

16a ACTS

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our Bible study tonight, in the Book of Acts, to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, and acknowledge the presence and the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. We had a fruitless endeavor without His guidance and His help, not only in learning, but also in recalling and applying the things that we will see in God's Word tonight. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for bringing us safely through another week.

We thank You for the challenges and the tests, as well as the blessings and the graces that You have bestowed on us each and every day. We thank You that we have the opportunity to spend time in fellowship together in the study of Your Word. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding, help us to take from our study those things that You would have in our souls so that we can think and decide and act in a way that is in accordance with Your plan, that accomplishes Your purpose and reflects Your glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Tonight we resume our study in Acts chapter 5. We saw the first 11 verses last time, Ananias and Sapphira.

For me, and I think probably for most normal human beings, this is kind of a scary story. Relatively minor infraction it would seem. They weren't totally up front about the profit margin on the sale of the land.

And because of that, they both were instantaneously struck dead by God. Well, I wasn't completely satisfied with our coverage of that last week because I still didn't feel like we really had a handle on why this happened. We understand that God does things, and our conclusion last week was that God does this, especially at the beginning of a dispensation, to point out His priorities and to let us know what His attitude is towards certain kinds of decisions and actions that people have made.

It doesn't mean He's going to strike everyone dead who tells a lie or that there won't be far worse things done by people, but it is a point of reference, it is a reminder that there is a God in heaven who is holy and righteous and who takes His righteousness seriously. So that's about a 30-second summary of what we gleaned from this last time. But I want to point out one additional thing as I have continued to work on this and think about it and I want to share with you my more recent conclusion.

If you look back in the latter verses of chapter 4, look with me back up at Acts chapter 4 and verse 32. It says the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. All of this is really important information, I think, in understanding the Ananias and Sapphira incident.

It says the whole group, the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one

soul. What does this mean? They are united, they are considered to be an indivisible group. You talk to one, you're talking to them all.

You look at one, you're looking at them all. They are all closely associated with one another. They are like-minded, right? So, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

This meant whenever there was a need, someone would just say, well, no problem, we can meet that need with this thing that I have over here. Or another one would speak up and say, well, we'll meet it with this thing over here. Now, this is by way, you remember our old friend the chiastic structure, the chiasm? The reason they call it a chiasm is the Greek letter chi is like a big X. And if you look at an X shape, you've got a wide part at the top and a wide part at the bottom and you have a convergence in the center.

And in a chiasm, the things in the top half of that design correspond with the symmetrical opposite on the bottom half. So, outside most elements would match, intermediate elements would match, inside that would match, and you get to the center, and at the center of a chiasm is the place of emphasis. This is literally the point of the chiasm.

This is what everything is pointing to. We have something like that here in verses 32 through 35. Look at it.

Most of those believe one heart, one soul. No one said he possessed anything of his own. They had all things in common.

With great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. That is the center of our chiasm, verse 33. Because then we go back and repeat some things we had back in verse 32.

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked all who were possessors of land or houses, sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, laid them at the apostles' feet, they distributed as anyone had need. This is information we've already had, just in a different form, and it creates this bracket and this envelope in which we have this unique piece of information. With great power, the apostles... Why is this in this paragraph? The more I looked at this, the more I scratched my head.

It's talking about everyone is sharing and sharing alike. No one has a need. They're looking out for one another.

Everything's fine, but right in the middle of that, completely different subject. With great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is their job, isn't it? What did Jesus tell them before he left? You, eleven, will be witnesses unto me.

Remember that? Matthew 28, 19, Acts 1, 8. You have been with me from the beginning.

You have seen. We looked over in 1 John.

John says the things that we have handled, the things that we have seen and heard, we're passing along to you so that your joy will be complete. Right? So, the whole point here is this testimony of the disciples. It almost gets lost in the details in our English translation here, but this is the big deal.

It is critically important that Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, i.e., the nation of Israel, get this message. Now, let me ask you. We had Johnny Cash die last week.

