

15b ACTS

Acts, chapter 5, verse 1. But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira his wife sold a possession, and he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God. Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last.

So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out and buried him. I would say that's the definition of unceremoniously.

Now, it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened, and Peter answered her, tell me whether you sold the land for so much. She said, yes, for so much. Then Peter said to her, how is it that you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.

Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

We go back to verse one where it says, a certain man named Ananias. You may recognize this name. It was the name of one of Daniel's three friends, Ananiah, Hananiah, Hanan is the word for grace or mercy.

And Yah, of course, is the shortened form of the Lord's personal name, Yahweh. So Hananiah, it's hard to know by the time it goes through a couple of translations here. It's either the Lord is gracious or my mercy is from the Lord, something along those lines.

He has the idea of grace and the Lord. Sapphira is an Aramaic name that means beautiful. I think it has its roots in the ancient Semitic languages that go all the way back.

You may think about the similar sounding name of Moses' wife, Zipporah in the King James. But if you see it dramatized, I think in the Turner thing they did on Moses, or maybe it was even in the Ten Commandments where they called her Sephra. But this is all basically the same word.

Sapphira, Zipporah, Sephra has the idea of going back to beauty, beautiful, that sort of thing. So you have the grace of the Lord and beautiful. You know, sometimes husbands will say, come here, beautiful.

Well, that's what Hananiah could say to his wife, and that was actually her name. So they sold a possession. They kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware.

Soon I do ace. This is the word for knowing and soon means with. She knew it with him.

They were complicit in this. Now, there's nothing wrong with selling some property and there's nothing wrong with giving all or potentially any part of that to the church as long as you are honest. But although we don't see it come out specifically in the transaction here with Ananias, we do see it when Peter questions Sapphira later on when he says, did you sell the land for so much? You've brought us 200 shekels.

Did you sell the land for 200 shekels? Yes, we did. We have brought it all and laid it at your feet. Well, they sold the land for 300 shekels.

And they kept 100 shekels back, let's say, and brought two thirds of it in and are representing that that is the whole thing for this. Both of them die. Now, let's take a poll.

You don't have to vote visibly. But if I were to take a poll, take a vote, how many of us think this seems rather unduly harsh? You've got Peter who denied the Lord. He didn't fall down dead.

Denied the Lord three times. What if as soon as the cock crowed, Peter rolled his eyes backward and keeled over for denying the Lord? That would sort of seem reasonable. Judas collected the 30 pieces of silver.

He didn't walk out from the environs of the temple and keel over dead. Herod slew John the Baptist and had his head chopped off and put on a charger on a platter. He didn't fall over dead.

So why do Ananias? In fact, a lot of people have looked at this and said there are people who don't believe in the inspiration and the infallibility and inerrancy of scripture. And they say, well, this is not really authentic scripture. Someone added this in later.

And it's not really true. And it's not really something to apply to our faith and practice because it's just too harsh. I mean, here's Peter who's been mercifully forgiven by the Lord.

And Ananias comes in and tells this little fib. I mean, he did give some of it. It's still a charity.

So so he misrepresented it a little bit. He doesn't say, Ananias, you want to run that by me again? Are you sure you don't want to, you know, let me give you one more chance to come clean here or fess up. And and, you know, we'll just give you your gift back and you take it home and we won't accept it after all or some such thing.

There's seems very harsh, doesn't it? Peter just says, why have you conceived this thing

in your heart? You haven't lied to men, but to God and he's gone. Why so harsh? Well, it's a good question. I look back at the Old Testament in the early days after the instruction of God comes to Israel.

And in the first few instances where someone brooks the law of God, God makes an example. It is not a rule that every time you gather sticks on the Sabbath, you're going to be killed. But the first man who did so after the instruction for the Sabbath came out was stoned to death, wasn't he? The first time someone decided that they would worship God in a manner not according to his instructions by getting their little brass censer and stick and some fire in it coming before the Lord, fire came out from the Lord and incinerated them.

And their relatives had to go up to the smoking remains of the corpse and scrape them off the deck with a putty knife and haul them off using their clothing as sort of a makeshift bag for what was left. Well, this didn't happen. I mean, egregious things happened after this, where they had golden calf worship and incorporated Baal worship and Molech and everything else in Israel.

And the first one to toss their child into the fire of Molech didn't fall down dead. Why here? Why now? And in the very asking of the question, you find a part of the answer because it is here and because it is now it is at the inception of the church. It is at the beginning where God's attitudes need to be expressed.

