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ACTS 4:32-5:42

Last week our lesson text stopped at **Acts 4:31**. The rest of **Acts 4** tells us some very positive things about the early church.

It tells us they were of **one heart and soul**.

It tells us they **shared all they had with each other**.

It tells us the apostles were **proclaiming the resurrection** of the Lord Jesus and that **God's grace** was on them in abundance.

The last few verses of **Acts 4** tell us that there were no needy or poor people among them, because all who owned houses or property would sell what they had and bring the money from the sale and lay it at the feet of the apostles and the apostles would then distribute this money to those who had need.

The latter part of **Acts 4** also introduces us to a particular man who did this. His given name was Joseph. He was born in Cyprus. His nickname was Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" Barnabas owned a tract of land and Barnabas sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. And we'll see much more of this man as go through **Acts**.

Now, can you imagine a church exactly like this?

No fussing. No jealousy. No needs that weren't met.

Everyone *one in heart and soul*.

Everyone *sharing what they had*.

**The *Word of God* being taught
and the *Resurrection* being proclaimed.**

Folks being saved.

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Sounds like the perfect church! Sounds like just the kind of church we'd want to be a part of, doesn't it? The only problem: if we joined it, it wouldn't be perfect anymore, would it?

Well, **Satan** took notice of this church, too, and it looked like a good church to **him**, too, and he decided **he'd** "join this church!"

See, Satan had seen this church before, and he had attempted to kill it by the arrest of Peter and John. Satan must have thought,

"Surely if these guys are put in jail this thing will die down.

Surely they won't be willing to go to jail for the sake of the Gospel."

But Peter's and John's and the other apostles' commitment had **not** died down. ***In fact their resolve and determination had only grown stronger!*** So Satan decided he would use another tactic. He decided he would join the church...So let's see what happens when Satan did that...

Acts 5:1...

Notice first that this entire passage of Scripture begins with the little conjunction "***but***." This little conjunction always marks a change. **Thus far the church triumphant had been marching forward in victory.** Satan was unable to ***conquer*** it, so he decided he would ***corrupt*** it.

If the story ended with **verse 1**, there would be no problem at all. If they had said, "Peter, this is just a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of the property. We just didn't feel as though we could give it all." But that's not what they did, is it?

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Verse 2-4...

Peter's question to Ananias must have been a real shocker! We need to remember that Ananias and Sapphira were under no obligation to give. No pressure was brought to bear on them. They didn't have to sell their property and once it was sold, they weren't under any compulsion to give all their money to the Lord's work.

So what made them do this?

Well, several reasons could have been operating here.

Maybe they had seen Barnabas do this, and they wanted to be like Barnabas.

No doubt they were new converts and maybe they just wanted to be "accepted" and on the "inside" of what was going on.

Or, maybe (and I believe this the real reason) they wanted to "look good" to other people...maybe they wanted other folks to believe they were much more spiritual than they really were.

It was deception, pure and simple. And it was not "casual deception". It was a **carefully devised, premeditated** scheme to display a deeper spiritual commitment than they really had.-

Satan had deceived Ananias and Sapphira just as he still deceives so many Christians today.

Have you ever fallen into Satan's trap?

Have you ever even been **tempted** to cause folks to think of you more highly than they should? We need to remember that our sin is not when others **think** we're more spiritual than we are, but the sin comes in when we **try to make others** think we're more spiritual than we are!

Some examples of Ananias' and Sapphira's sin today:

Making it look like we have it all together when we don't...

Creating the impression we're people of prayer when we're not...

Promoting the idea that we're very liberal in our giving when we're so tight we squeak...

and we could go on...(I KNOW NONE OF US CAN SAY WE'VE EVER DONE ANY OF THESE THINGS, CAN WE?)

Verses 5-10...

There are those who have a very hard time with this passage of Scripture. They say "Peter didn't even give them time to repent." They say, "After all, **Jesus** didn't do this, did He?"

Jesus could have killed Judas and avoided a whole lot of trouble, but He didn't!! He gave Judas 3½ years to come around and repent, and be saved, didn't He? So critics question whether Peter was fair, and they also question if it happened at all.

But what critics don't realize is the fact that Jesus was trying to save Judas' soul. Ananias and Sapphira were saved already, but they were dishonest.

