

17a ACTS

After I rebind my other Bible, I'm going to rebind this one. Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study, as is our custom, to go before the Lord in prayer. It gives us an opportunity to clear our minds, to acknowledge any unconfessed sin, and to be conscious and aware of the importance of the ministry of the Spirit for not only our study and understanding, but also to remember and be able to apply what we see in the pages of God's Word.

So we pray. Father, thank you for giving us another opportunity to assemble ourselves in accordance with your command, to spend time in fellowship in the study of your Word, to receive the benefit of the spiritual gifts that you have distributed to each one of us. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, for our salvation, for the potential that has been given to us for our lives to have meaning and purpose and definition, that we can take the time that is allocated to us and parlay it into eternal benefit and opportunities in the future.

We ask that you will guide us in the study of your Word through the Holy Spirit so that we will come to an understanding of what you would have us to know and to practice in our lives in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We resume our study of the book of Acts. We have seen most of the content of chapter 5, which began with the rather frightening story of Ananias and Sapphira. I keep trying to leave chapter 5 and I keep being dragged back.

It's like a hand coming out of the swamp and grabbing me by the ankle and saying, why didn't you cover this? There's one or two more things that I do want to point out before we leave this because it reminds me of the book of Genesis. Acts is to the church what Genesis is to Israel. It tells us where a lot of things came from and many things are introduced.

You will remember that a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession. He kept back part of the proceeds. His wife was aware of it, brought a certain part and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

The thing that we emphasized in our last couple of surveys of this is, why was God's judgment so severe? The answer to that question that we looked at last time is because the testimony of the Apostles is superintended by God's Holy Spirit. They are filled with the Spirit. They are notorious for being representatives that are guided and motivated, energized and given a message by God's Spirit.

If that Spirit is foolable, deceivable, and if this group that is so closely knit and so closely identified with one another, all of the individuals in that group are seen as one, they have all things in common, this severely damages the credibility and the witness to

Christ's resurrection. And God says, I will show you that my Spirit knows the truth and knows the difference between truth and error, between truth and deceit. And the first time someone introduces deceit in the presence of the Holy Spirit, as He is manifest and operating in the Apostles, it is met instantly and severely with deadly force.

God says, don't think for a moment that my Spirit is kind of a half-baked, come and go, now you see it, now you don't, kind of thing. It is real. It is present.

This is an important message and nothing is going to get in the way of it. So if there's one thing we remember from Ananias and Sapphira, it is that the emphasis and that which produces godly fear in all who heard it and should do so today, is that the message that God sends through His Spirit is important. Jesus said there is only one unforgivable sin, and that is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Anytime you find something that God will kill you for and not forgive you for, you find the Holy Spirit attached to it. His witness to Jesus Christ is so important. God emphasizes it throughout the New Testament, and we will see it as we go forward.

So that's all the review we're going to do for our last couple of sessions. But now you will remember that when Peter sees Ananias come in. Now this is some weekday, it would appear, and it's interesting that there seems to have been people coming and going all day long and it wasn't out of the ordinary.

I didn't really mention this before, but if you think about it, Ananias comes in, Peter speaks to him. Three hours later, Sapphira comes in. Now, there's no church in Dallas that I know of that you could come in, say, at 930 in the morning and see everybody at church, and then three hours later come in and there's still people all there worshipping.

But this gives us an indication that there was something going on in the place of meeting, which would have been someone's house. But wherever the apostles were staying, it was kind of like an all-day Bible class, and people would come and go as they were able. The apostles did nothing but teach all day long.

And so someone might have the morning free and they would come in and listen for a few hours and then had obligation and had to leave. Somebody that was busy in the morning might come free and come in and sit in and listen to what was being spoken of in the afternoon. But the apostles appeared to have been holding forth all day long.

People came and go, come and go as they are able. So Peter says Ananias, and also other business was being transacted, other things were going on. They evidently had announcements and activities and made decisions and did things other than just have Bible class, because this conversation takes place.

And Ananias comes in and evidently says, well, Sapphira and I just sold the North 40 and here's the 300 shekels that we received for it when they really sold it for five, as an

example. 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? Having said all that we have said thus far, we have not said anything about Satan's role in this, have we? Peter says 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? Well, if you think about that, this raises some questions. Ananias is a Christian.