If Johnny Cash came back from the dead, and I came in here and said, Hey, by the way, did you hear Johnny Cash came back from the dead? What would you think? Does this typically happen? How many people can you think of in the last couple thousand years that have come back from the dead? Anybody? I can't, since the time of Christ, I can't really think of anybody that's come back from the dead. So, if I were to tell you, Johnny Cash is back. If you listen real close, you can hear fulsome prison blues.

What would you want by way of confirmation? What kind of proof? Oh, I've got a picture here taken with a digital camera. No problem. Click and drag.

I can click and drag some picture of Johnny Cash from the past and put it on someone else's body, holding a newspaper with today's date, and say, well, you know, that's been faked out. What's the best evidence of a thing being true? It's eyewitness, right? If you can't see it yourself, you know somebody that you consider to be trustworthy that says, look, I saw this. I don't particularly believe in a lot of demon possession and poltergeists and teacups smashing against the wall.

I've read about it. People claim it. They reenact it on television.

But if someone I knew and trusted, if my mother came and said, Samuel, I was sitting in the living room the other night, combing out the dog, teacup flew across the room and smashed against the wall. This is an eyewitness account from someone whose credibility I value, right? You think of somebody. Think of somebody in your periphery who you think is the most trustworthy.

If they told you something, you'd believe it, right? And that person comes and tells you, I just saw Johnny Cash down at Walmart singing Folsom Prison blues. Well, you'd have to deal with that, wouldn't you? It would be an issue because a credible source has given you eyewitness testimony. Let me say that again.

A credible source has given eyewitness testimony. That's what's happening in verse 33. These disciples do not have a black mark against their name.

No one's ever heard them lie. No one's ever heard them deceive. No one has ever accused them.

You think about Samuel the prophet in our first Samuel study. When he comes to the people and they've anointed Saul as king, he says, have I ever taken a bribe? Do I have anything in my hand that you've given me to pervert justice or cause me to not be credible and true? And all the people say, no. You have always told us the truth.

Your credibility is completely 100% sterling with us. You are good to go. That's the case here.

And that's the point of this little construction in verses 32 through 35. Now, with that in mind, what is God up to here in Jerusalem and Judea? What's he trying to impress on his people, the nation of Israel? Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ, by the foreknowledge and will of God the Father, died on the cross.

He wasn't accidentally executed. He was delivered over with the full foreknowledge of God. He was crucified and he was raised from the dead.

And these 11 men are eyewitnesses of his resurrection and even beyond the 11. There are others who were in the upper room. Well, for this to go over and for this to have impact in the nation, these people have to have credibility, right? So what's going to happen when the details of this Ananias Sapphira real estate deal leak out? They sold the land to a guy for 500 shekels.

They bring 300 shekels to the church and they keep 200 shekels for themselves. When this gets out, how fast is that going to spread through Jerusalem and Judea? Those people down at the church, those lying ingrates, saying it damages my reputation. I paid 500 shekels for that land and they're saying I only paid 300 shekels for it.

Where's the other 200 shekels? This gets out and pretty soon, what did it tell us in verse 32? They were of one heart and one soul. So if Ananias and Sapphira have the reputation for being dishonest and deceitful, if they lie to their own people, what are they going to do when they're talking to outsiders? If they're not even honest amongst themselves, this is a direct attack on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's why it's so serious.

Because these men are the eyewitnesses that God has detailed to confirm and convey that information to the nation of Israel. And these people, because everyone is of one heart and one mind, and they're all so closely associated and they have everything in common, if they'll lie to each other, well, they must be lying to us. So it's a serious threat, which God puts a stop to.

Somebody told a lie in the church and they got struck dead. Now what's the reputation of this group going to be? The only ones who are still walking around talking must be telling the truth, because the ones that lie get struck dead. Right? This is what I think is really going on here with this dynamic.

And when you get down and Peter says, you have not lied to men but to God, and this is

another place where the Greek helps us out here, because the idea is you have not lied with reference to or with a view. They did lie to men, didn't they? They came down and said, hey, here's all the money that we got from the sale. They did lie to men.

