

Great Things in the Early Church

Apostle Peter

By Rev. Jan Neels

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

Preached on: Sunday, November 1, 2009

Heritage Reformed Congregation of Jordan

4171 15th Street

Jordan, Ontario L0R 1S0

Canada

Website: www.hrcj.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jrcjordan

Dear congregation, in the book of Acts, in the opening chapters, the Holy Spirit has inspired Luke to use various different phrases to describe what the apostles were doing as they were preaching the Word of God.

At his ascension the Lord Jesus has instructed them in Acts one verse eight that they shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon them and they shall be witnesses unto him in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

But how must they be witnesses unto Jesus? How are they to testify of him? It is always, always with spoken words. They must speak. They must tell the story of Jesus Christ. They are to raise their voices. They are to be witnesses to bear witness, to testify of Christ Jesus. That is always the subject matter of their preaching is to be Jesus Christ and him glorified and him crucified and him raised from the dead, ascended on high. And that is what the apostles are doing in the open chapters of Acts led by Peter.

As we have been following them and we see how the Holy Spirit is at work in the early Church and in his servant Peter specifically doing a great work, we heard him preaching on the day of Pentecost. It says so beautifully, “Peter... lifted up his voice.”¹ He spoke loudly and clearly and boldly and he said, “this known unto you, and hearken to my words.”²

That takes boldness for a preacher to say, “Listen to my words.”

In verse 22 he said, “[Now] hear these words,”³ and, later on, “Let me freely speak unto you.”⁴

In Acts two verse 40, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”⁵

¹ Acts 2:14.

² Ibid.

³ Acts 2:22.

⁴ Acts 2:29.

In the Great Commission the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded his Church, “Go into all the world teaching these people, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you.”

Then in the Acts of the Apostles that is what the disciples, the apostles are doing. Everywhere they go they are preaching and teaching and testifying and witnessing of Jesus Christ.

But not everybody is happy with them for doing so. We heard it in chapter four. Here the religious leaders, the Sadducees, the priests, the elders, the scribes, they are very annoyed that these men would come and preach and teach in this name, this hated name, Jesus. And they show their enmity against Christ and his apostles. They bring down their verdict on them.

“You may not speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

That is what the supreme court of the Jews in those days said to Peter and John and the other apostles. They are not to mention the name of Jesus in all their speaking and their teaching. And that is a command that these apostles will not keep, not because they are rebels, but because they cannot obey these men. That is why they say, “You judge for yourselves. It is better for us to listen to God or to you? We are going to do.... We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard.”

It is impossible for the apostles to be silenced even if they are going to face certain persecution, even if they are going to have to face death for it.

When the Lord Jesus has told them to speak, they must speak and none can stop them. Oh, they take their burden, their great need to the Lord in prayer in that prayer meeting that we witnessed last week. Remember what their prayer was.

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.”⁶

That is their petition. “Lord, take note of the threats against us. In the light of those threats give us boldness.”

They realized their great and desperate need for boldness to speak God’s Word, not their own words, but God’s Word.

“We are thy servants, Lord,” they say. “Give us boldness. More than anything else that is what we need, boldness.”

More than anything else that is what we need today, boldness to speak thy Word.

⁵ Acts 2:40.

⁶ Acts 4:29.

Well, the Lord answered their prayer. We saw last time, took at verse 31.

“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”⁷

He gave it to them upon their prayer. And that preaching was bearing fruit in the early chapters of Acts. In chapter two verse 41 Luke records, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”⁸

And in chapter four verse four, “Many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”⁹

So in a very short time the little group of 120 that was meeting in that room upstairs there has grown into a crowd of people, 5000 men. And then they are not even mentioning women and children. So it could be upwards of 10,000 people in that early church and that trend continues also in our text for today.

Today we continue our study here in Acts four verse 32 through 5:11.

Let me read to you just one of the opening verses and the closing verse of this section of God’s Word.

Verse 33.

“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”¹⁰

And then chapter five verse 11.

“And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”¹¹

We want to consider this morning together from these verses the theme, “Great Things in the Early Church.”

First, great power and then great grace and, thirdly, great fear; great power, great grace and great fear.

