

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - The Protection of the New Testament Church

Sermon Text - Acts 5:1-14

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

“With fear and with trembling, Through tears and repenting, I'll never forget it the mercy of God”
When we are willing to admit our sinfulness and repent, oh the mercy of God that flows into our lives. It's powerful! He doesn't hold it over our heads the wrong things we have done, rather He lets us know that we are forgiven, redeemed, restored, and reinstated to a right relationship with God! But we must never forget that God's mercy is something that He will never force on anyone! God won't push His will, His love or His help on us, we have to allow it, but God is always working for our ultimate good and for the ultimate good of His body, the church, His followers. And as we'll see today, God is very protective of His people and their well being. Let's pray and we'll learn some very important lessons from a tough chapter in the life of the New Testament Church. Pray.

Today's history lesson from the New Testament Church is a tragic, true story. It's a story that has great implications and lessons for our lives today! It is a story that if misunderstood or misinterpreted can lead to a misunderstanding of God and His mercy. Last week we talked about the DNA of the New Testament Church. We talked about their unity, their selflessness, their message, their theology of grace, their good stewardship, and their Godly leadership! One of the examples of this Godly leadership is found in the last two verses from our text last week...

Acts 4:36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),

Acts 4:37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

That act of sacrificial giving was used as an example of a Godly leader! Barnabas was a leader who selflessly gave of his own resources to help others. He went on to become one of the great leaders of the New Testament Church and encouraged other churches around the region. Today we will read a story that, I'll say again, is somewhat difficult for many of us at first glance. It seems extremely harsh, severe, unforgiving, unmerciful and heartless. However, upon further study and reflection, we see that the action taken by God was justifiable, though unfortunate and sad that it had to be taken. Let's read our story and I'll explain...

Acts 5:1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

Acts 5:2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

Acts 5:4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

Acts 5:5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

Acts 5:6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Acts 5:7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Acts 5:8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."

Acts 5:9 Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

Acts 5:10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Acts 5:11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Acts 5:12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 5:13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

Acts 5:14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

When we read this story the focus is inevitably on the tragedy of death! At first glance, it makes God seem intolerant, cruel, and vindictive. But upon closer inspection, you'll discover something quite different. You see, in this story the tragedy did not begin with death, it resulted in death. You might wonder what in the world I'm talking about. Well, there are other tragedies that led up to this tragedy and there were additional tragedies that would have happened had God not stepped in when He did. Let me just state a few facts: Ananias, and his wife Sapphira, owned the land and were not compelled by God or the Apostles to sell their land. It was totally voluntary. This passage is not a passage about tithing or giving. It's about the tragedy of deception, pride, and a willingness to place one's own self interest above the needs of everyone else.

You see, Ananias and Sapphira could have kept their property outright, or sold it and only given a portion to the Lord, as Peter said, it was totally in their hands. However, what they did was sell the land and lie about how much they sold it for so it would appear in the eyes of everyone around them they had given 100% to the Lord! They wanted to look like Barnabas, and wanted the praise and adoration that had been given to Barnabas and wanted leadership positions in the church like Baranbas, but they were nothing like Barnabas. They were true hypocrites. They were one thing, but wanted everyone to think they were something else. I've often taught this principle: We are all sinners in need of a Savior, and once we have received Jesus as our Savior, we've been forgiven for our sin, but now need Jesus to be our guide and our strength as we seek to overcome our sin and begin living different lives, but we aren't perfect. Sometimes people will say to me, "Pastor Larry, the reason I've not been coming to church is I'm struggling with some things, sinful things, and I don't want to be a hypocrite!" While that may seem noble,

it's misguided! People who are struggling with sin need to come to church and hear God's truth on how to overcome the power of sin! They need to find brothers and sisters in Christ who can help them, encourage them, and hold them accountable. We are all sinners in need of help from God and His people to overcome sin! God's not going to strike you down because you come to church and you've messed up!

