

Acts Ch 5:1-11

“Hypocrisy’s A Killer”

As you’re making your way to Acts Ch 5 do me a favor, stop off at Matt Ch 21 and let me draw your attention specifically to vs 18-19 (read).

Now Mark’s gospel tells us that Jesus saw the fig tree from *afar* having leaves. But things aren’t always what they appear to be on the surface from a distance are they? At a distance this tree appeared to be one thing, but upon close inspection it was in reality quite another. From a distance it seemed to be a tree bearing fruit, the leaves were there, all lush and green, seemed real promising and quite genuine. But the closer you drew the more it became apparent that this wasn’t a tree *bearing* fruit, it was a tree *barren of* fruit. It was a counterfeit, a *hypocrite* if you will, had the appearance of one thing, but in reality it was another. Had the front of being fruitful, seemed to have all the right qualities, rooted deep, nice healthy looking trunk, leaves flourishing, but once you began to look a little closer, beyond the surface qualities, far from fruitful, it was absolutely fruitless. and It incurred the immediate judgment of Jesus, why? Because God hates hypocrisy, has a real problem with pretense, and doesn’t deal well (for lack of a better term) with deception, putting forth the show of one thing on the surface, but being something quite different underneath.

But when it comes to His church, Jesus expects the genuine article. That which is legit as opposed to counterfeit, yet it’s amazing how many people put on a pretense of godliness yet in reality are quite carnal. As if God doesn’t really get what’s going on in your heart; which brings us to our text today whereby we encounter just such a situation. and The basic application that we glean from this situation that deals with Ananias and Sapphira is that if there’s to be *power* in the church, there 1st must be *purity* in the church, and It goes sort of like this, 1st they *deceive*, then they’re *discovered*, then they *die*. So often we want power, but we don’t want purity, but if I’m *impure*, how can I expect God to *empower* my life? I want to lead my life given over to the flesh and have the benefits of a life that’s led in the Spirit; it doesn’t work that way. The bible says, “...*to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*” Rom 8:6-8 To be carnally minded, or fleshly minded is death, I think that pretty much sums up the account of the 1st 10 vs of Acts ch 5.

Now we need to pay attention to this 1st word in this 1st vs of Acts ch 5, “But” because this is a word that generally speaking connects a certain passage in sharp contrast. This one little word can disrupt the entire flow of a particular passage, and it *can work* for the good.

For instance we read in Eph 2 “*And you...who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),” Eph 2:1-5 So we have this whole flow of despondent desperation and debauchery going on of which we were all at one time apart of, being dead in sin and trespass, and then “but” and in comes the contrast and everything changes. Because God who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He’s loved us, even though we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. Dead in sin, and alive in Christ is just about as stark as you can get when it comes to contrast. However this word “But” also serves to contrast at times to the negative, and that’s what we have here. What was *happening*? Look back at vs 32 of ch 4.*

Vs32

This was just the overflow of the love of God and the life of the Holy Spirit permeating with in the early church. They put God’s glory 1st as we saw last week, placed the needs of the people 2nd, and the material things of this world at a distant 3rd. They recognized the fact that the reason God blesses us isn’t so that we can horde up all that we can for ourselves, but so that we might be a blessing to others in His name. So if they recognized a need, and had it with in their means to meet that need, they didn’t wait for someone else to do it, they just took care of it.

Vs33

By now we should be realizing this particular theme woven throughout the book of Acts regarding the *power* of the Holy Spirit in its relationship to the *witness* of the reality of the resurrected Christ. Jesus promised them that when the Holy Spirit came upon them they’d receive power to be His witnesses, and that’s exactly what’s taking place. and That’s exactly what God wants to take place in your life, and in my life, that with great power you would give witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Why? Because the message of the resurrection is forgiveness of sin and everlasting life to all who believe, the message of the resurrection is that God so *loved* the world that He gave His only begotten Son to take upon Himself the *sin* of the world there upon the cross. and By shedding His blood He paid the full purchase price for the redemption of mankind, laying down His life that we might have life and the resurrection is God’s receipt showing proof of purchase, there’s nothing more to be paid. No more debt that’s owed in Christ, the resurrection is the verification of that. and God wants to use you to send that message, now how is He going to empower you to do that? We saw it last week, through prayer, and the Person of the Holy Spirit resting upon and overflowing from your life.