In Acts two verse 41, 3000 souls. In Acts four verse four, 5000 men. In Acts four verse 32, the multitude of them that believed.

⁷ Acts 4:31.

⁸ Acts 2:41.

⁹ Acts 4:4.

¹⁰ Acts 4:33.

¹¹ Acts 5:11.

It seems as if Luke gives up trying to keep track of numbers here. It is more likely that the Church is growing so rapidly that they had lost count. He couldn't keep up so he uses the phrase called "the multitude of them that believed," a huge crowd of people, great numbers of believers in that early Church, just a little glimpse, a little tiny peek into heaven.

We read about heaven in Revelation seven verse nine, "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number."¹²

How the Church is growing here. Here is that first increment of those people of the New Testament, a great multitude of them that believed. The exact number is not important for us. If it were important, the Spirit would have written it down there in Acts chapter four. He would have given us the exact number.

Just like in this congregation numbers are not most important. Some people really think they are. We like to know exactly how many baptized members, how many confessing members. We pay very close attention to the number of people at the Lord's Table. But numbers are not most important. What is most important is the genuineness, the reality of their faith. The number of them that believed, a multitude, and how that faith is evidenced, how that is shown in their life as a church.

"The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."¹³

In other places in Acts that same idea is mentioned with the little phrase, "They... were with one accord."¹⁴

To be with one heart and one soul means to be a complete person, a whole body. It speaks of a oneness, a unity, a togetherness. It is really a phrase that comes from the Old Testament. You hear it in Joshua 22 verse five where Joshua speaks it to the people of the Lord and he says to them, "Be diligent. Love the Lord your God. Walk in all his ways. Keep his commandments. Cleave to him. Serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." He is saying that to the whole multitude.

The same in 2 Chronicles 15 verse 12.

"They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul."¹⁵

They were of one heart and of one soul. It is a description of being united together. And the source of that unity, that unity that is being one heart and one soul is in Christ. Christ is always the source of unity in his Church because we are one in him, in him alone. And,

¹² Revelation 7:9.

¹³ Acts 4:32.

¹⁴ Acts 2:1.

¹⁵ 2 Chronicles 12:15.

as in a living body, there is one heart that is beating and one soul that is breathing, so in the early Church there was one living organism this Church. The Holy Spirit is powerfully at work living like one living body. They were all united. They all wanted the same thing. They wanted to be saved God's way eternally. They thought one thing. They pursued one thing, to be faithful to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They experienced the same thing, the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

They were all there filled with the Spirit it said a few verses ago. And that oneness, that is expressed not only in words. They didn't just talk to each other about these things, but it is expressed in deed.

“Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”¹⁶

And that thought is continued in verse 34.

“Neither was there any among them that lacked [anything].”¹⁷

We will say more about that a little later in our second thought. But here, here is the description of that unity of the early Church. They were of one heart and one soul. They had all things in common. None of them lacked anything.

How do you explain, how do you figure that out? A huge multitude of the early Church so united, so one. The secret to it is in verse 33 where we read of the great power of the apostles' preaching.

“With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”¹⁸

That is connected. Did you notice the verse is speaking of the apostles, not of all the believers, but of the apostles, the original ones? They are preaching. They are with great power giving witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is this power in their preaching? Where does that come from?

Well, we already know where that comes from because we have heard it in Acts 1:8. “You shall receive power,” says the Lord Jesus to his little band of apostles, “after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me.”¹⁹ That power comes from the Holy Spirit on the servants of the Lord and they received this power and that power is connected with that boldness with which they proclaim the Word of God.

¹⁶ Acts 4:32.

¹⁷ Acts 2:34.

¹⁸ Acts 4:33.

¹⁹ Acts 1:8.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit, verse 31. They spoke the Word of God with boldness. And when the Word of God is proclaimed with boldness and his servants filled with the Holy Spirit, then there is a power involved and that is a power that is irresistible. It cannot be withstood.

It is the power that Paul speaks of in Romans 1:16 where he says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”²⁰

Do you believe that, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to all you who believe?