They need to be exemplified. God is going to make an example so that everyone understands. Now, the thing to keep in mind is, did the second, third and fourth person who did this and didn't fall down dead, did they sort of get away with something that Ananias and Sapphira did not? Manifestly not.

Ananias and Sapphira got their judgment from God on the spot as a warning and as an example to others. But do not kid yourself. All of the rest of us who commit similar acts will suffer a comparable loss at the time of the judgment.

I hate to keep harping on the judgment, but it is one of the most misunderstood truths. And God put it in his word to motivate us and to remind us to live our lives in godly fear, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to have endurance and patience and stick with the plan of God because there is a great positive benefit. There is great blessing and reward for those who are faithful.

And there is an equally great loss and sorrow and chagrin on the opposite end of that spectrum. It is a false picture to say, well, it would be like someone tying a rope to a tall branch of a tree with a tire on one side and saying, I'm going to climb up here in the loft of the barn with this tire and I'm going to let go of it and it's going to swing and it's going to come down a vertical and just stop. It's not going to swing equally far in the opposite direction.

You know how a pendulum works in the absence of friction, in the absence of resistance. A pendulum would swing forever. If you lift it up three inches on one side, it will swing to the center and go up three inches on the other side.

You know, in a perfect world without friction, without resistance, it would continue to swing back and forth forever. Equally opposite effects. Well, there is this myth in the Christian world that, well, God can raise us up on one side, but if we fall, we'll just stop at zero and we won't ever go into negative territory.

We won't go past this certain point. And it is not in the word of God. Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira drop in their tracks dead with no second chance, with no opportunity? What about the guidance of the Lord? If you have a lot against your brother, go and counsel with him and try to get in, then take a few more people and try to bring them along.

There is no question. There is no discussion. It's just why have you done this? And he's dead.

Verifies, lets Sapphira give the same testimony that Ananias did. Did you sell the land for so much? She tells the lie. She drops dead.

The feet of the guys that no sooner had even gotten the hadn't washed their hands yet from burying Ananias. And here's another corpse to carry out. This is the point.

God is giving us this as an example. It is a shocking reminder of the fact that less than whole hearted service to God is unsatisfactory. It is a sin.

The standard by which we are measured is the same as what was given to the Old Testament saints. What is the first and greatest commandment? What did Jesus say? What did he affirm when the lawyer answered this question? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength. You will love your neighbor as you love yourself.

You know, that second part, the golden rule is just another way of saying the same thing. If you do unto others as you would have others do unto you, you're basically treating them like you would like to be treated. You love your neighbor as yourself.

You treat them the way you would like to be treated because you love yourself and you want to be well treated. If you would like people to give you the benefit of the doubt, you give them the benefit of the doubt. If you would like people to respect your property and your privacy and your space, then you respect the privacy and the property and the space of others.

You don't tread all over theirs and then not expect that it's going to come back in kind, even if it doesn't come back in kind in this life. The Mosaic law, when it talked about an

eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life, we say, well, that doesn't seem to always play out here in this world. Well, this world is not all there is.

And there is a day of reckoning. And how many times do we see the principle expressed in Galatians? Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

Whatsoever a man sows, that's what he's going to reap. If you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap corruption. Now, when is this reaping? Well, it can be in this life.

It can be in the next life. It can be in both. Maybe you don't reap much in this life, but you can be sure that God is just and God is fair.

And apart from availing ourselves of God's grace, there is a, it's not exactly a loophole, but there is a way to escape our just deserts in this regard. And that is to turn around, epistrepho, to change the trend of our life and begin to live for God. And as we walk in the light, as we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, as we begin to judge ourselves, our judgment goes away at the judgment seat.

And we do not reap everything that we have sowed. It is like getting cancer and beginning to develop the inevitable malignant tumors and effects of that disease. And then unlike what happens in this life, if you were to suddenly begin living a healthy lifestyle and following certain procedures that you could somehow stop and even reverse that process.

It doesn't work that way in the physical realm, but it does work that way in the spiritual realm because God honors the work of his son. And if you honor the son, the father is pleased. And he is the one that was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.

The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all. And by his stripes, what does it say? We are healed. By his stripes, we are healed.