Notice what else was being granted to them as they gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, did you see it there in vs 33? “Great grace” great power, mingled with great grace; is a great thing. Grace is that undeserved, unmerited favor, its by grace that we’re saved, we don’t deserve it, have done nothing to merit it, it’s just a work of God’s grace. But when you have great grace working together with great power, you can expect that God will be doing great things. But what we’re seeing here today is that God’s *power* demands a *pure* life. A life that’s unencumbered with carnality, God help us to be a people individually, and a body corporately upon whom He can dispense great power, mingled with great grace to do great things for His glory.

Vs34-35

Now this isn’t saying that everyone sold everything they had and placed it at the apostle’s feet. The idea here is that there those who were wealthy or who had perhaps more than one house, or some land or something, when a need would arise they would simply sell a piece of rental property, or their vacation home and give that money to the church so that the church could adequately meet the needs of the people. and Though the general concept behind it was a neat thing, we don’t see that as a pattern throughout the NT, the church in Jerusalem operated this way for awhile, but we don’t see where the other churches that Paul planted adopted this pattern. As a matter of fact there in 1st Timothy Paul had to give guide lines on how the church was to discern the truly needy because its easy for some people to take advantage of a benevolence program rather than just get a job. Or turn to their family 1st rather than being a burden on the church, now as I said the bible is clear that when God blesses us its because He wants to use us to bless others. and The command to the rich in 1st Timothy 6 is to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, but its to stay with in the confines of the context, we’re not to sponge of the rich so that we can be sluggards, you get the idea.

Vs36-37

Here we go, this is where Barnabas (who will come a little more into the forefront later) is 1st mentioned. and He’s brought forth as an example of exemplary giving, he owned some land there in Cypress and took every cent of it and laid it at the apostles feet. He didn’t do it for recognition, or so that he could be idealized as super spiritual. He just wanted to bless the body of Christ, and I’m sure it was a radical encouragement to the body there of how God was providing for their needs. But this was just the type of guy Barnabas was, he had the gift of giving, the gift of helps, just always encouraging the body through one-way or another. That’s why they nicknamed him Barnabas, it means Son of Encouragement. Would to God that we would all be those by whom those around us could be encouraged and built up in Christ. Rather than discouraged, or criticized, biting and devouring one another being consumed by one another. God hates that stuff, Barnabas was a blessing the body of Christ. Spiritually, and financially, and though he didn’t do it for recognition, apparently it got around. As you follow the book of Acts you realize that the apostles rarely ever got any real alone time so there were some people around when he blessed the body in this way.

It's not that God cares if people see you give, it's your motive in letting people see you give that concerns him. Jesus said, *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."* Matt 6:1-4 You see there's a certain type of individual who gives for what they get out of it, the "ooo's" and "aaah's" of the people. and There are plenty of places willing to give you that if that's what you want, this isn't one of them. Right now we've got a fairly significant building project going on out there on east 7th, and there's all kinds of ways that we could seek to manipulate you to dig a little deeper to keep that project moving forward. Be it a chart on the back wall, plaques that go in the new building with your name on it if you give so much, or whatever it takes to stroke your flesh and give you glory for what you've done. But God forbid that the methods of man build that place rather than the Spirit of God, if God lays it on your heart to get behind that, that's awesome, but the only way anyone's going to know is if you tell them, because we never will. If you want your reward now, start blowing your trumpet and you'll have it. But we trust that where God guides God provides and we're willing to wait for Him, to get the job done whatever that may mean for us.

Barnabas just discreetly gave what God put on his heart and people were blown away. They just thought, "Man, that's awesome, what a radical demonstration of faith, giving God his all, trusting Him to take care of his life, I wish I had that type commitment and trust in the Lord to just give my all." and On and on it goes, you know when there's been a good and godly standard shown to you, you just go, "God, make me like that, one who trusts you, can be used by you, to be a blessing in the lives of others." It was just a real cool thing. (Notice, here comes the contrast)

Vs1-2

You've heard the phrase, "Big doors swing on little hinges" notice how the total tone of everything changed with the use of this one little word, "But." You see there was another couple, "Ananias and Sapphira" that caught wind of the notoriety and esteem given to Barnabas in his giving and they more or less thought, "Man, we need to get in on that." The bible says, *"...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."* James 1:14-15

Ananias and Sapphira are being drawn away by their desire to be recognized and receive the praise of man. and Though, "Ananias" means, "God is gracious" he's about to find out that He's also holy, "Sapphira" means, "Beautiful" but she's not living up to her name here because ugliness of sin is dominating her heart.