Sapphira is a Christian. He commits this sin. He makes this decision in cahoots with his wife.

Peter says, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart? Well, this is an interesting question to try to figure out because Ananias does not answer that question. He doesn't say, well, we got out the Ouija board and you know, here came Satan. But the question deserves an answer.

Why has Satan filled Ananias heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back a part of the price of the land for themselves? Peter goes on to say, 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? So look at the second statement there pertaining to this. First of all, why has Satan filled your heart to do this? Then in verse four, why have you conceived this thing in your heart? So there is a partnership here. There is a collusion.

There is a permission that Ananias has given to Satan to fill his heart. Satan is not struck dead on this occasion. Ananias is.

So where does the what is the answer to the question? Why has Satan filled your heart? The answer is because you let him. You allowed it. You cooperated in it.

Satan did not sneak up behind Ananias and overpower him and say, I've got a gun in your ribs. We're going to go in here and we're going to keep a part of the money. We're going to attack the credibility of the message.

We're going to squelch this Christianity thing before it ever gets off the ground. And if you don't do exactly what I say, bad things. This is a cooperation.

It is a collusion. It is a permission and an allowance that Ananias has made. This is why Ananias suffers.

Even in the garden, when you look at Adam and Eve and the serpent, you have the serpent getting some comeuppance because he came uninvited. He came without the cooperation of the foreign ideas that would not have occurred to her had he not showed up. This, on the other hand, you have no indictment of Satan.

You have no indictment of an outside agent. And yet Satan is said to have filled Ananias heart. Of course, first scripture you think of in that regard is be not drunk with wine or is

it wearing his excess, but be filled with the spirit.

That is a command. That is an imperative. And we choose whether or not we are going to be filled with the spirit.

Looking at this example, we find out that we can also choose to be filled with Satan. Why has Satan filled your heart? This is basically a statement of fact. You could turn it around and say Satan has filled your heart.

Why? And this is a believer. So, you know, we've talked about things like demon influence, demon oppression, demon possession. I'm not sure that you can slice things that finely, but Peter says that Satan has filled his heart.

And this is Ananias fault. So what is our conclusion that we draw from this? We must be careful when we are thinking through problems and entertaining possible options as to what we are going to say and what we are going to do, whether it's how we spend our time, what we choose to look at on television or in movies or on the Internet. We choose.

I like that thing. I think it's over in Job chapter 31. I think of this because a lot of us, because of our profession, wind up spending a lot of time, you know, in the media or on the Internet.

But you look over at Job chapter 31. Job says, I have made a covenant with my eyes. Why then should I look upon a young woman? For what is the allotment of God from above? What is the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is it not destruction for the wicked and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does he not see my ways and count all my steps? Job says, I know that I am under the watchful gaze of the Almighty.

I have made a covenant with my eyes. I am not going to let certain things into my mind. I'm not going to let certain things fill my heart and soak up my time and my attention because God has allotted an inheritance of destruction for the wicked and disaster for the workers of iniquity.

He says in verse 5, if I have walked with falsehood or if my foot has hastened to deceit, and a lot of times when we start getting tangled up in things that are not legitimate, there is a deceit involved. We wouldn't do it if someone was looking. We wouldn't do it in the presence of other people.

But when, you know, this is something that the first pastor that ever taught me a whole lot used to say, you really find out what you're like when you're alone. That's when you find out where your priorities are. That's when you find out whether or not you are content with your own company or if you require stimulation.

You require the company of people. You get so uncomfortable alone that you've got to go do something. You've got to go be somewhere.

You find out a lot about yourself when you're alone. Why has Satan filled your heart? Because you let him. Because you invite him.

Because we make choices. We make decisions. And it's a wonderful thing to look at the pattern set by individuals that were pleasing in God's sight in the Bible.

And here's one of the things that Job did. Job said, you know what? I have made a contract with myself. I've made a contract with my eyes that there are certain things I am not going to look at.

Maybe I have the opportunity, but I'm not going to be David on the roof of the palace getting up out of bed at evening. What was he doing in bed in the evening? It was the time, the Bible says, when kings go forth to battle. We'll see it in 1 Samuel here, not too distant future.