Now, what does that mean? It goes beyond just the payment of the penalty of death for sinfulness. By his stripes, we are healed. It is to the extent that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us, keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

1 John 1.7 and 1 John 1.9. That we move away from the judgment aspect of the judgment seat of Christ and into the blessing and reward aspect. But if we are apathetic and indifferent, if we don't claim the cleansing grace of God, if we trod underfoot the Son of God, if we count as an unholy thing, as a common thing, the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified, if we disregard it, dishonor it, pay no attention to it, you can be sure that what that blood does not erase and what that blood does not sanctify in our lives is going to come up at the judgment. It is all about our attitude toward God.

If we love Him, if we respect Him, if we obey Him, we move in an upward trend. We are

healed. We are forgiven.

We are cleansed. We grow. We gain capacity.

Our joy is full to the extent that we ignore that and we think, well, I don't see any bad consequence of this. It doesn't seem to make a difference right now. We are storing up for ourselves, as it says in Romans 2, indignation and wrath in the day of judgment.

And there is no further sacrifice for sin that remains. Hebrews chapter 10. Harsh principle of the Word of God, very seldom covered from any pulpit or any Bible class point of view.

You just don't hear about it very much. And it's unfortunate because we need that warning. We need to look at why Ananias and Sapphira die on the spot.

God did this for a reason. God stopped their hearts. Why? It doesn't seem like it was a big deal, but it is.

Take a look at this. It says, why did you keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? And Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. Now, is it possible to lie to the Holy Spirit? How does this happen? What does it mean to lie to the Holy Spirit? This is a view of fellow believers.

Because who was the lie actually told to? Does the Holy Spirit already know everything that's going on? I mean, he's omnipresent. He's God. He's indwelling believers.

He knows how much the land was sold for. He knows how much they bring to the church. He knows what they say.

So, in what sense is this lying to the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is filling the believers in the church, right? Jesus said, if you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me. There is a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit that is an unforgivable sin. And God the Father and God the Son don't take it well when people disrespect the Holy Spirit.

Blaspheme the Holy Spirit. And this is called lying to the Holy Spirit. There is a spirit in the church.

There is a fellowship in the church. There is an honesty and a level of brotherhood and communication in the church that Ananias and Sapphira are counterfeiting. They are deceptive.

They don't really care for people as much as they claim. They care for themselves enough to keep back a part of the price. But they want the respect.

They want the goodwill and the fellowship and the good opinion of everyone. And so they say, we've given it all just like old Barnabas. We want to be thought of just like

Barnabas.

Well, they're not Barnabas and they don't have the heart of Barnabas. And this is called a lie to the Holy Spirit. This verb here that is translated keep back is the very same verb that is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament scriptures when it tells the story of Achan and the sin of Achan in the book of Joshua when they go in and attack Jericho and God says, destroy everything.

It is Korban. It is dedicated to the Lord. Do not take any of it for yourself.

The spoils are to all be destroyed. And Achan said, oh, but look at these silks. You can't find this kind of stuff.

And look at this bar of gold and silver. Look at these other things. And so he snaked away part of it and hid it in his tent and his family knew about it and said nothing.

Kind of like Sapphira. And then you remember the casting of the lots and Achan is discovered. He acknowledges it and he is stoned.

Now, there were a lot of far worse crimes that were committed in Israel after they came into the land of Canaan. Why is Achan singled out and stoned to death for this? Some might call it petty theft. Maybe it was a few hundred dollars.

Maybe it was a couple of thousand dollars worth of stuff that he took. Why didn't they just say, come on, Achan, cough it up, go burn the clothes, throw the gold ingots and stuff back into the pile of rubble? There was no mercy, there was no second chance, he was just killed. Every time God starts a new economy, he makes examples and he says, I want to show you what my attitude is toward deceit, toward partial obedience, toward compromising and saying, well, I'll give God part and I'm going to keep part.

I'll have sort of a half-hearted obedience. Same thing here, the very same verb is used in the Septuagint as is used here for keeping back part of the spoils with Achan and keeping back part of the prize here. It was a free will choice.

There was no pressure other than pride and personal desire of some sort on the part of Ananias and Sapphira. So when it says he fell down and breathed his last, this is also language that is used of those who die by divine judgment. We're going to see it again later on in Acts.

Great fear came upon all those who heard these things. This is God's purpose. Great fear is supposed to come upon those who hear these things.

Great fear ought to come upon you and me when we look at this, because it is not a light thing. A lot of Christianity sort of presents our spiritual life as kind of a nice option. If you really want to please the Lord, if you really want to just kind of stand out and get to the

front of the pack, and a lot of us tend to say, well, I want to be in the comfortable middle.