A man by the name of George MacDonald wrote, “Half the misery in the world comes from trying to *look*, instead of trying to *be*, what one is not.” Jesus called that “Hypocrisy”, it means “Actor,” its deliberate deception. You’ve seen those theatre masks, one smiley face, and one sad face. and Depending on the scene the actor holds whatever mask over his face to play the part, and so that he can be seen from the nosebleed section way in the back. They have one face for the stage, and one face for the street. and Now that Ananias is on the stage (so to speak) the mask comes up. The spiritual façade, you see the sin wasn’t in not giving all, he didn’t have to give *any* the sin was in *putting on the appearance* of being totally sold out and giving all when in reality keeping back part of the proceeds for himself.

This phrase, “kept back” carries with it the idea of embezzlement, to with draw covertly and appropriate for one’s own use. In other words he’s saying, “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give.” But in reality he’s holding out a portion of that which he’s claimed to give to Jesus for his own agenda. and We notice that his wife is in on the deal, she was aware of the plan. Listen wives, you’re called to be a helpmate to your husband. What does that mean, does it mean you help him carry out his self-serving agenda’s at the expense of biblical integrity? No, you help him realize that he’s about to do something that he’s going to regret and should he choose to do this (whatever unbiblical act it may be) you’re not going to be apart of it, or behind him in it. That’ll be way more help than going, “Ok honey, if that’s what you want to do.” and It seems that often times wives have a tendency to cover for the sins of their husbands under this misguided notion of love, or being embarrassed for him that he’s not as godly as people may think. But don’t be apart of helping your husband destroy his life, because he might just take you down with him, that’s what happens here. They stand together in deception, they stand together in judgment, remember that.

Vs3-4

What does the bible say, “*For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.*” Luke 8:17 and Again, “*O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*” Ps 139:1-4 The bible teaches us that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. God knows your heart, He knows when you’re being genuine, when you’re playing the part of the hypocrite, raising your hands, and bringing your bible to church but theirs unconfessed, unresolved sin in your heart. “*“Come now, and let us reason together, ’ Says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.’”* Isa 1:18 Ananias didn’t have to go through with this, he could’ve stopped, rethought, and repented. But he brought corruption and compromise into the church through deceit and hypocrisy and God is going to safeguard the birth of the church. and We see Peter here operating in the gift of discerning of Spirit, and a Word of knowledge, recognizing that what was happening here in Ananias’ life wasn’t a godly thing. and Even having the insight as to exactly what took place. Playing games with God just isn’t a healthy thing to do.

Peter tells him, “While it remained it was yours, you didn’t have to sell it, and when you did sell it you didn’t have to give it all.” You see it wasn’t that he didn’t give it all that was the problem, it’s that he put on the hypocritical pretense of giving all when in reality he was holding out on God. He wanted that super spiritual sense about him. Peter says, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Now understand that this isn’t saying that he was an Satanically possessed unbeliever.

The text points to the fact that they *were* believers, but the bible is clear that Satan can wield his influence upon the life of the believer. In 1st Chronicles 21 we’re told that Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number the people. Remember when Jesus was speaking to His disciples about heading the Jerusalem to lay down His life upon the cross and Peter said to Him, “*“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”* Matt 16:22-23 Now was Jesus saying that Peter was literally Satan? Or Satanically possessed, no, but that he was be swayed and under the influence of Satan in his reasoning. That’s why the bible tells us to take up the whole armor of God, that we might be able to stand against the wiles of the wicked one. and The idea here is, “Why have you let down your guard and let Satan influence your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?”

Satan was a liar from the beginning and if he can’t destroy the church from the outside through persecution, he’ll try to destroy the church from the inside through corruption. It’s so critical that you and I take up the shield of faith by which we’re able to quench the fiery darts of the enemy. We’re told, “...submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” James 4:7 Here Ananias didn’t do either, he didn’t submit to God, nor resist the devil, what’s the result, his life is destroyed. and That’s Satan’s agenda, to destroy your life, by any means possible. Full on debauchery, or religious façade and hypocrisy... makes no difference to him, as long as he destroys your life, he’s happy.

But I also want to discourage you from this, “The devil made me do it mentality.” We note in vs 3 that he fell prey to Satanic influence, but in vs 4 we note, “Why have you conceived this thing in your heart.” What’s that speak of? Personal responsibility, Satan may’ve influenced him, as he seeks daily to do to us all, but he made his own choice to follow through on it, Satan didn’t sin for him, he made his own choice on that. We so often want to justify sin in our lives, but the bottom line is we made a choice, and we’re the ones whom God will hold accountable for the choices we make regardless of the circumstances surrounding that choice.