There's a difference between a sinner and a hypocrite! A sinner is a person who sins, makes mistakes, and struggles to overcome sin. Just because you may be struggling with sin doesn't make you a hypocrite! That makes you a human being in need of an Almighty God to come to your aid, first as Savior and Redeemer and then as your personal spiritual trainer in life, which He does by way of His Holy Spirit. In the New Testament Church, and even among the disciples, there was room for the skeptic, the doubter, the seeker, the downcast, the downtrodden, the sinner! And that is still true for God's Church today! The hypocrite, on the other hand, is a sinner who claims to be without sin, or wants people to think they've got it all together and have no need for anybody's help, they've got everything under control, all the while living in sin. And the worst of hypocrites are the ones who take it a step further by putting up the false appearance of righteousness for personal gain, power, position, prestige, profit.

Let me clarify something, if you run a business you've got to make a profit, that's not an evil thing, and working hard to achieve success is not a bad thing either, but if everything in your life is about material gain, and your position in this life, and your status in the world's eyes, then you miss out on real life, real peace in life, and real meaning in life! It's good to work hard and to do your very best at your line of work and for that work to be rewarded financially. But again, let me stress this, if your main goal in life is about material and financial success then you will miss the greatest and most important things in life as you pursue things that can never truly satisfy. Like I said last week, when you give something up to God and He gives it back to you, it's so much better because that thing no longer has control over your life, and that means you have freedom in Jesus rather than bondage to the things of this world!

Now back to our story! God knows the heart!! He knew Ananias, and Sapphira's hearts! He knew they weren't repentant, or sorry for what they had done, they simply were sorry they got caught. That kind of attitude in the very beginning of the New Testament Church would have contaminated the DNA of the church and caused extreme issues down the road. If that kind of treachery had gotten into the leadership of the church, the eternal destiny of millions of souls would have been affected. Let me put it this way: The deceiver who wants to infiltrate the leadership of the church for personal gain, that's an intruder in God's house and He will protect His Home! He knew their hearts. I believe if there had been even the slightest chance of true repentance, there would have been a different outcome, but God knew they had made up their minds to take a deviant path and had no desire to change. They had become so darkened in their souls that they were going to refuse any attempts by the light and conviction of the Holy Spirit to change them. We must never forget that only God has this kind of insight into a person's soul. That's why I will always hold out hope for anyone to come to Christ. I never give up hope. Only God knows the heart! So bottom line, when we get to heaven we can ask the

Good Lord to explain the details of this story to us! But there's some very important lessons we can learn from this story and we don't have to wait for heaven to get these insights!

Lesson #1 - Your Life is an Example

Acts 5:1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

Acts 5:2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

How tragic that Ananias had decided to be such a horrible example to his wife. He abdicated his role as a spiritual leader in his home. And what a sad thing that Sapphira evidently put up no fight. One of the things I teach to couples is that the man should be a Godly leader and example in the home and to remember it's about leadership not dictatorship! And it is equally important for the woman to encourage her husband to be a Godly leader, to take his role, and to challenge him in a gentle, but firm way if he is not stepping up or doing the right thing! But this topic of example, goes for everybody in this room, married, single, young and old alike. The example you chose to be is so important and will have a positive or negative impact on those around you! By the same token, the influence of others on our lives is strong and the examples we choose to follow can determine the very course of our lives. However, we must understand no matter how bad the example of people around you, you still have a choice of who you're going to follow! Sapphira looked to her husband and followed his lead. She did exactly what he led her to do. It cost her her life. Here's a good question: Who are you following? The Book of Psalms starts out with this advice...

Psa 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Psa 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

When God was expounding on the law He had given to Moses on the mountain, He said this...

Exo 23:2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.

The choice you make concerning who you will follow is critical. A bad choice in this matter can either make or destroy your whole life. So there's the tragedy of following a bad example, but there's also the tragedy of being a bad example! I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say, "I just wish I could go back and do things differently. My behavior led others astray." I'm so glad God is a merciful and forgiving God for anyone who is truly sorrowful and willing to repent of their past mistakes! Be a good example from this day forward. Sometimes people ask me how they can know they are truly forgiven for past mistakes. I can say with 100% assurance, if you have the desire to be forgiven, God will not turn you away no matter what you've done in the past! Just be truthful with the Lord! He knows your heart anyway! John tells us this...