I don't want to be real sinful and bad, but I'm not Billy Graham and I'm not any great sheik. I just want to kind of be in the middle of the crowd, just one of the great number of saints that go marching in. That's good enough for me.

And God says, look, you're going to be judged on an individual basis. It's not grating on the curve. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Every thought, every action. And the only solution to that very exacting judgment is to grow in grace and knowledge, to judge ourselves, lest we be judged. And to claim the cleansing grace of God, the cleansing of the blood of Christ that is ours on an ongoing daily basis.

It goes beyond the paying of the penalty to the sanctification of our hearts and of our lives. You go to Hebrews chapter 10, a little earlier in the chapter before the no more sacrifice for sin part where it says, let us draw near with a full assurance of faith, our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. That is our daily sacrifice of ourselves to God, Romans 12, 1 and 2. Therefore, brethren, present yourselves a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service.

That's what's going on here. The reason they drop dead is that it is very early in the church age. This is the first example of someone coming in and pretending to be something that they're not.

Pretending to love their fellow believers when they really don't. They have a self-serving motive. Keeping back part of what they claim to be giving to God for themselves.

God is pretty jealous about what is offered to him. And we've seen that same thing with Saul eating part of the sacrifice that belongs to God over in 1 Samuel. Well, three hours later, it says in verse seven, why three hours later? Why don't they both come in together and both drop at the same time? This gives us a little bit of a signal that there's a change.

Israel tends to be judged corporately as a group, don't they? The quail come in and lots of people, you know, the whole nation goes out in captivity. At least the Northern Kingdom does and the Southern Kingdom does. Things happen in groups.

You get judged by families and so on. Here, Sapphira, all she has to do, it's sort of like the Monty Python thing in the Holy Grail, where you come up to the bridge keeper and he asks the three questions. What is your name? What is your favorite color? And then some other question having to do with swallows or whatever.

All you have to do is give the right answer and everything is fine. If Sapphira had said, no, sir, that's not what we sold the land for. We brought two thirds of it and we kept a

third for ourselves.

She would have lived on into the church age and become one of the widows in the church that was cared for and had a place of service and a place of function and opportunity to grow. Instead, she repeats the lie. You will notice that she.

What do you say when you take the fifth? She incriminates herself. She incriminates herself. She bears her own guilt.

She tells her own lie. She doesn't ride out of this life on the coattails of her husband. She has her own chance to make her own statement.

And this is a signal that there is a change in the nature of judgment. Each of us will stand or fall before the Lord on our own. Obedience, our own faithfulness or lack thereof.

So Peter asks her, she doesn't know what has happened. Tell me whether you sold the land for so much. And she says, yes, I did.

And it is a big, fat lie. And we think, well, now, wait a minute. Who really got hurt here? It's still a donation to the church.

I mean, let's be reasonable. Well, you have to take it up with the Lord. The Lord said it's unacceptable.

And for that, you die. And she falls over dead. How is it that you have agreed? The last word she hears on this earth.

How is it that you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord? They have lied to the spirit of the Lord. They have tested the spirit of the Lord. I think we can get away with it.

Ananias says to Sapphira, and Sapphira says, husband, I think you're right. Let's do it. We can have the best of both worlds.

We'll please the church and we'll please ourselves. He says, look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door. They will carry you out.

Immediately, she fell down at his feet and breathes her last. Young men came in, found her dead and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. And you think, well, no notification of relatives, no ceremony, no eulogy, no obituary, no flowers, no candles.

That means they just carry them out, wrap them in their own clothing and stick them in the ground. No, you know, the whole purpose of a funeral and an obituary and eulogy and all the rest of that is to honor those who have died. It is as though this sin against the Holy Spirit, this testing of the Holy Spirit has wiped out whatever good might have been said about Ananias and Sapphira.

It's a very sobering thought. And once again, it tells us the purpose of this great fear came upon all the church and upon all those who heard these things. And we should do the same.

We should take heed. It is the same God who will sit behind the judgment bar on the great and terrible day of the Lord. And we want to ensure that we have heard and heeded this example through the hands of the apostles.

Many signs and wonders were done among the people. They were all with one accord in Solomon's porch, yet none of the rest dared join them. But the people esteem them highly.

There is a level of courage and a level of visibility on the part of the apostles who gathered now that they've seen the rest of them. You get the idea the other nine have kind of ridden in with Peter and John, who took the first steps of courage in becoming visible and manifest on Solomon's porch. But notice they're in Solomon's porch there at the temple in Jerusalem, in Judea, which is a part of Israel.