When preaching the Word of God, he receives the blessing of the Holy Spirit, then the apostle Paul says with great boldness in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”²¹

That is that power of the Word of God and you see it in our text here. The apostles are preaching with great power because the Spirit is upon them and that works results. Specifically they are giving witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the main thrust of their preaching. Christ lives. He is risen. He lives forevermore. That is the main focal point of true Christian preaching is a living Savior, a living Lord. And that sets Christian doctrine apart from all others. We preach, yes, a crucified Christ, but a risen Christ and an ascended Lord and Savior, the one who lives and reigns forever more. It is in him that we live and move and have our being. Without the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ there would be no gospel to preach. Without the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ there would be no Holy Spirit giving power to bless the Word of God. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”²² In fact, you are still in your sins.

“But now,” 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20, “But now is Christ risen from the dead,”²³ and that is what the apostles are preaching. Christ is risen from the dead. He is alive. He has become the first fruits of them that slept.

You see how we need the Holy Spirit to give preachers boldness. Because that power with which the apostles are preaching here and giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that was not a power of their own. They couldn’t look within themselves and say, “Oh, there is a spark of this goodness. I have it in me. I just have to know how to work it out.”

²⁰ Romans 1:16.

²¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

²² 1 Corinthians 15:14.

²³ 1 Corinthians 15:20.

No. That power that comes from God himself. And without that power a preacher's word will be just that, words.

Paul says to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians one verse five, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."²⁴

That is what we need to be praying for, that the preaching of the Word of God may come not just in words, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and with much assurance. And when the congregation and the preacher are praying for boldness to speak the Word of God, we may expect to receive it from God himself and we may expect great blessings on the preaching of the gospel of Christ. That is how the Holy Spirit works, through the preaching of the Word.

We heard it last night, right? Even from Church history. We know preaching is central. Preaching is God's way, God's tool to save his people, to give them faith and to cause us faith to flourish, the preaching and the use of the sacraments.

Well, when God's Word is proclaimed with power and with boldness and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit then that has great results in the congregation.

"With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."²⁵

The apostles preaching boldly, powerfully and the people being blessed, great grace, our second thought.

"Great grace was upon them all."²⁶

There is a two fold sense in which this can be taken. And the first is that the divine grace of God that comes through the channel of the Holy Spirit blessing the preaching of the Word of God that saves a sinner's soul through faith in Christ Jesus that umerited favor of God, that gives and increases the faith of his people. That grace was great upon them all.

Paul describes it like this in Titus two verse 11. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men."²⁷

That grace of God that comes from above from God into his people, that grace doesn't just stay in there and they don't just walk around and say, "Oh, I have this grace. Now I am saved. Now I am done. Now I have arrived."

²⁴ 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

²⁵ Acts 4:33.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Titus 2:11.

Now, that grace spreads. It doesn't just doesn't come down from above, but it spreads abroad. You see it in the early Church. Paul says that, too, in Titus two, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,"²⁸ in this place, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."²⁹

Great grace goes to work. It is being worked out in the early Church.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."³⁰

"Neither was there any among them that lacked."³¹

You see what is happening in the early Church there, what it means to be of one heart and one soul in the life of the congregation. Then the individual members of the congregation, they go home and they look around their homes and they check the balance sheet and their financial statements and they look at everything they have and they say, "You know, these possessions that I have, they are not really my own." That is what these people did.

"Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but..."³²

What did they do then?

They said, "All of my possessions that I possess are not intended just for me, for me to enjoy and for me to have, but they are for all of us."

They had all things common. No one among them lacked anything. And this is truly amazing, isn't it, that you could have a multitude of people all in unity, one heart, one soul, not a single one of them said, "My stuff is mine."

"It is not my own."

We don't read anywhere in chapter four of any disagreements with this. They are all in unity. Usually, you will find at least some opposition to such ideas. That is especially true, isn't it, when it comes to money. Oh, then our selfishness soon begins to show that maybe not publicly.

²⁸ Titus 2:11.

²⁹ Titus 2:12.

³⁰ Acts 4:32.

³¹ Acts 4:34.

³² Acts 2:32.

Here we see true generosity and Christian love flourishing. We see great grace at work here in the early Church.

“As many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”³³

So we can imagine a couple has been listening to the apostles’ preaching the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are preaching boldly. They are preaching powerfully and they go home and they look around and the husband says, “Dear wife, look at all this stuff that we have. Look at all we own. Look at all our property. We have an extra house, a field that we don’t really need. How about we sell some of this and maybe somebody else needs the money more than we do.”