But what he's saying here is this lie, the issue is not that you lied before men. The issue is that you lied before God. God has a vested interest in the credibility and the truthfulness of the people in this group.

And when you told this lie, this is an issue between you and God much more so than between you and the actual human beings that you told the lie to. Now, having figured this out and having had it make sense to me, then what was my next question to myself? So what? What does this mean to me? How should I then live? What principle of interpretation and application do I draw from this? Well, at this particular time in the history of the church, God has a high priority on the witness, right? One of the things that has happened is people have looked at that and said, well, because God had a high priority on personal witness from the disciples, he wants everybody in the church to always have a high priority on their personal witness all the way down to the end of time. Well, and this is a big tradition in Christianity.

Well, you've got to have a personal witness. You've got to live as a model for others and let your light so shine and this kind of thing. And so people wind up sort of putting on a show of joy when they don't really feel joyful or friendliness when they don't really feel friendly or kind of almost a hypocrisy that goes on in the name of maintaining a good witness.

That's really not the point here. And why? Because the witness of the disciples is unique. These are people who walked with Jesus.

Their eyewitness testimony, remember what I said earlier? The credibility of the source of eyewitness testimony is what's in view. We are not eyewitnesses. We are the recipients of that testimony.

I haven't seen the resurrected Lord and you haven't either. Not yet. So this particular witness is not what's in view.

So what is the interpretation application after we figure out what's going on in Ananias and Sapphira? Well, at that time, what was foremost and important in God's plan was this eyewitness testimony. The thing that was important in God's plan, what was moving forward in His plan, was the disciples testifying to the resurrection of Christ. What is the important thing now? What is the focus and the calling and the emphasis for you and me? Did God give us Acts 1-8 and Matthew 28-19 personally? He didn't.

He didn't say, I want you to be eyewitnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. What does He tell us? What is He asking of us? What is the emphasis each and every

day? How do we measure the success of this day? This is a Friday, Friday the 19th of September, 2003. We lived a day today.

We engaged in tasks. We checked things off a list. We did this.

We did that. We talked. We thought.

We had meals. We did all the usual things that go on in a day. We're toward the end of that day now.

As we look back over the last 12 or 14 hours, what is the measure of this day? Whether it had any meaning or purpose. How does God look at it? What is God going to measure it by? It isn't how far I got down my to-do list, or how much of my particular responsibilities I fulfilled in the human realm. It is how and why we do what we do.

What is the how? What are we called to do? I did a search in my software here on the word faith in the New King James Version. As you can imagine, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of uses of the word faith in our Bible. 428 separate occurrences came up in my search.

Beginning in Genesis 22.1, Abraham's faith. All the way through to the book of Revelation. It occurs in almost every book in some form, either explicitly or implicitly.

When you get to the New Testament, let me just read you a few, just from the Gospel of Luke, because we studied it recently. Luke 5.20 Jesus, when He saw their faith, said, Man, your sins are forgiven you. The man that was let down through the ceiling.

Surely I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel. Talking about the Roman centurion. He says to the woman, Your faith has saved you.

The woman with the issue of blood that touched the hem of his garment. He said to the disciples, who were afraid in the boat, Where is your faith? Daughter, be of good cheer. Your faith has made you well.

Peter confesses his faith. If God clothes the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, how much more will He clothe you? O ye of little faith. Over and over and over again.

It is faithfulness. Jesus says in Luke 16.10, He who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much. Jesus talked about having faith like a grain of mustard seed.

So I would suggest to you that a likely candidate for what is the emphasis, in the same way that we see God focusing and concentrating and emphasizing this testimony of the resurrection of Christ. Because that is the proof of His deity. That's the proof of His saviorhood.

Is the fact that He was raised from the dead. Paul says, if Christ is not raised, you are

dead in your sins and your faith is vain. The resurrection is key.

The resurrection is all important. If there is no life after this life, then what is the point? There is no hope. We are lost.

Our life is futile. We are tiny microbial organisms on a speck, flying through an infinitude of space, living and dying, turning back into individual atoms and molecules with completely no purpose, no future, no impact. Our planet will eventually be enveloped by a swelling, dying star and incinerated.