Verse 11...(by the way, this is the first time the word "church" is mentioned in the Book of Acts)

Imagine the affect this must have had on the church. What if such a thing happened today? What if one of **our** congregation began to tell what all they had done for the Lord and they were stretching the truth and suddenly they fell over dead?

YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK?

I think it would definitely make all of us think twice about trying to appear more spiritual than we are! I believe we would be very aware of telling the truth.

But, why was God so severe? God was so severe (and we need to remember that Peter did not kill Ananias and Sapphira, God did!) because this was a very pivotal time in church history. God

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had called the Old Testament saints to be holy and He desired the New Testament saints to be holy as well. **God desired for His church to stay pure...free of spiritual pretense for as long as possible.**

“a little leaven leavens the whole lump”...

The consequences of deception are great...and yet we come by it so naturally. We are deceivers by nature. Watch a little child trying to hide what he's done wrong...we are liars by nature...in fact, that's the very first sin we commit.

Added to that, there's just something in us that cries out for the approval and even admiration of others, isn't it? Ananias and Sapphira were guilty and paid with their lives. Will we see them in heaven? Yes, I believe we will but we need to remember that God takes very seriously when one of His children **pretends** to be more spiritual than he or she really is.

Well, that in a nutshell (and there is so much more we could say about this) is the story of Ananias and Sapphira, but before we go on, let's just summarize briefly what this passage teaches...

- 1) It teaches that the Holy Spirit is a Person...not an influence or impersonal force...He can be lied to.
- 2) It teaches that the Holy Spirit is Deity...Verse 3 says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says Ananias lied to God.
- 3) It teaches that it's a very dangerous thing to lie to God.
- 4) It teaches that it's a very serious sin to be a hypocrite.
- 5) It teaches that when the church is experiencing obedience and blessings and sharing and joy, we can expect Satan to be unhappy and come against the church.
- 6) It teaches that we must be on the alert when the enemy comes against the church, that he doesn't come through us!

By now, you and I should be aware of a pattern in the book of Acts. Luke's plan is simple. He alternates between a picture of the **church by itself**...a portrait of the early believers alone in sweet fellowship with each other...and he talks about their witness and their joy.

Then Luke switches and gives us a picture of the **church as it relates to the world** and this second picture more and more deals with **persecution**.

This alternating pattern makes us aware of **two important extremes** the church can follow...

- 1) The church can be so focused on its own fellowship and joy and wonder that it loses sight of the fact that it is called to be a witness to the world.
- 2) The church can be so involved with doing good works that they leave out the unity and worship and prayers that come from spending time gathered together to seek God's truth and direction.

There's a balance and I believe this is what the early church was striving for. I believe it's what we should be striving for, as well.

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Well, in the time we have left, let's look at the rest of **Acts 5**.

Verses 12-14...

In these verses we see that the apostles were performing many signs and wonders and many were being added to their number...

Verses 15-16...

The Holy Spirit had acted in judgment, now He could act again in blessing.

Again, we see here the healing gift that was given to the apostles. It was such a powerful gift that even Peter's shadow had healing in it.

As we said last week, this was a sign gift for the early church that we don't see today. Look down at the last of **verse 16...**

"they were all being healed..." (NAS)

"they were healed every one..." (KJV)

Do we see this today? NO! But here they were! What a demonstration of power!

God was at work. People were being saved. Lives were being changed. Jesus was being glorified.

You can rest assured the devil never takes that lightly.

He is always on the job. He never takes a vacation.

And he was already planning his next attack on the early church and its leaders.

Verses 17-28...

We see in this passage the jealousy of the high priest and the Sadducees. **You see there's a real problem when a group of unlearned and ignorant fisherman draw a bigger crowd in their worship services than the high priest and his crowd can draw in their worship services.**

So, they did the only thing they knew to do. They put the apostles in jail...again. But God intervened and sent an angel to open the gates of the prison for them.

Where did the apostles go when they walked out of the gates of that prison?

Well, they went to the temple and began to teach!

What's wrong with these men? Don't they know they ought to hush up? Don't they know that of all places they should not go teach they should not go teach in the temple?

But, these men are absolutely determined to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, aren't they?

Well, when the high priest and his cronies found out what was going on, they were "greatly perplexed as to what would come of this..."

I guess they were! I mean, they must have thought,
"We put these men in prison, and somehow, some way, they got out. It **does** look like they could stay put."