Finally did you notice the fact here that the Holy Spirit is God, just as God the Father, just as God the Son? In Vs 3 Peter says, “You lied to the Holy Spirit.” In Vs 4 he says, “You haven’t lied to men but to *God*.” Why does he say that? Because the Holy Spirit is God.

Vs5-6

Did Peter do this to him? No, this wasn't church discipline, this was divine judgment. God was sending a message here regarding the sanctity of His church, can you imagine what would happen today if God responded to those who enter the church trying to look spiritual before man but in reality were quite carnal before God like He did here? "I surrender all" (Thud, thud, thud) "In all I do, I honor You" (Thud, thud, thud) "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I with hold" (Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud) we'd be dropping like flies! Some people think that this was a bit harsh, but the reality is that the wonder is that God delays His righteous judgment in virtually every other case! Listen, don't take the grace of God for granted, great grace was upon them all, but that was by no means a license to sin. The bible is clear that the wages of sin is death, and God was not going to establish His church on a seedbed of corruption. So Ananias and Sapphira became the example of that fact that people were not to take God's grace for granted and that they were to walk before Him in godly fear and purity of heart. Just like with Nadab and Abihu, just like with Achan (which I'll share with you next time). But we notice in vs 7

Vs7

She must've been out of town, but this is just like our enemy. God desires to bring things into the light, so that we might see things for what they are and avoid unnecessary ramifications. Satan wants to keep you in the dark while he plots a course to destroy your life.

Vs8-10

Peter even gives her an opportunity to repent. Perhaps he pointed to the sum of money, "Did you sell that land for *this* much?" "Yeah, that's it." Then he tells her that there's no hiding the secret conspiracies of your heart before God. There's just no hiding your ill thoughts, or dishonest actions, or anything else from the Lord. "*Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? says the LORD; Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD.*" Jer 23:24 Yet how often we try to tuck away some little secret sin, hoping that God doesn't see it, God sees it. It's best just to come clean, confess and forsake it that you might find mercy in the sight of God because you can be sure your sin will find you out.

"How is it that you've agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord." You don't think God is going to deal with you on this, you think God is going to just wink at your sin? Or that perhaps you'll just do what you need to do now, and then repent later. God forbid that we would always presume that there will be time to repent and get right with Him later. God owes us no such thing, and reserves the right to deal with our sin immediately. and Though they agreed together, and in this case were judged together, they were both individually accountable before God. Again she didn't have to agree, and she could've confessed the whole deal right here. But she decided to follow through with her hypocrisy, and just like with her husband, the wages of sin is death.

Is God concerned for the way we reflect towards others our relationship of dedication and devotion towards Him and with Him? I would say emphatically yes, God is

greatly concerned, Jesus expects genuineness from His church. Too many people have the spirit of Ananias, they want to be seen or considered as spiritual with out having to count the cost, or pay any kind of price for their service to the Lord. If you're not sold out to Jesus, why pretend that you are? God sees your heart, that's called hypocrisy. The Pharisees are recorded as being those who loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God. and Jesus said to them, "*You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*" Luke 16:15 The bible says, "*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; How much more when he brings it with wicked intent!*" Prov 21:27 Looking for the praise of man, rather than the praise that comes from God.

Vs11

Great Power, Great Grace, and Great Fear, the makings of a great church, do what you do for the glory of God, not the recognition of man and God will honor your life, and the things you do in secret He'll reward openly. and May the power of God, the grace of God, and the fear of God, be at rest upon your life. Hypocrisy's a killer, it'll destroy your life, but sanctity and purity, invites God's power, and we'll see that next time.

We've talked today about being real before God, being honest with Him and letting Him have His way in our lives of purifying us, sanctifying us, and setting us apart to be used by Him. and If you've never given your life to Christ and today God is dealing with you, why don't you be honest about that as well. If God is dealing with you, its because He longs to forgive you and wants to save you from the penalty of your sin as by the blood of Jesus Christ Not because you deserve it, but simply by His grace. He wants to dispense great grace upon your life today. To purify you, and give you everlasting life. But you have to come to Christ, place your trust and your faith in Christ, God sees you for who you are, and He's willing to receive just like that. Jesus said the one comes to Me I will by no means cast out, receive His forgiveness today and let Him change your life forever.