

Scripture Reading:

Acts 4: “33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

Acts 5: “1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.”7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”

"The Spirit Disciplines His Church"

Well we come to a portion of the New Testament this morning that many are not quite sure what to do with! It is like the account in John chapter two where Jesus takes up a whip to drive folks from the Temple or in Luke where He instructed the disciples to be sure they had swords! These passages don't seem to fit our modern impression of the New Testament as a statement of God's great love that brings peace

➤ Many say they belong more to the Old Testament where God was much more judgmental!

As I was preparing this message, along came an editorial from Bishop Desmond Tutu on Saturday proudly proclaiming this modern view: “Hate has no place in the house of God...” is how he begins his piece aimed at those who call sodomy a sin and he ends by saying...

“my fellow clerics, of all faiths, must stand up for the principles of universal dignity and fellowship. Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared path to freedom & justice.”

Of course, he IS certainly excluding those of us who declare that homosexual acts are sinful, but that will have to wait for another sermon. I share some of his comments only to remind us that what we are going to study this morning is not just academic theology... Understanding these passages is vital if we are going to properly engage the modern world that we live in!

What we see in our reading this morning is a clear contrast between Barnabas and Ananias and we can learn many wrong lessons if we separate the two...

[remember that those verses and chapter separations came long after the Scriptures were written]

- **As we pointed out a few weeks back, Luke is revealing the Spirit-filled life of the new church in these early chapters of Acts.**

We saw the Spirit come in power in Chapter two, a powerful sermon preached by Peter, thousands saved and then a picture of new life in the Church at Jerusalem.

In Chapter four, there is a great miracle at the temple, another powerful sermon from Peter and again many are saved.

- **Now Luke is once again showing us Spirit-filled life in the new Church at Jerusalem.**

The Saints are of one accord, lifting up powerful prayers, meeting the needs of all and next week we will see more miracles occurring.

In the midst of all this we learn how the Spirit of God guides them...

- **He has come to give them power as Jesus promised and this morning we learn that this power sometimes includes discipline!**

Men like Bishop Tutu are all for the power, the love, the fellowship, the caring and even the miracles that the Spirit brings, but they want no part of holiness or discipline.

- **The lesson we should learn today is that you cannot have the former without the later!**
- **The Spirit has not come to glorify or satisfy men...**
- **He has come to glorify the Son and to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**

The skeptics will rightly ask how you can glorify the Son by striking folks dead for lying, and that is a question we will Lord-willing learn to answer this morning.

- **First the contrast: Barnabas as opposed to Ananias and Sapphira:**
- **Faithfulness v. Unfaithfulness**
- **Honesty v. deception**
- **Actions that advance the Kingdom of Jesus verses actions that hinder the advance of the Kingdom of Jesus**

Barnabas is a man that we will get to know pretty well during our journey through Acts and he is introduced to us here as a Levite from the Island of Cyprus. He is a faithful man who is given a new name by the Apostles because of his encouraging actions. Barnabas brings the proceeds of property he sells to the Apostles so the needs of the Saints can be met.

- **Barnabas was not the only man doing so, but Luke uses him as an example of the faithful actions that were taking place**

Because of these actions, the needs of those in the young congregation were being met, in stark contrast to the pagan cultures of that day and even the hypocritical actions that Jesus exposed in the nation of Israel.

- **This practical meeting of real needs was a powerful witness of resurrection life in Jesus!**
- **The Gospel must be preached in word and in deed!**

Luke then contrasts the faithful actions of Barnabas with the deception of Ananias and Sapphira.

We are told nothing about these two except that they are married and had some property.

- **They sell the property and bring only some of the money before the disciples.**

Rather than be honest, they want the kind of attention others like Barnabas are getting for having brought ALL the proceeds...

So they decide to act as if they too are bringing forth ALL the money they received for the property

- **Peter confronts them with their sin and the punishment from God is swift and severe.**

Before we deal with the tougher question of the punishment, let's review what their sin was...

Since you have a buyer and a seller when property is exchanged and some sort of public record, it is doubtful that the deception could even have been concealed from a human standpoint.

- **Such is the foolishness of sin!**

BUT even if Ananias and Sapphira could have kept the secret from Peter, there is no way to hide the truth from God, and that is the point Peter makes...