1 John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Here's what we need to remember about this lesson on being an example to others...

Someone's always watching you! You may not think it, but you are the person someone looks up to, whether you are worthy or not. You are an example, either good or bad, but you are an example. Dads, your sons and daughters are watching you. Your sons are watching how you treat your wife. Your daughters are watching your example for how they ought to be treated. Would you want your daughter's future husband to treat her the way you treat your wife? Mom's, your daughters and sons are looking to you for an example of what it means to respect your husband, to love him, and to work together as a team. Your example has a bigger impact on their future marriages than you could imagine. Two final Scriptures on the matter of example. Paul gave Timothy this advice...

1 Tim 4:12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Paul gave Titus this advice...

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness

Titus 2:8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

And this leads us to our second lesson from this event...

Lesson #2 - Deception Destroys

Acts 5:3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

The tragedy of being deceived.

Ananias had allowed himself to be deceived by Satan. He evidently listened to the lies of Satan and became convinced that the evil he was doing was somehow okay. It is amazing how people

will rationalize horrible behavior. They allow Satan to convince them that it doesn't matter. But God's Word is plain that it does matter...

Rom 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Rom 1:19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Now I want to say again, God doesn't strike someone down when they mess up, or even if they choose to reject Him. I once outright rejected Him. But I was shown mercy! I believe this passage is talking about folks who go on the offensive against God. It says these ungodly men suppress the truth by their wickedness! But for people who are trapped in sin, and struggling with sin, God gives so many chances for redemption. He extends His grace over and over and over again. But sometimes, no matter how often, and regardless of the extremes God goes to offer His love, forgiveness, mercy, help, grace, and kindness, there are those who will reject it because they have been so deceived by sin! Sin looks so good, so desirable, so satisfying, so rewarding, but it's a mirage! Have you ever thought about how hard it must have been for Moses when he was faced with the decision to follow God and rejoin his people, who were enslaved by the Egyptians, or whether or not he would take advantage of his position as an adopted son of the Egyptian Pharaoh's daughter. Be a slave or live in the palace? The writer of Hebrews describes his decision this way...

Heb 11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Heb 11:25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Heb 11:26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

I'm amazed at the honesty of God's Word when it comes to sin. This is a passage where God lets us know that sin is pleasurable, but only for a short time! A life of sin will never bring about the life of purpose God so wants each of us to have! Later the writer of Hebrews says this...

Heb 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Now it's one thing to be deceived, but an entirely different thing when a person decides to be a deceiver! If a person chooses to live a life of deception knowingly leading others astray, they invite the judgment of God into their lives. Especially when it comes to children. Jesus said this...

Luke 17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.

Luke 17:2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

This seems so harsh, but Jesus is saying if you live a life of deceiving others and causing others to sin, you are racking up judgment to come! You are perpetuating evil in the lives of others and unless you are willing to repent of these behaviors, you will be held accountable. And it is especially grievous when you mislead children into sin! God loves children and takes it very personally when we sin against them. But this passage is not just talking about sin against children, but causing someone else to sin, regardless of age, is a serious offense! But before you throw your hands up and say, "I'm done for, I've caused others to sin!" Hear this...if you are truly sorry, and ask forgiveness, then the punishment Jesus took on the cross, covers your sin. The reason the crucifixion was so horrible was because our sin was so horrible and Jesus had to pay the price! However, the choice to let Jesus' sacrifice cover your sins is yours and yours alone. He won't force you to accept His love and forgiveness! And that takes us to lesson three in our story today...

Lesson #3 Choices Matter

Ananias and Sapphira had a choice! Peter said...

Acts 5:4 "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

They had a choice, you have a choice! Adam and Eve had a choice. In fact God had said this to the Children of Israel back in the book of Deutoronamy...

