

**“Week 8”**  
**Acts 4:32-5:11**  
**Downtown**  
**Week 8**  
**March 6, 2022**

Turn with me to Acts 4. Today we will finish Acts 4 and get into Acts 5.

If by chance you have been reading ahead in the book of Acts, you are well aware of what we are going to be talking about. When the average church go-er in America reads this passage, they probably think, “Oh my goodness. What is happening? Did God have a bad day?”

So far in the book of Acts, things are off to a good start. Jesus resurrected and showed himself to the apostles. Before ascending into heaven and told them to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, the helper Jesus promised. Jesus legit said it is better for you if I leave so that the Holy Spirit might come. And we see this played out. The apostles receive the Holy Spirit and there is an internal transformation in them and they saw the fruit of the Spirit all around them.

The apostles are able to continue the ministry of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit. And stuff is happening all around them. They are preaching and proclaiming Jesus with boldness. Signs and wonders are popping off everywhere. People are hearing the good news and responding with repentance and faith. The church is gathering regularly and people are hopping in constantly. They are devoted to Jesus, devoted to each other, giving generously and reoriented their whole life around the person and work of Jesus. **It’s beautiful.**

There are even some outside pressures and resistance. There is opposition, but even in the midst of those troubles there is **a sense and feel of victory.** Things are happening and God is on the move building his church and establishing his kingdom.

But this story is a break in the pattern. It’s a stark contrast to the pattern we have seen up to this point. It’s a, “What in the world just happened?” If the story of Acts so far would be described as beauty and victory, then this next section seems more like darkness and destruction.

So, here’s what I want to do. First, I want to walk you through the story and show you the contrast. Then I want to answer some questions that arise from it and draw out what they have to say to us for today.

So let’s start with the picture of faithfulness and fruitfulness towards the end of chapter 4...

**Acts 4:32-37**

**32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the**

apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Vs 32

**“Those who believed were of one heart and soul”**

Heart (Kardia) - pulsing heart, center of all spiritual and physical life. The center of the will and personality. The location of our deepest values, desires and affections. .

Soul (Psuche) - breath of life, what animates the body.

To be of one heart and soul was of the deepest connection. The core of who they were, their deepest values, desires, and affections, were all aligned. Their core identity was one.

The early church was unified just as Jesus had prayer in **John 17:20** - **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their words, that they may all be one, just as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, that that the world may believe that you sent me.”**

For these disciples and for those who will believe, Jesus asks the Father to make them as one, unified and in this unity may they bear witness to the reality of Jesus's life, death and resurrection. It was working, it was coming to pass. They were united in thinking, feeling, and will.

They were so unified that is says, **“But they had everything in common...There was not a needy person among them,”**

“The gospel had loosened their grip on their stuff and tightened their grip on each other.”

- JD Greear

The good news of Jesus transforms us, the Spirit of God actively working in us. When you start to see and understand the depth of Jesus' love and grace for you and for others, and when you begin to trust your life with it... it changes the way you see and relate to **things** and it changes how we relate to **people** and even changes how we relate to **ourselves**.

We start realizing that everything we have is just another extension of God's grace to us. We have what we have because of Him. And we start to realize that all of it is temporary. It begins to lose its luster. Our things, our possession, our cars, our homes, our bank accounts and everything else in between isn't the goal. It's not the important stuff.

But, people, people on the other hand... people are eternally significant. People are eternally loved by God... to the point that He gave Himself for them, to the point that He gave something of eternal value and worth - Himself - to forever reshape their destiny.

And when that reality starts to hit you, living generously with what we have starts to become the only thing that actually makes sense.

**We loosen our grip on our pride and possession and we tighten our grip on each other.**

**36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

Now we are introduced to Barnabas. We will read more about the life of Barnabas and the impact he made on the Church as we continue through the book of Acts. But for now he is the prototype. He is the example to follow. Legit, they changed that dude's name. Name changes in the Bible are usually a big deal. Names changes usually indicate a bigger inner change. Examples Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, etc. Don't want to make his name change a bigger deal than what it is, but it does represent his disposition toward himself and others.

To be an **encourager** means your gaze has shifted.

**You look to Jesus, you look out for others and you don't focus on yourself.**

To encourage someone is to push them toward Jesus. It's not superficial making people feel better about themselves. It's bigger and more beautiful. It's wanting what is best for people and constantly pointing them toward Jesus and reminding them of the gospel. It means you're not or can not be self consumed. You have to look at other people. Real encouragement requires time and proximity with people.

The gospel took root in his heart and it loosened his grip on his possession, it changed his perspective toward Jesus, whilst tightening his grip on people and relationships. He became generous and encouraging giving his stuff and himself away.

**5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and 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.**

And let the contrast begin. From beauty to darkness, from victory to destruction.