The apostles were called and commissioned by the Lord Jesus to be witnesses unto him, both in Jerusalem and Judea, which is part one. And in Samaria, which is part two of the nation of Israel, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. And that's exactly what they are doing.

They are following their commission to the letter. It's exactly what they're supposed to do. Believers were increasingly added to the Lord.

I should point out, by the way, that back up in verse 11, when it says great fear came upon all the church. This is the first time that ecclesia is used to designate the church proper. They've been called an assembly, they've been a group and so on.

Jesus said, you know, used it in the sense of assembly. But as a word that means a local church or church proper, this is the first use here in Acts 5.11. None of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches.

That at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also, a multitude gathered from surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and all those who were tormented by unclean spirits. And they were healed.

This is an answer to the prayer that they prayed that God would manifest his presence and validate their message by these supernatural signs. This is every bit as symbolic and temporary as the rest of it. Supernatural discipline, supernatural signs, supernatural manifestations of the spirit.

All of this signals the change. It is a new dispensation. It's a new way of thinking.

Well, we ask ourselves, so what? Now that I've gone through the first 12 or 13 verses of Acts chapter 5, so what? What should I come away with? Looking at the courage and boldness of the apostles and the healings that are taking place, the growth of the church, and yet this very harsh discipline. In our lives, the power of God is available. It is a power that is represented to us as strong enough to heal physical disease, strong enough to raise the dead, strong enough to take withered legs that have been withered for upwards of 40 years and make them whole and functional in an instant.

The power of God is no less now than it was then. And we think, well, there are these soul problems. I've got kinks.

I've got issues. I've got history. People around me have got problems and they're making my life a misery or whatever.

This scripture tells us that there is power available from God. God provides for us in a lot of ways. Concrete ways.

He provides for us through people. He provides for us sometimes through technology. He provides for us in lots of different ways.

But the issue for us is, are we fulfilling that first and great commandment? Are we dedicating ourselves to the Lord? Are we offering ourselves wholly? You know, when you take the oath of federal office of any kind, military or whatever, it says, I, Samuel C. Hall, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and that I will carefully and diligently fulfill the duties of the office upon which I'm about to enter. It's the same oath the president takes right down to the newest buck private, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. That's what God is looking for from us.

Do we offer ourselves as living sacrifices without hesitation, without reservation? Are we an entire sacrifice or are we keeping part back? This is not yielding the sense of saying, oh, Lord, I give up. Just take me, carry me to glory. Just inhabit my body and motor me around and make great things happen.

This is a conscious dedication. If you were going to have a manservant or a maidservant back in days gone by, you wouldn't want an unthinking, unsentient being that you had to give every little command to. You want someone who can anticipate, who can think the way you think.

When you get ready to put on clothes, they're already laid out. When you're thinking about having a meal, they walk in and it's on a tray. They are in tune with you.

They're sympathetic and empathetic and know almost before you ask that this is what you're going to need and this is what you're going to do. And they're there and they're

an aid. And you think, what a blessing, what a great thing to have this servant.

You don't want one that's just saying, just tell me what to do and I'll do it. And then doing nothing. God is not looking for mindless automatons.

And the surrender movement in Christianity is an atrocity. It's an abomination. God wants dedicated, thinking, motivated people in his family to offer themselves wholly.

And that is what we have represented here in Ananias and Sapphira. So it's a question we have to ask ourselves and a dedication that we have to renew before the Lord daily. How am I going to live this day? Am I going to give a little time to the Lord and then set him aside and go my own way? Or am I going to try to do whatever I do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men? So it's a good, memorable picture to keep in our thoughts as we go forward into the weekend and into the weeks ahead.

And we trust that the sacrifice of Ananias and Sapphira in the negative sense will motivate us to make a positive and beneficial sacrifice of ourselves in a positive sense. The death we die, we should die to sin. And the life we live, we live to the Lord.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for giving us such clear and graphic pictures of your purpose and your will and your thinking, your attitudes and your priorities. For us, we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress these truths on our souls.

Help us to see the application in our own particular circumstances. Each of us must live our lives before you. Each of us is not beholden or accountable to the other, but we are accountable and beholden before you.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us insight and wisdom as we seek to apply your word. And we pray that in all things, our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. And we pray it in his name.

Amen.