At the time when kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab and he didn't go. He delegated that. He should have been out with the army.

He's back in the palace. He should have been up and around and doing the business of the king. Instead, he slept in.

I'm the king. I don't have to get up. So he gets up in the evening and he walks on the roof of the palace at a time when he shouldn't have been walking on the roof of the palace.

Shouldn't have even been in the city. But he's made a series of lackadaisical poor choices. And it puts him in a position where as he looks over the edge of the roof, he sees Bathsheba taking a bath.

She does never close on. And he is suddenly filled with lust. Doesn't know the woman.

Doesn't know her name. Sees her. She's beautiful.

He says, it's good to be the king. I'll just send a servant over. Have her come up.

All no end of grief comes after that. Why has Satan filled your heart? Because you let him. You open the door by violating the goals and the norms and standards that are part of the Word of God.

And he finds the house clean and swept and empty. And he's going to move right in. That's the answer to that question.

So there is a power that we give to Satan that he does not legitimately have on his own. He cannot storm the defenses that God puts around us through his spirit and through his word. But if we go and unlock the gate and swing it wide, he will come in.

He will fill and he will lead us down a path of destruction. Secondly, it says while it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? This tells us that the idea of having all things in common and meeting the needs of the poor and all of that was completely voluntary, not compulsory. Much has been made of the idea that, well, believers ought to really just consider their goods to be a part of the church.

And anytime the church has a need, they should start contributing in. Especially when you get in large churches with a big infrastructure and they sort of want you to believe that giving to the church is identical and completely the same as giving to God. Well, maybe it is and maybe it isn't.

That's an evaluation and a decision to be made. But you cannot come to act and say that the ideal New Testament model is for us to be communists and just throw everything in the same pot. Because Peter here says you had this land and it was yours and after you sold it, the money was yours to keep.

He doesn't say you have kept back what rightfully belongs to the church and because you kept what belongs to the church, God is going to strike you dead. Just the opposite. He says what was the reason for you to lie? Why were you trying to, if you had just kept the land, everything would have been fine.

If you had sold the land and kept the money, everything would have been fine. The problem came when you came down here and perpetrated a deceit. Because unbeknownst to you, what you thought was sort of a petty white lie that would get you in good with your fellow believers and you thought maybe you would be as well thought of as Barnabas is, what you unwittingly have done is open up an avenue of attack against the message and the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the single most important fact in human history.

And the testimony and the witness to that, there is nothing that has ever been revealed on the planet more important than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And unknowingly and unwittingly, they have, Ananias and Sapphira, have opened this crack that if it is not filled and if it is not closed, can invalidate the message, can stop the church before it ever gets started, can corrupt the gospel before it ever gets spread. And God says no way.

I will cut you off. Why have you conceived the thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God, which of course is impossible. What made you think you could lie to God? You cannot lie to God.

You came down here and said this is all the money when it's not. God is manifest and present in the person of the Holy Spirit who immediately identifies your lie and because he is God, is judge, jury, and executioner. Notice Peter does not say you will pay for this

with your life.

Peter doesn't point a finger and lightning comes out. Peter just tells him the attitude of God about this. You have not lied to men, but to God.

And Ananias falls down and breathes his last. God killed Ananias, not Peter. Great fear comes upon all those who heard these things.

And I mean immediately. This is great fear fell on everyone who heard before Sapphira ever shows up. This is the sort of thing, you know how it is when something happens, 9-11 or the Challenger disaster or some such thing, it spreads like wildfire.

You know, phone lines light up, people tell people, tell people, and it is immediately all over town. Well, in these days when life was slow and agrarian and when something like someone being struck dead took place, I mean it just rippled outward almost like they had electricity. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things, and that is God's intent.

We ought to be afraid of getting in the way of the plan of God. And what we don't realize, what Ananias and Sapphira did not realize, is that obedience and integrity and faithfulness had consequences that they were unaware of. And a lack of integrity and a lack of truth and obedience had consequences that they were unaware of.

We look at things and we weigh it and say, well, I can bend this rule. I can override what I know to be right this time, because it won't really make a big difference. Who's going to see? Who's going to know? And what we need to remember is this example, because we don't know what's on the line.