We are now introduced to 2 new people. Anania and his wife Sapphira. Like Barnabas, they too sold a piece of property, they too laid money at the feet of the apostles. But there was a difference. Their acts of sacrifice were not the same.

**3 But 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? 4 While 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."**

## **“why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit”**

If you are wondering, that's the complete opposite of being filled with the Spirit. Why has Satan filled your heart? Barnabas, a man filled with the Spirit. And Ananias & Sapphira, filled with Satan.

Contrast!

So what exactly was so wrong about the actions of Ananias and Sapphira? Was it wrong that they kept some of the money from what they sold? No. Peter says as much. The problem, and this will become even more clear as we move on, was that Ananias presented the gift as though it were the full amount. He presents it as though He had also done what Barnabas had done. Instead of saying, “I sold it for x amount, but kept some of it for some other things, but I wanted to give to you guys y-amount.” He says, “I sold it for y-amount and here's all of it.”

He's operating in secrecy. He's not being transparent. He is being deceptive. He is lying - which as Jesus says in John 8, “is Satan's native language.” Out of the heart the mouth speaks. **When Satan fills your heart, he also fills your mouth with lies and deceit.**

**5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.** I told y'all this was one of those “what in the world is happening” type of stories.

**7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.”**

That had to be a bit of a tense moment, right? What's she gonna do? Tell the truth? Or follow her husband's lead and lie?

**And she said, “Yes, for so much.”**

She chose to lie.

**9 But 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.” 10 Immediately 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. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.**

So here's what we see. Ananias and Sapphira appear to be like Barnabas, but upon further inspection, their hearts are off. Rather than being filled with the Spirit, Satan has filled their hearts.

Barnabas' generosity was motivated by love for God and love for others in light of the gospel. Ananias and Sapphira's motivated by something else - the love of self. They want to be seen as people who are like Barnabas, but without actually having to be that way.

Together they premeditated and collaborated on a scheme - outwardly looking like they are sacrificial and similar to Barnabas and others. Their sacrifice was all an act. **They were not actually sacrificially giving, they were actually seeking their own selfish gain.**

**Table of Contrast**

	Work of the Holy Spirit	Twisted work of Satan
Focus	Emptying of Self	Selfish ambition cloaked in sacrifice
Outward Appearance	Encouragement and Generosity	Feigning generosity and religious acts
Disposition	Honesty	Deception
Desire	Known and Loved	Hidden and Praised
Fruit	Beauty: abundant life, generosity, unity, multiplication	Destruction: death, scheming, disunity, breaking apart
Examples	Barnabas	Ananias and Sapphira

**This is a story of Deception and Hypocrisy-** they were trying to fool others into thinking they were something they were not. They were better off just keeping the property or keeping all the money or just being honest about what they were giving.

We do this too. We lie and deceive others and often times ourselves.

So what about you, when are you tempted to hide? When are you practicing deception?

- When someone asks you how you are doing? I am fine.
- At Group Time during Engage the Heart, what are you holding back?
- Are there areas in your life that you feign acts of service and generosity when in reality self gain is your driving motive?

Their lies, our lies were actually symptomatic of a deeper problem. Sinful actions are really just symptomatic of sinful hearts. Sinful actions - whether that be lying, or adultery, or stealing... jealousy, greed or any number of other things - are really just indicator lights - like the ones in your car - the something is off underneath the surface.

Sometimes we lie because the truth seems too costly: we might have to face the consequences for our choices. Sometimes we dont want to feel the costs of our sin: disappointing or hurting them. Sometimes we are embarrassed and dont want others to know.

Be we always lie because there is something other than God that you are worshiping. That is the root: believing you need for ultimate satisfaction or happiness. Something other than the love of God that is the

good life. Something other than God who can save you, set you free, or deliver you to your promised land.

We are not just passively not sharing, we are actively hiding.

This is what was actually going on with Annais and Sapphira. The problem wasn't just that they needed to simply stop lying. Sure, that's part of it. But, bigger picture their hearts were set on and filled up with something other than God.

**What a devastating story. In the midst of some much beauty and growth and excitement, why did God respond the way he did and what does that mean for us?**

Why death on the spot? This isn't how God usually responds right. Isn't God loving, kind, patient and slow to anger? Yes, yes he is.

First let's start with context. In the book of Acts, everything is heightened and magnified. Signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit seem like they are happening back-to-back-to-back. To such a degree that, in the portion just after our text today we're told people are bringing their sick into the street in hopes that Peter's shadow might fall on them to heal them. His shadow.

God is creating a people for himself. A people to follow after him and to represent him. A people to bring salvation and healing to the world. He is establishing his church and from this church in particular, all churches will descend from. God is setting a culture of holiness to be passed down from church to church to church. So sin is a huge deal.