So they sold the house and in those days there were no such things as mortgages or anything like that. When they sold the house the person buying it would give you a big bag full of money.

Children, a bag full of coins.

And then they took that whole bag of money and carried it to where the apostles were and put it down at their feet and said, “Peter, we sold a house. Here is the money for it. If you know of any needy people, give them the money.”

That is how that worked in the early church. And remember, it is not a congregation of less than 300 like this one is. It was a multitude of people of all different backgrounds. They weren’t all Dutch Reformed like we are. All different backgrounds, different nationalities, from all over the world they came and nobody was forced to sell anything.

This isn’t Communism. Nobody forced them to sell anything. Nobody even told them they had to do that. Nobody forced them to give a penny. But those who could did. And they held nothing back. They gave it freely.

I understand from the deacons that the benevolent fund of our congregation is kind of strapped right now, as a matter of fact more than strapped for funds. Now you know what to do about that. Most of us won’t need to sell anything to give an extra donation to the benevolent fund. We won’t have to give anything up. We won’t even have to give up our vacations. Just go home, write out the check and stick it in the bag. That will take care of it.

That is how the early Church took care of their business.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians nine verse seven, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”³⁴

³³ Acts 4:34-35.

And then Luke gives one example of one of these people, one of the members of the early Church and how this great grace that was upon them all went to work. And we are introduced here in Acts chapter four to a man called Barnabas.

Barnabas later on in the book of Acts, the Lord said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”³⁵ And Barnabas, this same man, is going to be used mightily of the Lord to be a missionary to the Gentiles. He is going to accompany Paul. He is going to go to jail for naming the name of Christ, children, this Barnabas, this same man.

And lest we think he is a hero, he is not a hero either because in the same book of Acts we read at one point that Paul and Barnabas have a huge argument. Contention between the two is so great that they go their separate ways, the first Church split right there in the book of Acts. And it includes this man.

His name really is Joseph. That is the name his parent gave him when he was born. That is the name he grew up with, but in the early Church the apostles gave him another name. They called him Barnabas.

It is difficult to trace the exact meaning of it. Well, we don’t have to because Scripture tells us, “Which means the son of consolation.”

This Barnabas growing up a Jew like so many others, he had moved away. He now loved in Cyprus, the island of Cyprus. He was of the tribe of Levi, a true Jew. And he came into the early Church as Joseph and soon the apostles called him Barnabas, the son of consolation.

Consolation is a word that means comfort and encouragement. The main definition of this word is comfort.

So Barnabas was known as a comforter, an encourager of the people. We can see Barnabas, can’t we? Here is this huge number of people and he sees a person who has some kind of affliction, maybe whatever illness it might be. And Barnabas goes to them and he says, “[Dear brother], our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”³⁶ “Be encouraged, dear brother. Be comforted. It comes from the Lord.”

An encourager, the comforter. Barnabas, he is the one who always seems to know just the right thing to say to people, how to give a cheering word. Would to God there were many Barnabas’ in our congregation. There are some, oh yes. But all of God’s people really need to be having this name, Barnabas, daughter of comfort or son of comfort. If we were to give you a surname as believers what would that be? People who know you

³⁴ 2 Corinthians 9:7.

³⁵ Acts 13:2.

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:17.

best, if they were to call you the son of something like they called Barnabas the son of consolation, what would they call you? What would they call me? Would it be the son of complaints or the son of discontentment or the son of encouragement, the son of comfort and consolation?

Barnabas, “Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”³⁷

What an example this... from one person in that early church, great grace is upon them all. He has a piece of land. He sells it. He has his bag of money, children, and he brings the whole bag to the apostles and says, “I sold my land. Here is the money. Distribute it to whoever needs it in the congregation,” a bag full of coins.

And there it sits at the apostles’ feet. He holds nothing back.

So far, so far in the early church everything is going so well. Oh, yes, there has been some trouble from outside, but inside the early Church it is going so smoothly. The preaching is being blessed. Great grace is evident in the Church. There is unity. There is love. There is generosity, a beautiful, congregational life. Much like what we have.

