

ACTS#3 CHAPTER 5 A DEADLY DECEPTION

Acts 5:1-11

Acts 5 we see the early Church in a the midst of a great revival which every pastor hope for his church.

But let me warn you

When God's church is experiencing revival,
that is when Satan attacks

He is the enemy of all God's plans,
and he was persecuting the early church from the outside
Using the Romans and the Pharisees

But that tactic didn't work

So he tried a different strategy and attacked from within

The church today is discredited more by

Unfaithful pastors,
Addicted ushers and greeters
Broken marriages,
Lying members,
Than by the world.

It was the morning of the big parade,

a man and a little boy entered a barber shop together.

"Give me the full treatment," the man said. "I want to look good in the parade!"

After the man received a shave, manicure, and haircut, he placed the boy in the chair.

"I'm going to buy a new tie for the parade," he said. "I'll be back in a few minutes.

When the boy's haircut was done and the man still hadn't returned, the barber said,

"It looks like your daddy forgot all about you."

"That wasn't my daddy," said the boy. "He just walked up, took me by the hand and said,
'Come on, son, we're gonna get a free haircut!'"

It troubles all of us when a Christian is arrested,

Or a fellow believer is found out to be a hypocrite or a liar.

SLIDE ---Ralph Waldo Emerson had this to say about that:

It is what is within us: We hear the stories of pastors to priests,
Church leaders, Sunday School teachers, and youth directors,
getting themselves into trouble and appearing to
Get by without much disturbance to their lives.

The question is: Can we sin and still get away with it?

Can Christians lie to God and not be held accountable?

Can they break marriage vow, remarry and live happily ever after?

Can they be addicted to porn, drugs, alcohol, and still be faithful?

Pretend to be generous when they are greedy?

Does God automatically forgive and forget?

You cannot claim to be a disciple of Jesus

And live like the devil and not suffer consequences!

Even the early church had is high-profile phonies.

Ananias and Sapphira who were big news in that day.

Dr. Luke made it a point to record the story

So it would survive as a lesson for us today.

New converts were flocking to Jesus by the thousands.
Miracles were performed every day.

I. HUMANS ARE DECEITFUL

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

They were the perfect couple.
With names to match.

Ananias meant God is gracious
And **Sapphira** the Aramaic word for Beautiful.
They were the recipients of God's generosity.
Rich enough to own land,
Probably extra land beyond their home estate.
They were the socialites caught up in the center of all
that occurred in the growing first church.

They had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.
Witnessed the movement of generosity sweeping over the believers.
Went home and discussed what God was inviting them to do.
They talked, prayed, and decided together
to sell their land and give money to the church
as an act of worship to God.

So they came back to church and announced their plan.
To the congregation, the building Fund, and Finance Committee.
It was a bit like signing a pledge card
And as soon as God blessed them,
They would contribute the cash when the land was sold.

These are the type of people that every church needs and honors.
Godly,
Generous,
Good hearted.
But something went wrong.
Behind the show of spirituality
Was a premeditated deceit.

²With 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 5:2

Maybe there was an explanation.
They had intended to turn it all over, but now
the new house, or car, kids off to college,
that European vacation, that fishing trip to northern Canada..
And at the last minute decided to hold back a portion of the money.

II. SATAN USES HIS INFLUENCE

Although I doubt they recognized their partner in the deal,
This was a conspiracy of three.
Satan was part of the plot,
Out to damage and destroy this fledging New Testament church.
The persecution outside had backfired and made the Christians stronger,
So Satan sneaked in to the minds of Ananias and Sapphira
a conspiracy of deceit.

²With 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 5:2

Like many wealthy couple today,
Ananias and Sapphira didn't travel together.
They had their own vehicles of transportation.
Rather than wait for his wife.
Ananias went to the church and laid the cash at the feet of the
Apostle Peter.
I can see the smile on his face
Feel the sense of pride and satisfaction in his voice.
He was expecting a pat on the back and praise.
His gift far exceeded others around him.
100 times more than the widows mite.
10 times more than the next couple had given in the church.

But in his worst nightmares Ananias could not have
Anticipated what happened next.