Anything we've ever done, anything we've ever thought will be completely obliterated. And what's the point? We had to snuff out one of our pets last week. And I think about the difference between a pet and a human being.

Well, euthanize. We had to euthanize a pet last week. Did you ever think about that? Euthanasia? Euthanasia.

Thanatos is the Greek word for death. Eu is the prefix that means good. Good death.

Well, if there is such a thing, it's kind of an oxymoron. Euthanasia is a good death or a death that has a good purpose, supposedly. At any rate, you think about this.

Here's a little animal that lived for a number of years, had memories, had behavior patterns, what it had gotten used to, what it liked and what it disliked, who it knew, what was familiar, what was unfamiliar. And yet, when an animal dies and its brain goes to room temperature and all the little electrical impulses cease, all of that is erased. It is like your computer rebooting before you saved your document.

It is just gone. You can work for six hours. I told you the story.

I'll tell you it again. One of my first clues of what it was going to be like to be a computer guy was way back in about 1985. It was the winter of 1985 and I was working on a little TI-99 with 16 blazing K of RAM and I was typing up a test for my students because I was teaching.

Algebra test. Composed all of these problems in my head, had them all neatly arranged on a paper, was just getting ready to print and a teacher, who was also the wife of the president of the school, came in and it was cold. And she wanted her heater and so she came in to get her heater out of my office and take it into her office and she reached over and unplugged the heater and walked out but it wasn't the heater, it was my computer.

And my test that I had been laboring on for two hours just went and was gone. Well, this is what happens when an animal dies. All of its stored memories, all of its everything it's ever learned and done and known just vanishes and is gone.

We are not that way. Why? It is only because of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because God has chosen to give us life eternal.

Death is not the end for us. We do not lose our memories. In fact, we will gain them.

When we get into our resurrection bodies, we will have you want to talk about Arnold Schwarzenegger and total recall? He doesn't even know what total recall is. Everything that we have ever experienced you know how people under hypnosis can remember things that they would otherwise not be able to recall? You know why that is? Because every minute of every waking moment of every day is stored in our soul not in our brain. It's in our soul.

The brain is a retrieval mechanism to pull information from the soul into the conscious mind. You can suffer brain damage. They can give you a lobotomy and you can lose the ability to recall.

You can lose the ability to exercise certain kinds of functions, but nothing they do to your brain can affect your soul. Your permanent long-term eternal storage is in your soul. All of your recollections, all of your memories, all of your knowledge, all of the Word of God that you learn is stored not in your brain, but in your soul.

Your brain retrieves it. As your retrieval system gets old and worn and begins to malfunction, you can no longer remember the things that you would like to remember. I saw an interesting snippet, about 15 minutes I guess, because it was mostly in Spanish.

It was about a girl who had a mini-stroke. She was not very old. She was in her 20s.

She lived with her mother down in Mexico. She suffered a mini-stroke. She was bilingual.

English and Spanish. Her mother spoke only Spanish. Almost everybody in the area.

But her job, she had a good job because she was bilingual. She had this mini-stroke and she woke up one day and she could no longer remember her Spanish. She lost it.

I think this is based on a true story. Well, her fellowship with her mother is gone. They can't communicate anymore.

She can't understand Spanish. Her mother doesn't understand English. The story, I didn't see the whole thing, but it kind of went through her tribulations of trying to adjust to having lost her Spanish.

She went to therapists and went to one thing and another. But one thing that they did a scan and showed this damaged area that this mini-stroke had taken away in her brain. But when she was under stress or when she became emotional her Spanish would return.

Her mother got hit by a car and she ran into the street and she was saying, call 911 and hurry up by Udemé and this and the other. It was all coming out in Spanish. She didn't even know it.

She was talking to the ambulance driver and talking to her mother all the way to the hospital. It was all in Spanish and she didn't even realize that she had gone back to the Spanish that supposedly she had forgotten. But see, that kind of thing is in the soul.

It's stored in the soul. You and I are eternal beings. This little temporary habitat the New Testament says we dwell in a tent.