But in the early Church that is about to change because, children, do you know why that is about to change? It is because Satan hates this kind of thing. Satan hates love. He hates unity. He hates generosity. And wherever the Holy Spirit of God is doing a great work, the devil will never sit still.

There is an old saying. I don’t know how accurate it is, but where God builds his church, Satan builds a chapel right next to it, right next door. You see, where there is honesty, Satan want to put the lie. Where there is love, he wants to bring contention. Where there is unity, he wants division. That is how Satan works. He is about to try in the early Church as we will see.

Chapter five begins with the word, “But,” to connect it to the previous chapter by way of contrast. You see, the beautiful unity, the oneness, the generosity in the Church where great grace has come upon them all, a huge multitude giving freely, distribution is made to all who have need, no one in the Church lacks anything.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.”³⁸

And what follows here in this first 11 verses of chapter five is a puzzling story. It brings great questions to many people’s minds. How can this be? How can this happen? Great grace is upon them all.

The reality, dear congregation, is this, that in the Church of Christ there is sin, even such sin as Ananias and Sapphira commit.

³⁷ Acts 4:37.

³⁸ Acts 5:1.

Some people read this history and they say, “Well, for sure they were not saved. That can’t be.”

Oh, is that so? If you say such things, you don’t know your own heart all that well, because the sin that they did lives in here, too. Not only in the unbelievers, but in the children of God’s hearts, too. The root of all sin is there.

Let’s see how this comes out here.

Ananias and Sapphira, they sold a possession and he kept back part of the price. So he didn’t... Remember Barnabas. Barnabas sold a field or a house and he got that whole bag of money and he brought it to the disciples and he could say, “Here, that is how much I sold it for. You do what you think fit. Give it to the needy.”

Ananias and Sapphira, they sell a property and let’s say they got 100 silver coins for it. They kept back 20. Keep 80 in the bag and brought that to Peter, just for an example. We are not given those details so you have to use your sanctified imagination sometimes.

But that is what they did.

His wife is privy to it. They brought a certain part of it, of that money and laid it at the apostles feet. It sounds if people are watching them, that is exactly what Barnabas did. Maybe Ananias was there when Barnabas came and made his donation to the early Church and maybe he saw how the people looked up at Barnabas and admired him for his generosity and maybe people were saying, “Wow, he sure is generous, isn’t he?”

And maybe Ananias though, children, I sure would like people to say that about me, too.

Do you see how that pride is here not only stinginess and lying, but pride is there, too. Whatever his motive was, he sins grievously. You can see it in those words “he kept back part of the price.”³⁹ He laid a certain part there at the apostles’ feet and Peter seems to have here the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to know what Ananias is doing. He knows what is going on.

“Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”⁴⁰

Peter knew he was keeping back part of the price. How Peter knew, that is not told to us. The Lord revealed it to him. Let that suffice.

“Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?”⁴¹

³⁹ Acts 5:2.

⁴⁰ Acts 5:3.

⁴¹ Acts 5:4.

This piece of property that you sold, while it was there, it was yours. You didn't have to sell it. You didn't have to do this.

“And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?”⁴²

That bag of money? Yes, it was. You didn't have to give any of it. You could have given us half of it without lying.

“Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”⁴³

And you see the sins of Ananias and Sapphira keeping back part of the price. They are hiding something. They are being very secretive about this sin that they are doing. Part of the price they give.

But in lying they are lying not to men, says Peter, but to God, to God.

And what happens? You see here, the first mention of a collection being taken in the early church and look what happens.

“And Ananias hearing these words...”⁴⁴

So while Peter is still speaking, “You have not lied unto me, but unto God,” while he hears those words he falls down and he dies right there. He dies.

“And great fear came on all them that heard these things.”⁴⁵

Everybody who heard this, great fear came upon them. It should. Can you imagine? Somebody and the collection bag came by and they put their donation in and suddenly they dropped dead.

Great fear would come upon all of us, too, and rightly so.

The young men came in, bound him up, carried him out and buried him. That's it, the end of Ananias. He died that instant.

Where is he now? We don't know. We don't need to know. We need to fear.

Great fear came upon all those who heard it.