There could be a stadium full of angels that God has assembled, looking at our life at this particular juncture with this particular set of choices, and God is about to make a teaching point. And we say, it ain't no big thing. Nobody's looking.

Nobody knows. It's just an attitude in my soul, or it's just a little activity I'm going to participate in. I'm going to pull up this page, or I'm going to watch this movie, or I'm going to read this book, or I'm going to do whatever this thing is, and it's just no big thing.

You can't say that. We can't say that, because we've got such a limited point of view. These two people here had no clue what a serious issue this was, and that it was going to cost them their life.

Do you think if they'd known ahead of time that this was life and death? What's the point of keeping 200 shekels when you die? I mean, it's ludicrous. But the point here is, we don't know. You cannot decide the relative value of obedience or disobedience in any given circumstance, because we just don't have all the facts.

So the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Unceremoniously, there was no memorial, there was no eulogy, there was no obituary, there were no flowers, no preparations with embalming and spicing. They wrapped him in his robe, dug a hole, planted him in the ground.

It was about three hours later when his wife came in. Came in where? Came in where Peter was. And there were people present.

Many, many witnesses for the first thing and the second thing. And this tells me of this ongoing situation in whatever house they were currently meeting. Most people today would be horrified if you had a Bible class that lasted three hours.

You know, it would just be egregiously bad. Tell me whether you sold the land for so much. She said, yes, for so much.

You'll notice that she doesn't walk in and receive a sentence of death. She walks in and it is her own testimony. She is condemned out of her own mouth.

We all stand or fall on what we do. Not on what we might have done, not on what we are assumed to have done, not even what God knows we will do or could do. It's what we actually do.

There is a school of thought that says, well, you may die young. You might die at the age of four or five. But God knows what you would have done.

And so your salvation will be based on whether or not you would have accepted Christ had you lived to accountability, etc. Nonsense. Every place in Scripture where you find someone being judged, you find that they have condemned themselves or they have vindicated themselves by their obedience or lack thereof.

You never find God coming in and saying, hello there Hezekiah, I've got to kill you now because I know you're about to be disobedient. Or Ananias, I know you're about to lie to the Holy Spirit. You're about to try to perpetrate this land deal fraud, so you're going to die.

And Peter says, well, group Ananias and Sapphira are not here with us this morning. They were about to lie to the Holy Spirit, so God killed them. I just thought I'd let you know.

It's always God gives us the rope to either climb into the gospel ship or hang ourselves from the yardarm, one or the other. But we are judged based on commission or omission, not on potential. Well, I just wanted to cover those points, especially with regard to Satan, because do not think that Satan has disappeared off the earth and is no longer a factor.

Paul tells us our warfare is not against flesh and blood. The pushes and pulls and temptations of our society and our culture are perpetrated with malice of forethought. There is a plan.

There is a design. There is a desire on the part of Satan and on the part of his minions, his principalities and powers and rulers in high places. He has an organization.

He has generals, and he has colonels, and he has majors, and he's got captains and lieutenants. And it's not like the record Matthew and I heard when we were a child. You know, we're all evil, satanic, and bad, and that's our form of government, disobedience, confusion, frustration.

It's just kind of a wild mob of demons going helter-skelter, wreaking havoc. Satan is organized. Satan is intelligent.

Satan has an agenda. He has a plan and a purpose. He knows where force can be applied to maximum effect, and he works through systems, and he works through ideas, and he works through culture.

He works through Hollywood. He works through the Internet, and his goal and desire is to distract us, to deflect us, and to deceive us. If he can lure us into something, if he can masquerade as an angel of light and get us busy, flying elbows and knees to do evangelism rather than growing in grace and knowledge of the Savior, so be it.

Because we can run around the earth making two-fold the children of hell that we are. If he can ruin our motivation, if he can take away our integrity, if he can deflect us from the righteousness that comes by faith, that's what he will do by any means possible. Your adversary, the devil, roams to and fro seeking whom he may devour.

He doesn't devour anybody he wants to. He finds the weaklings. You think about those Safari National Geographic films.

What do the lions get? They get the slow gazelle. They get the limping gazelle. They get the weak ones, the slow ones, the dumb ones.

