God. The presence of the church was a new way for God to interact with mankind and in the beginning, his judgment on sin was very severe.

Many Signs and Wonders

Acts 5:12-16

¹²Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Notes:

The first church was characterized by the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. They didn't just talk about their faith, they demonstrated it by the way they lived. Because the people had a fear of the Lord and gave Him the glory for all that was being done, the Spirit was at work. The church continued to meet in Solomon's Portico and those who did not believe in Jesus were afraid to join them. However, they were not afraid to listen to the preaching and to observe the miracles that were done.

And, because of the preaching and the miracles, a large number of people were being converted. The reputation of the church grew dramatically and people gathered from the whole area around Jerusalem to be healed. And, according to verse 16, many of them were healed. Wait! Is that what it says? No, it says, "they were *all* healed."

The Apostles Arrested

Acts 5:17-26

¹⁷But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” ²¹And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³“We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

Notes:

You will recall that in the previous chapter, the religious leaders of Israel were very upset about Peter’s and John’s preaching because they were teaching the people that it was faith in the resurrected Jesus that caused the crippled beggar to be healed. The Sanhedrin, which was composed mostly of Sadducees (including the High Priest), commanded Peter and John to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. (Slide 5A)

Obviously, the apostles continued to teach in Jesus’ name and large numbers of people were joining the church daily. This really upset the Sadducees because these uneducated upstarts were reaching the people in a way that they weren’t able to. As a result, they had the apostles arrested and put in prison. The text implies that it was not just Peter and John, but all the apostles who were put in prison. In the previous chapter, when the apostles were arrested, they were just detained. This time they were locked-up in the public prison, not a pleasant place to be.

We are not told the details of their release from prison except that it was an angel who brought them out (Slide 5B) and told them to keep on preaching. Then, early the next morning (at daybreak) they entered the Temple again and commenced their teaching. Meanwhile, when the Sanhedrin convened, they sent for the apostles in the prison, but they weren’t there, even though the prison had been securely locked and all the guards were still in place. Then someone came and told the Sanhedrin,

Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.

So, because they were afraid of what the people would do, the Captain of the Guard and officers went and politely brought them back to stand before the Sanhedrin. Here, once again, my mind wanders off into areas of speculation. I wonder what the members of the Sanhedrin thought about the apostles having left the prison. Twelve men, followers of this Jesus person, were locked in the

prison and they just vanished and reappeared in the Temple! I'm sure they weren't accustomed to this kind of miracle, so surely they must have wondered how it happened.

The Apostles' Defense

Acts 5:27-33

²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."
²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

Notes:

Having brought the apostles back to the Sanhedrin, we are told that the High Priest questioned them. However, if you read the next verse, you will not see a question there, just an accusation. Now, this is totally conjecture on my part, but I wonder if they didn't first ask the apostles how they got out of the prison. Can you imagine what they thought when Peter informed them that it was an angel who released them? Remember, the Sadducees don't believe in angels – or the resurrection. But neither did they believe that Jesus was their Messiah.

The High Priest then reminded the apostles that they were previously commanded not to preach in Jesus' name. Notice, however, that he didn't mention Jesus' name. He said,

We strictly charged you not to teach in **this name** ... and you intend to bring **this man's** blood upon us

The High Priest did not want to even mention the name of Jesus. And – they were very aware that the apostles had accused them (the religious leaders) of being the ones responsible for crucifying our Lord.

We see again that the apostles were more focused on obeying God than political or religious rulers. Peter then went into accusation mode once more. He reminded the religious leaders, again, that they had crucified Jesus, and Peter made a specific point that God raised Him from the dead. Not only that, but Peter told them that God had exalted Jesus to His right hand. (Slide 6) This was Peter's way of reminding the religious rulers that Jesus was their Messiah. However, Peter didn't stop there. In front of the Sanhedrin he referred to Jesus as "Leader and Savior." The word translated 'leader' is *archēgos*, which is the same word translated "author" in Acts 3:15. This is a title that the religious leaders would only use of their Messiah.

The members of the Sanhedrin were well aware that Peter was using their own descriptions of the Messiah in reference to Jesus, and it made them mad. In fact, the text says that they were enraged. The word translated "enraged" literally means "to be sawn in half." Metaphorically, it means "to be cut or torn emotionally" or "to be greatly angered."

They knew that these uneducated upstarts had just accused them of killing the Messiah, so they now wanted to kill these followers of Jesus also. Isn't it amazing that these religious leaders, who were supposed to lead the people into a closer relationship with God, were more interested in maintaining the status quo for their own personal benefit? Their focus was on themselves instead of being on those whom they were supposed to be leading. Kind of reminds me of current day politicians, doesn't it?