As we have seen in previous weeks there is external danger to the church. There is real persecution and attempts to thwart the work of God. The real danger for the church isn't the attack from the outside, but it is the sin from within. God is holy and calls his people to holiness. And right in the midst of the Spirit moving to establish the church, Ananias and Sapphira pose a huge threat to God's people.

A similar story can be found in Joshua. The Israelites were freed from Egyptian slavery, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and were not entering into the promise land. God was establishing his people, his kingdom. There were obvious enemies around but the Lord had promised them victory. In Joshua 7, the story of Achan. The Israelites were humiliated in a battle and the reason was that Achan had disobeyed God and his sin impacted the whole nation. Thus leading to his immediate death.

At first glance, this doesn't feel loving or gracious. How can this be good or right? I normally receive God's grace and patience, why didn't they get the same treatment.

Obviously, I don't believe that it would be accurate to say that death on the spot is normative for sins of this nature. It doesn't appear to be the case. I know that many of us in the room have had times where we were intentionally dishonest, purposefully deceitful. And we are still standing.

But as this story tells us, it can and did happen when God deems it appropriate and necessary.

**Romans 6:23** says that the wages of sin is death, and in this story the consequence just came more quickly than is typical.

This story is one of the particular instances where God does something unique to emphasize a reality. God was establishing his people and what defined them as the people of God. Sin always leads to death, in these situations God hastened the process to show his holiness and to establish his culture of holiness.

Alright so now, what can we take away from this story?

**God sees our hearts.** - To the human eye the actions of Ananias and Sapphira are indistinguishable from those of Barnabas. But God sees. He knows our hearts, he know our deepest values, desires and affections. Pretending before God doesn't work. You can fool everyone, but you can't fool him. They were active in church and they were actively giving, but their heart was off. Their motives were wrong. Their love of money and love of praise drove them to concoct a plan of deception. They feigned generosity for the praise of men.

**Our sins is a big deal.** Sin is not to be coddled or minimized. Sin is to be repented of and put to death. The Bible says that sin leads to death, but sometimes it just happens a lot quicker. Matt Chandler compared our pet sins to keeping a pet lion. Seems cute, cuddly and harmless until one day it kills you.

*“If we are offended by the swift judgment of God described here, it reveals our ignorance of God’s holiness, our sinfulness, and the seriousness of our sin in relation to his holiness.” - CJ Mahaney*

Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are a reminder to us that our sins are a big deal. **II Cor 5:21. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

**Practical:** Where might we need to repent?

- Do we hold people tight and our possessions loosely?
- The passage also gets at motive. Where might we be doing the right thing for the wrong reason?
- Are there ways you are looking for man’s approval rather than God’s?
- Are their ways you are deceiving and lying to gain power or approval?
- Are you hiding anything?
- Are you pretending to be someone you are not? Where is your hypocrisy?

**Conclusion:**

The truth is: **you’re only as healthy as your secrets.**

You can look the part and just simply be playing a part... pretending, acting. In fact, that’s what the word hypocrite originally meant, “actor”.

You can be sitting here saying, “Jesus is Lord,” and it just be a show. You can be active in church, giving money and time, serving in Kidtown... but beneath it all, the you - the real you - the you that you are

when no one else is watching is saying, “something else is actually Lord, here.” whether that’s money, or success, or control, or sex, or comfort or something else...

Leonard Ravenhil says,

*“There are three persons living in each of us: the one we think we are, the one other people think we are, and the one God knows we are.”*

You can put on a front for others, you can even deceive yourself, but you cannot hide from God.

The most heartbreaking thing about Ananias and Sapphira, as well as me with my secrets, is that **there is no need for them**. If Jesus saved us based on merit then we should all play the game. But he saves by grace. It's actually by my honest admission of my guilt that he swoops in to save me!

Why hide?

Why pretend?

What possible motive could you have to keep playing a game when his grace covers you and his righteousness stands in your place????

God sees 100% of your sins, even the ones you’ve tried too hard to hide. And even still He loved you so much to send His one and only Son to live a perfect life to stand in your place, died a sacrificial death to pay for all of your secret sins, and He offers you His perfect record by grace alone through you crying out in faith and saying “Please save me! Please forgive me!”

The gospel makes secrets totally unnecessary. Secrets are foolish, backward, counterproductive. Why would you ever go back to the darkness when you’ve felt the warm rays of the sun over your entire soul.

The most heartbreaking thing about your secrets is that there is no need for them.

So what must we do?

Nothing new for us. We are called to confession and repentance. We acknowledge where we are. We confess our sins and then we repent. We turn from them. We stop pretending and we start being honest. We stop our current direction and path and we turn back toward Jesus. We take advantage of Engage the Heart to regularly confess our actions and acknowledge our motives.

**I John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Pray and lead into a time of response including prayer, communion, and singing.