"Why have you allowed Satan to fill your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"

Peter knows firsthand the influence Satan can have on a person tempting them to sin...

Jesus had rebuked Peter for denying the need for the crucifixion saying, "Get thee behind me Satan."

On the night of that crucifixion, Peter was sifted by Satan and again failed miserably.

Part of what makes this passage difficult is that we now have this same Peter harshly judging someone who has succumbed to the temptations of Satan, much as he himself had done! We will get to that in a moment, but first we need to focus on the nature of the sin.

IT was not about the value of the property sold or the size of the gift. Peter explicitly states that their property was their property while they owned it. Again, as we saw last week, the Saints had all things in common because of their willingness to share one with another...

NOT out of compulsion.

Think about it this way... What is one of the important things we strive to teach our children when it comes to toys?

- **We want them to learn to share their toys!**

Think about what lessons they are to learn from that simple statement: What are they to share?

- **THEIR toys!**

Implying ownership or possession. Some things are theirs and other things belong to others.

- **From a very young age we can teach the principle and importance of private property!**

BUT what do we want them to do with their toys?

- **Share them!**

Implying that meeting the needs of others is more important than possessing goods or keeping them selfishly to ourselves.

Which is the more important lesson?

BOTH: Which is why we must have wisdom & not just parenting rules!

- **The parents of our young covenant children, and we as their helpers are responsible to teach such lessons, and as we do we will often learn just as much as they do in the process!**

Now Peter goes on to point out, AGAIN, that after the property was sold they could still decide what to do with the proceeds. There was no compulsion and there would have been no condemnation if they had decided to give half to the church and keep half for themselves.

Their sin was deception: Coming to the disciples with a sum of money and acting as if it were the entire amount of the sale when in fact they gave a smaller amount.

- The result is a swift and severe punishment that cannot be softened by any honest reading of the text.

Ananias and his wife have lied to the Spirit: They have lied to God! We like to use this portion of Scripture as one of our strongest proof texts for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, to prove that He is in fact the third Person of the Trinity. And they are certainly good texts for that purpose!

- However, we are not as quick to point to how the Spirit disciplines His new Church in this text!

For example, we should wonder how the 20th Century Church here in America could have spent so much time focused on Pentecost, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and being a Spirit filled Church; while at the same time see church discipline all but disappear from the scene!

So if we are going to be honest and be able to answer the skeptics we need to address two haunting questions:

- 1) Were Ananias & Sapphira saved?
- 2) Why was their punishment so severe?

As Moses prepared God's people for the promised land, he shared wisdom that can help us to answer and prioritize these questions:

- "The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. [Deuteronomy 29:29]

So as to the first question: Were they saved, part of the elect... Will we see them in heaven?

- God knows the eternal state of Ananias and his wife, but it has not been revealed to us

We could actually agree with Bishop Tutu when he says in that same article, "Does any of us know the mind of God so well that we can decide for Him who is included, and who is excluded, from the circle of His love."

What the good Bishop fails to understand or believe is that this circle is drawn with the blood of God's own Son! The Apostle Paul gives the right conclusion & balance in his 2nd Epistle to Timothy at 2:19... "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'"

- This leaves us with the tougher question: Why was the punishment so swift and severe?

- Ananias was not even given the opportunity to repent.
- They committed sins of lying & theft: NOT capital offences
- Some argue it was because they lied to God the Holy Spirit!
- But are not all sins ultimately against God?

David said against "you and you only have I sinned" when he had murdered Uriah and committed adultery with his wife!

First and foremost we must remember that we are in no position to second guess the judgment of God with regard to its timing or severity.

- We know that ALL sin leads to death and that God can justly strike down any sinner at any time
- Remember, all died in the flood, save Noah and his family

However, there is an important lesson to learn here and it is more obvious if we know our Bibles

What Old Testament account is strikingly similar to what we have read here in Acts this morning?

That's right: *[review the account of Achan up to Joshua going to prayer in Joshua 7]*

We see one of the most interesting responses to prayer from God in verse ten: "10 So the Lord said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?" Now I think the point is that Joshua should have prayed BEFORE they went up to Ai and then he would have known about the problem! So God now tells him:

11 "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you."

Sin in the camp was a big problem!