Well, I don't know about you, I do not want to be the foot-dragging gazelle, you know, that stuck his head up one second too late and is devoured. If we get devoured, it is our fault. Why has Satan filled your heart? Because you were so busy getting that last tasty clump of grass, you didn't stick your head up and see the lion coming and flee, flee youthful lusts.

Well, we go on forward now and I want to probably go ahead and pause here and take our break. We're going to pick up after verse 11. Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

Great fear ought to come upon us. We ought to have a sense of working out our salvation with fear and trembling when we look at these things because this has been written for us. God could have had this happen and motivate the Jerusalem church and then it kind of got lost in a haze of time.

But Luke wrote it down under the ministry of the Spirit to make an impact on us and encourage us to look at our lives and decide whether or not we are pursuing faith and obedience. It goes on to say in verse 12, that through the hands of the Apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. 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, laid them on beds and couches so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. One thing I did not point out here last time is there is no record here of Peter's shadow healing anyone.

It says people tried to lay the sick in the street so that his shadow might fall on them. Whether this is because they knew that it would heal, but the Bible doesn't say that. And you get the idea that this is sort of a superstitious thing.

We find out later that sometimes they were mailing out hankies that the Apostles had touched because the hanky was thought to have some healing power. But just to be faithful to the details here, it does not say that those upon whom the shadow of Peter fell were healed. It says the people fought that.

So whether it actually healed, I have no information here. It tells us that this was the attitude of the people. I personally suspect that they weren't.

First of all, if you think about the Middle East, most of the time when you're out and about, it's in the middle of the day and you don't have a very long shadow anyway. And Peter would have to be practically stepping over them for his shadow to hit them. You don't cast, you think even at three, four in the afternoon, if you look at your shadow, it doesn't go very far.

You'd have to be within a foot or two of someone for your shadow to hit them. But I think the mystique around the Apostles, because they're doing these signs and wonders, has infected the people with a kind of superstition and an unreasonable expectation. And you see this happen in the church today.

You see a celebrity ship around the famous, whether it's some well-known pastor or Billy Graham always comes to mind. He's probably the most well-known Christian in the world. But there is sort of a vortex that forms around those who are well-known.

And there is a pull and a draw and an attraction where people expect that the blessing of God is just going to hit you because you're near this locus of spirituality. And it's not

true. The Bible does not say that.

Each of us is judged according to the standard of God's Word. Just because your parents are faithful doesn't mean that you will be blessed. Just because your child is faithful doesn't mean that you as a parent is going to be blessed.

Just because your spouse is faithful does not mean that you as an individual will be blessed. Each of us is accountable to God. When we stand at the judgment, it's not a group event.

We're not graded on the curve. We're graded against an absolute standard of God's Word. And so it's important for us.

You hear so many times people say, well, I'm a Methodist, or I'm a Baptist, or I'm a Presbyterian, or I belong to such-and-such church. And oh, we've got the most wonderful ministries. So what? You could belong to the greatest church in history and go to the judgment and get slapped down and be chopped in cotton for a thousand years.

Your church membership does not count, even in our church. Not that it would. But it is not our associations.

It is our faith. It is not our nearness to a celebrity. It isn't because the shadow of Peter has fallen on us that we will be blessed, or that we will grow, or that we will accomplish anything in God's plan.

It is the simple act of faith. It's knowing God's Word, thinking about God's Word, measuring our day-to-day activities in the light of God's Word. We don't have to be thinking verses and prayers every minute, but when we undertake a task, we ought to take a breath and say, how would God have me do this? How would God have me handle this? What is the God-honoring choice as I undertake this conversation, or this issue, or here's a thing that has sprung up? What does God expect of me here? How can I handle this in a way that's honoring to Him? Someone has asked me a question.

How can I respond and not hide my light under a bushel, and yet not make myself an odious, obnoxious idiot that drives people away either? And to send up a quick prayer and ask God for wisdom, and live our life day by day in that faith and obedience. That is the way to please God. That is the way to stand on the day of judgment and not be ashamed at His coming.

That is the way to be filled with the Spirit and not filled with Satan. Well, let's pause and take our break. When we come back, we're going to finish chapter 5, and we're going to move into chapter 6.