It's just a temporary dwelling is going to be replaced by something so long term and so permanent. And we're going to take everything with us. That's why the measure of a day is faith.

Did we live in the light of eternity? Did we live knowing that God is watching? That God is evaluating? That God is looking at us watching for faith? Two people can mow the lawn. One of them is saying, you know, this is my responsibility and my duty. I do this because it makes other people happy.

It's a responsibility of a homeowner. I picked a good time. I'm doing it in the right way.

Someone else can be out there fuming and grouching. Why do I have to do this? Somebody else ought to have done this and now I'm having to do it. You're both doing the same activity.

One can be doing it heartily as under the Lord in faith and the other one can be just chain sinning, cluster sinning, multiple explosion sinning, step after step, pass after pass. Who planted that little plant there? Down it goes. In sin, it is not so much what we do as why we do it.

Because we are creating a record of the soul. We are creating a record in God's book. This is the emphasis.

Now, back to Ananias and Sapphira. We need to be sensitive. We need to be aware of what God is looking for.

Is God just looking at a student and saying, well, what's on your report card? Is God just looking at someone in a job and saying, well, are you crossing all the T's and dotting all the I's and getting everything done that's assigned to you? Does God look in a home and look at a homemaker or look at a husband or a father or a wife or a mother or whoever, children, and say, well, did you do everything everybody expected you to do? That is not His measure, is it? He's saying, why do you do what you do? Are you doing this because you want to please me? Are you doing it because you respect the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross? Are you doing it because you know there's an eternal future

coming and you recognize that these are exercises to get you ready? Eternity is an awful lot longer than this life. This is our boot camp. That is our career.

You can disqualify yourself for a lot of things if you mess up in training. You can also qualify yourself for a lot of things if you excel in training, if you are dedicated, if you persevere, if you pick yourself up when you fail and get back up and try again and learn and grow. That's why we're here.

Ananias and Sapphira did not notice that God had a high priority on the credibility and the truthfulness of this very close-knit group. To become a liar in this group is to damage the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the heart of the gospel.

It is the center of God's plan. Anything that tampers with that is going to receive serious divine retribution. Well, guess what? What is the center and the focus and the emphasis of God's plan in your life and in my life now? It is walking by faith and not by sight.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. If we sin willfully after we've received the knowledge of the truth, there is no more sacrifice for sin but a certain fearful expectation of judgment. But, by faith and by patience, we inherit the promises.

By faith and by patience, we rule and reign with Christ. To the one who overcomes, remember those letters we studied in Revelation 2-3? To the one who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne. I will give him a white stone.

I will give him a new name. He will not be hurt by the second death. He will not be a loser.

He will be a winner. He will not be standing there saved yet so as by fire. He will be standing there as a mirror and a reflector of the glory of Jesus Christ because he took up his cross, denied himself, and followed by faith.

Live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Why are the words of God important? Because they are the object of faith. Faith is not just a scrunching up inside and trying real hard.

Faith is treating facts as true. Treating the word of God as true. So, the whole point here, I think, in Ananias and Sapphira is to wake us up.

We need to be aware of what God is looking for and be aware of how severe the consequences are if we are opposite that. If we are apart from that. If we are opposed to that.

We carry the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? We are saved by the blood of the Lamb. We are marked. We are sealed.

We belong to Him. What we do matters before God and God is not asleep. He's not busy

somewhere else.

He is intently watching each one of us. We have been given much by way of information and knowledge of the word of God and from those to whom much is given much is expected. So, when we are tempted to be distractible, apathetic, indifferent, caught up in the affairs of this life, we need to remember Ananias and Sapphira.

They thought it would be great to have some extra cash. Think what we could do with a couple hundred shekels. What they didn't know is they had no life left after telling that lie at the church because there were much bigger issues than how much cash on hand they had in the house.

We need to be aware that God is serious about calling us to a life of faith. We need to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith. That's the calling of God.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to move forward in chapter 5 because the sad you sees are going to be back in the picture. So, let's take a break and when we come back, we'll see what's up with them.