The religious leaders were told that the apostles were gone. They probably said, "Now what are we going to do? How are we going to find them?"

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And suddenly someone comes and said, "It's not going to be hard to find them at all. They're in the same place they were the last time you arrested them. They're over at the temple preaching."

Remember when we said last week that the Jews desired a sign? This whole period was marked by supernatural happenings... "many signs and wonders". God was showing forth His mighty power and He was accrediting and validating His church to the Jewish people...but they weren't listening!

Well, they finally rounded up the apostles again and they stood before the Council...a bunch of ragtag apostles appearing before the great elite Sanhedrin...the Supreme Court of Israel...

And look what happened...

Verses 29-32...

"We must obey God rather than man..."

There was a higher court in Israel than the Sadducees.

God had sent His Son into the world...

God had sent His Spirit into the world...

Are we supposed to submit to authority? YES...but when that authority is not in agreement with a higher authority, then we must obey the higher authority. The Sanhedrin had no authority to forbid these men to preach in the name of Jesus...they knew it and the apostles knew it. And Peter and the apostles had a higher authority to answer to than this Council of men.

And again, we see Peter laying the blame for the death of Jesus on these men.

Verses 33-39...

Here we see a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel. This man had influence over the Council. He was considered to be the most prominent rabbi of that time. His most famous student was Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul.

He basically said,

"Before you kill these men, stop and consider what you'll be doing. There have been others who have come and claimed to be 'somebody' and who have drawn the favor and following of the people, but they didn't last. I've learned that if something is of God, it will prosper, but if it isn't, it will collapse. My advice to you is 'do nothing to these men.' If they're being led by God and you oppose them, you'll find that you're fighting against God."

This was very wise counsel. Gamaliel was a very wise and gracious and understanding man. ***His advice was very good, but it just didn't go far enough! He should have advised more than "a wait and see attitude."***

Gamaliel should have said everything he **did** say, but he should have added,

"And in the meantime, since we are supposed to be the religious leaders of the Jews and these men are Jewish...let's investigate this matter and see whether what these men are teaching is true. If there is nothing to it, then we will let it run its course. It will go away.

"But if there is something to it, if Jesus really did rise from the dead, then **our doctrine is wrong**: If He really did rise from the dead, then He really must be the Son of God. His death

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really was God's substitutionary sacrifice for our sin.

"And if this is the case, we dare not be neutral. We must believe on Him and become His witnesses, as these men are."

Think about it!

Don't you believe Gamaliel and these men knew Jesus had been raised?

Don't you believe Gamaliel and these men knew the veil of the Temple had been torn in two from top to bottom? I mean, what did they do when the veil was torn and they could just look right into the Holy of Holies? Well, I believe they just sewed that veil right up and carried on temple business as usual!

Wouldn't you think these men would want to find out or wouldn't you think Gamaliel could have led them to do this if he had really pushed it?

Gamaliel didn't do that. What happened is that events **did** run their course, and it was the course that God had already foreordained. Jesus had said, "**The gates of hell shall not prevail against My church.**"

Christianity did not fade away. Instead, it spread throughout the whole world. It grew in power. It has even come to America, a land that wasn't even known at the time of Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin. **It has prospered because it is not of man but of God!**

Verses 40-42...

Again, we see these men refusing to be quiet...

considering it a privilege to suffer shame for the cause of Christ and we see them teaching and preaching Jesus as the Messiah.

They did it **incessantly**...Every day they spent their time spreading the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They did it **insistently**...They went to the temple....when public meetings were thickest and also to every house for private meetings, throughout the city.

They did it **instructively**...It was Jesus Christ who was the theme of their teaching and preaching.

The lesson today has given us a sharp contrast between believers.

We saw two believers who didn't listen to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In fact, instead they listened to the enemy.

We saw these early apostles who were led and empowered in all that they did by the Holy Spirit.

(STORY ABOUT "MEANEST MAN IN TOWN"??)

I want to ask you... Are you listening to the enemy, as Ananias and Sapphira did? Or, are you listening to the Holy Spirit, as the apostles did? Are you living your life to impress man or to please God? May God empower all of us to please Him in all that we do.

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I'm excited as week after week in our study of the **Book of Acts**, we see how the words of the Lord Jesus Christ "**the gates of hell shall not prevail against My church**" are fleshed out!

May you and I be found as faithful in what God has called us to do as these apostles were!