- In both cases we have theft and deceptions.
- In both cases the judgment is swift and fatal.
- In both cases the sin, which would be like leaven, leavening the whole lump, threatened the advance of the Kingdom!

Both accounts take place as a new major step in the advance of God's people is taking place...

AND at a time when God's people were being exceptionally obedient!

The people of Israel were about to face the fortified cities and vast armies of the land of Canaan.

Faltering at this point would have been fatal not just for Achan's family, nor even just the thirty-six who died in the first encounter with Ai, but the entire nation could be put at risk!

- The same is true with the new Church at Jerusalem.

The sin Ananias and Sapphira would not only have impacted their own lives but would have spread and put the entire Church at risk at a time where they were facing persecution from the nation of Israel and soon the Empire of Rome.

Seeing the Spirit's discipline in this context, there are some questions that we need to honestly ask:

- Do we really want to be a Spirit-filled Church?
- Do we really want to powerfully proclaim the Gospel?
- Do we really want miracles performed in our midst?
- Do we really want the Spirit to keep us on the straight & narrow path with His discipline?

It is easy to yell YES to the first three but the passage before us this morning might give us pause about that last one... Well, we no longer serve in the young church born at Pentecost there in the City of Jerusalem.

We serve in the Church that has matured for almost two thousand years and as such I believe the Spirit's work today is not only different, but more powerful than what we see in our text!

If we learn to understand this then we should be able to answer with a hearty YES to all four of the questions I asked.

Here at Church of the King we do want to be a Spirit filled Church!

- **We should be willing to joyfully obey the Spirit as He uses us to advance the Kingdom of Jesus.**

Here at Church of the King we do want to powerfully proclaim the Gospel!

- **We want to rightly preach and share the Word, calling people to repentance & new life in Jesus AND showing them how this new life is lived by being of one accord and meeting each other's needs!**

Here at Church of the King we do want to see miracles performed in our midst

- **We pray for the miracle of new life for our covenant children and those the Lord calls into our midst.**
- **We seek answers to our prayers for healing and guidance. And we long to see the impacts of the Gospel continue to grow far and wide as they have with hospitals or abundant farms and many other blessings we too often take for granted!**

AND here at Church of the King we want the Spirit of God to discipline us when it is needed.

We should want the Spirit to convict us of our sins, individually & collectively: Being willing to turn from those sins and accepting His chastisement where needed.

We are also willing to administer Church discipline turning those who wander from the faith over to Satan for the buffeting of the flesh so that their souls might be saved as the Apostle Paul instructs us to do.

When we see all of this in its proper context we know that we will not normally have thousands saved when a sermon is preached...

- **Rather we will continue to see God adding to His Church those who are being saved throughout the entire world.**

We will not often see the type of miracles that Peter and John performed at the Temple gate.

- **Rather we will continue to see people healed from diseases that have killed in the past, food provided to those who would have starved as the blessings of Kingdom obedience fill the earth.**

Nor will we see the Spirit striking any of our children dead for disobeying their parents or any of us for cheating on our taxes.

- **Rather we will see more and more parents, churches and civil magistrates faithfully administering discipline as they are called to do.**

-- This does not mean that the Gospel is any less powerful as it gives new life to God's people,

-- This does not mean that God's work in this world is any less miraculous

-- Nor does it mean that sin is any less grievous to God or that He fails to justly punish it.

IF we are serious about the advance of God's Kingdom we will believe and preach the power of the Gospel and we will believe and practice the Discipline of the Spirit.

As we learn from Proverbs 3:7

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear Jehovah and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. 9 Honor Jehovah with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. 11 My son, do not despise the chastening of Jehovah, nor detest His correction; 12 For whom Jehovah loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.”

God loves and delights in His Son’s Church and thus He corrects Her when it is needed.

As we see twice in the text, this should instill in us the proper fear of God...

The text says ‘great fear’

Not a cowering fear of ‘am I next’ but a reverent fear of the holiness of God as one who has unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips!

Seeing the severity of judgment here in Acts should not cause us to question God, but rather cause us to wonder that God does not strike each and every one of us down for the sins we have committed! [Give personal response]

Knowing of course that God will not and cannot because of what Jesus did for us on the cross!

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 10:

“1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”