Gamaliel's Advice

Acts 5:34-39

³⁴But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, (Slide 7) a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,

Notes:

Gamaliel was probably the most respected teacher in Israel at that time. He was a Pharisee, not a Sadducee, so he was not as offended by Peter's speech as the Sadducees were. However, since he was so well respected, the Sadducees listened to him. On the surface, it seems like good advice, especially since it meant that the apostles were set free. However, on further inspection, we can surmise that it was actually bad advice.

Why? First of all, because Gamaliel based his decision on history. The Irish statesman Edmund Burke is often misquoted as having said, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it." Spanish philosopher George Santayana is credited with the expression, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." And, British statesman Winston Churchill wrote, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Nobody really knows who originally stated this maxim. However, in a world where God is in control, this saying literally has no meaning. The crux of the disagreement between the apostles, the Sanhedrin, and Gamaliel comes down to truth. The Sanhedrin was attacking the truth and the apostles were defending the truth, but Gamaliel was ignoring the truth.

The second problem with Gamaliel's dissertation is the fact that he compared the infant church and its leaders to the followers of a couple of lawbreaking rebels. In other words, Gamaliel had already rejected the truth. He had already decided in his own mind that Jesus was not the Messiah. And - he failed to consider that the two rebels he referred to had never performed the miracles that Jesus had, and they certainly had not been raised from the dead.

Finally, his faulty logic included the notion that if something was not "of God" then it must fail. He said, anything that is "of God" will succeed. Did he not look around at the conquest of Rome

and its heathen rulers? The Roman empire lasted for more than 1000 years! Did he not remember the failures of his own ancestors, God's chosen people? The nation of Israel was certainly "of God," and yet they were often defeated by their enemies and eventually were carried off to Babylon. However, in spite of his bad reasoning and faulty logic, Gamaliel managed to succeed in convincing the Sanhedrin to "go easy" on the infant church. Remember the "sovereignty of God" that we talked about last week?

The Apostles are Released

Acts 5:40-42

⁴⁰and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Notes:

When they called the apostles back into the chamber, they declared them guilty and had them flogged. The crime they were convicted of was probably that of ignoring the previous order not to teach in "this name." Then, once they had been "punished," the apostles were released with the renewed charge not to speak in the name of Jesus. (Slide 8A)

When they were set free, they didn't go back and complain to everyone in Solomon's Porch. Instead, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake.

The final verse in this chapter is one of those that is often not recognized because we all tend to read our Bibles too fast. It says that they did not stop teaching and preaching about Jesus. They did so every day, from house to house and "in the temple." (Slide 8B) Do you see that? In spite of the fact that they just got flogged for teaching about Jesus and were warned, again, not to do it any more, they did it anyway. And they did it "in the temple," right under the noses of the Sanhedrin.

So What?

How many of us have done things which we were convinced were what God wanted us to do and we failed at it. Or, perhaps, got punished for doing it? And, when these things happened, how many of us then shook our fist at God and complained, "That's not fair, God!"

I don't know about you, but I have had plenty of fist shaking days in my past. How stupid is that? Think about it. We shake our fist at the all-knowing Heavenly Father who loves us better than any human father ever loved his children. We get angry with Him for doing what He has already determined will bring the most glory to Himself. He has already forgiven our sins, even those that we did deliberately, knowing it was wrong. He has blessed us more abundantly than any of us deserve and has promised us a future that is glorious beyond compare. And – we complain to Him that it isn't fair. Do you really want God to be fair? I don't. I don't want to get what I deserve. I'll take God's grace any day.

Now What?

The first church and the apostles were doing what they were commanded to do. They were fulfilling the Great Commission. They were preaching the gospel and they were making disciples. I suppose you could say that it was easy for them because God was daily performing miracles of healing in their presence and it was bringing people to their meeting place. Talk about a great advertising campaign!

We, on the other hand are not seeing God performing miracles of healing. So, how do we fulfill the Great Commission here at Ministry of Grace Church? As you all know, I have signed a contract to lease this building for the next 2 years and the owner has been very gracious to us. But we can't fulfill our commission by sitting behind closed doors every Sunday. I have already contacted a sign company and we are in the process of getting the sign on the side of this building changed to let people know that we are here. Are we ready for more people to join us?

We need several things. We need people to act as greeters at the front door. We want people to feel welcomed and loved when they visit. We need several people to volunteer to work in the nursery. I say several because we don't want anyone to do it week in and week out. As we grow, we will need people to work with our youth group. Some to teach and some to handle crowd control. We need an outreach program to connect with the people around us. We could also use someone to help me with the web site, and possibly handle social media. And – I think it's time to have an oversight committee. I would love to have several of you meet with me every other week to talk about the administration of this church. I would like to have both men and women on this committee.

Does one or more of these ideas ring a bell with you? Is one of these an area that you feel like God wants to use you? If so, stop and talk to Conie or me after church. Or, send me an e-mail to will@ministryofgrace.org. Or, text me on the church phone (503) 383-8001.

Let's pray.

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