Deu 30:19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live
Deu 30:20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Some choices can be changed. You may say, I've done wrong and I want to change. I want to make better choices. There's hope for you today. Here's the amazing thing. If you are willing to admit you've been living in sin, even in deception, and truly want to change, then I believe

there's still hope for you and our great God of mercy will transform your soul. But you have to repent. John the Baptist and Jesus said this...

Luke 13:5 ...But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Repent means to turn from your sinful ways and walk in a new direction! The Children of Israel had been so rebellious against God, but listen to what He told them...

2 Chr 7:13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,

2 Chr 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chr 7:15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

Some choices cannot be changed. Some choices you have made in the past have had their impact. You can be forgiven but there are some things that cannot be changed, which leads me to our final lesson from this story...

Lesson #4 Consequences are Real

Acts 5:5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

Ananias and Sapphira's choices had consequences. God acted decisively because He knew the intent of their hearts and He knew they evidently had no desire to repent or change! God took steps to protect the DNA of the new Church, because the church was God's plan to take the Good News of Jesus to the world then and all the way down to us here today! The consequences for Ananias and Sapphira were extreme because what was at stake was the eternal souls of untold numbers of people! Aren't you glad not all choices have such extreme consequences? Yet we must remember that all choices do have consequences. both temporal and eternal, good or bad! When you sin and mess up, it doesn't mean God is going to strike you down, but we must never forget that the consequence of sin is always destructive and can be deadly. That's why God hates sin so much, because it hurts us so much and God is a good Heavenly Father who doesn't want to see His children suffer the consequences of sin. God's Word says this in Romans 6:23...

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death...

That doesn't always mean physical death! Sin can kill your witness, your joy, your peace, your relationships, and even your health. But God has a prescription for sin...

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And once you receive Jesus as your Savior, you'll have a different motive for life! You will no longer desire to live for me, myself, and I, but for God and for others! And as you choose to live your new life according to God's will, it will have positive consequences! But if you choose to continue living according to your selfish desires, it will have negative consequences! I've known people who have chosen to live lives of greed, envy, selfishness, and bitterness, and it ain't pretty!!!! I don't want to live like that. On the other hand I know people who live lives of, generosity, humility, love, and forgiveness, and while their lives are not perfect or without trials and tribulations, I can tell you the peace, the purpose, the joy, the hope, and the deep, deep meaning they find in life is priceless!!

There are some of you in this room today and you are in the valley of decision. You've got a choice to make. Are you going to let go of your pride and trust God to show you what really matters in life or will you continue to follow the world's deceptive prescription for happiness? The consequences of your decision are real and they matter! And here's something so important to remember: Even though the consequences of past sins and mistakes are real, God will not only forgive you of your sin, He will help you get through the consequences! He's just that kind of good God!! And let me say this...Sometimes life can toss some really hard things at you that are not consequences of bad decisions you made, but may be the result of other people's bad choices or it may just be a part of living in this old fallen world! However, I want to remind you of what Jesus said to His disciples? Listen...

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

So it's not "if" you have trouble in this world, but "when" you have trouble in this world! During those times you have to decide whether or not you really believe God is good in His ways, and will give you His peace in the midst of the storms of life or whether or not you will blame Him for all the bad things that happen in life! You have to decide if you will let Him help you through the bad things in life, whether it's your fault or not, or if you will go it alone! And here's a beautiful thing: even if we are dealing with the consequences of our own bad decisions, God cares about us so much that He won't say, "you made your bed now you're going to have to sleep in it!" As I said before, some consequences can't be undone, but God will help us get through those things, learn from those mistakes, and begin living a different life with different outcomes. But you have to decide if you will let Him help you! He wants to help you so much, and what a blessing that God cares that much! The Psalmist reminded us of this fact...

Psa 46:1 ...God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Peter said...

1 Pet 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

1 Pet 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Pet 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Pet 5:9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 Pet 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Pet 5:11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

God protected the New Testament Church so they could get that message to you and to me!

Let's pray!