III. A DECEPTION UNMASKED

³Then 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 5:3

What made Ananias heart pound was that he
wasn't required to give anything at all.
This was Ananias land.
Peter had made it clear he could have done whatever he wanted
with the land or the money.

Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? Acts 5:4a

He could have kept it all or given only a portion..
The sin was not in retaining some of the cash.
It was lying to the Holy Spirit,
And tricking the other church members into believing
That he was doing something he was not.

This work adversely in our day when those who are wealthy,
Pretend and say they don't have enough for retirement or to make ends meet
Yet have new cars every year, and millions in estates, land and investments,
But cry poor to get the sympathy of their neighbors.
The lie is the same.

Peter said it well when he asked Ananias,

What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." Acts 5:4b

Did you believe that God didn't know?
Did he think that God didn't care?
Did he think he could get away with this?
Was he really that stupid?

Friends this is a warning to us today.
If we make a promise keep it.

If we make a commitment bear it out.
 If we sign an agreement fulfill it.
 God will require it of us.

We don't know what Ananias said:
 But we do know God's response:

IV. DIVINE JUDGMENT IS SWIFT

⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Acts 5:5

We can only speculate on the cause of his death.
 A heart attack from sheer shock and fear,
 A rapid strike from God,
 Or both?

Either way this was a church offering that no one soon forgot.
 The ushers came in
 Picked up his body,
 And took it out for burial.

And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. Acts 5:6

What about Sapphira?

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

Was she at the hair dresser?
 Getting her nails done,
 Coming back from Fargo Shopping.
 Spending some of her new wealth.
 She had no idea her husband was dead.

But seeing her enter the room,
 The other believers hushed.
 Sapphira felt a small thrill of excitement.
 People must have been impressed with their gift,
 More impressed that she had even anticipated.
 She expected them to thank her,
 And they actually seemed breathless.

My pastoral instincts would have been to have
 Meet her at the door, Take her aside and
 Gently break the news of her husband's sudden death.

But Peter was not so sensitive.
 He was so outraged by their assault on
 the integrity of the church and the cause of Jesus
 that he responded more like a detective than a church pastor.

⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

Peter wanted to give her a chance to step away from this lie,
 this deceit, and devious partnership.

"Yes," she said, "that is the price." Acts 5:8

She was caught like a rabbit in a snare..

And Peter vented his outrage.

"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 5:9

Panic and shock struck her.

The lie is discovered

And something dies.

Every time someone lies something dies.

Because we are found out,

We are known for what we really are,

To lie is to commit spiritual suicide.

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 5:10

God was making a point.

Not setting a precedent.

He was sending a message that

Be sure your lie will find you out.

You cannot fool God,

And that the consequence of lying is something dies within us.

Integrity dies,

Humanity dies,

Liberty dies,

Marriage dies,

America dies with every lie we hear from Pierre or Washington.

The last line of this story is a masterpiece of understatement.

A repeat of Vs 6:

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

Two thousand years later it should still strike fear in our hearts.

Following Jesus is serious business.

It can be a life of exhilarating joy,

Or abiding peace,

Or one of great fear and trepidation if we take our living too lightly.

That why the Psalmist cried out:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

Commitment is not enough.

We must make a daily surrender of obedience to our Lord.

Everything we say and do reflects on him.

We dare not dishonor the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Or God the Father.

What is it in your life that needs to be cleaned out?

What is it in your words and attitude that needs to be changed?

In the early days of my farm life we would put up a wood stove

In our kitchen to heat our house.

Unknown to us the chimney would get clogged with bird nest in the summer,

When we would fire up our old stove.

We were in danger of burning down the house,
Smoke would come back into the house and choke us up.

It wasn't God job to clean out the chimney,
But he would send the wind to blow eye stinging smoke
back down into the kitchen
our eyes would water,
and our lungs would catch.
We would have to go up on the roof and
Clean out the chimney and erase the danger

I don't know what is in your life that may be clogging your chimney
But I do know that unless we keep a daily maintenance,
life can sting the eyes,
And wrench the heart,
And choke your breath,
Until something dies within us.

We must not let one lie go uncovered.
One grudge left brewing,
One promise left unfulfilled.
But to act in total surrender
Jesus said Come Unto Me,
So the church of our Lord Jesus
Can grow unhindered.
And be blessed by Almighty God.