Are you fearful? You should be when you read what comes next.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Acts 5:5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Three hours later, his wife not knowing what happened, came in. Here she comes and she sat before Peter and there is the bag of money. Show knows that the bag that Ananias had this morning when he left to go to where they were meeting.

Peter said to her, “Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?”⁴⁶ “For as much money as in this bag? Is that how much you sold the land for?”

And she says, “Yes, for that much.”

What is she doing, children?

Lying. She knows they sold it for more. Here she has opportunity to confess, to repent, to say, “I am going to get the rest of it.” But she blatantly lies just like Ananias has done.

“Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?”⁴⁷

That is what they are doing with this secret sin of theirs, that nobody would ever have found out about. Nobody would have known. But now everybody knows.

Tempting the Lord.

“Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.”⁴⁸

Peter knows she is going to drop dead, too. And she does right there.

Straightway she fell down at his feet and died right there beside the bag, right there on the spot. And the young men buried her.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira clearly stated by Peter. To Ananias he says, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit.”

To Sapphira he says, “You have agreed together with your husband to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.”

They were pretending, weren't they? Pretending that what they were doing was really the work of the Spirit. They were... they sold something. It was such a good thing for them to do and here they brought the money and that is the Spirit's work. That is how they were passing it off.

But do you know what they were really doing? Deliberately deceiving the people and in

⁴⁶ Acts 5:8.

⁴⁷ Acts 5:9.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

doing so thumbing their nose at the Holy Spirit and say. “See what you do about this. We are going to deliberately deceive people. I dare you to do something about it.”

And he does. He strikes them down dead on the spot. They were members of the Church. They were of that multitude, great multitude that believed. And God removed them from his Church.

That does not mean that they are unsaved. That is not for us to judge. But God divinely intervenes and here in the very early Church God shows what he thinks of sin in his people, secret sins of his own people pretending, these people pretending to be generous and, thereby, defrauding God and his Church.

“And great fear,” verse 11, “came upon all the church.”⁴⁹ Not just the people out there who heard about these things, but great fear came upon all the Church.

The whole multitude of those who believed, including Peter, great fear comes upon him, too, and upon Barnabas, too, and upon all those, all the apostles, all the early church. Great fear came upon them when they saw and they heard how the Lord God deals with sin in his Church. Great fear came upon them. That is the proper response to God’s justice, to God’s view of sin in his Church.

When a believer sins deliberately, willfully, persistently, you are tempting the Holy Spirit, lying to the Holy Spirit, lying to God. And that should fill us with fear because the Lord God does not take sin lightly, not only in those who are outside of the Church, but especially so among his people. That is who is being addressed here, the people of God, that multitude that believed who tempt God with sin.

Oh, child of God, shall we not cry out, “Lord, keep me from presumptuous sins. Keep me from ever tempting thy Holy Spirit.”

In great fear the Church calls upon God even right now. “Oh Lord God, remove deceit from us now.”

From painful experience I know what it is as a believer to live in secret, willful, deliberate sin. I know what it is to think, “If God should strike me down dead now my wife will know, my family will know, the Church will know. But worst of all Christ’s name will be slandered.”

Great fear came upon them all.

If you are a sinner saved by grace, living in willful, deliberate, continual sin secretly, no one else knows, maybe some addiction. I think of pornography addiction especially. So prevalent today, so easy to get into. If that is your life, great fear should come upon you as it does upon all of us because God does not take sin lightly. Be sure your sin shall find you out.

⁴⁹ Acts 5:11.

No, as a believer you cannot lose salvation. I understand that very well and we all should understand that by now, too. But as long as you are living in that sin, as long as you are persisting in that secret, deliberate, willful sin with no grief, no sorrow, no repentance, you can't know that you are saved. You have no assurance of your salvation because every time you try to come to God that ugly thing comes between you and God.

Here it will never come again between Ananias and Sapphira.

And, dear children of God, we know, don't we, even knowing those things we look to Christ and we say what Paul says, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."⁵⁰

But when we are living in sin we don't cry, "Abba, Father." We try to hide from him instead.

2 Timothy one verse seven, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power."⁵¹

Believer, you have the power to overcome that sin; the Spirit of love and of a sound mind.

Great fear came upon the whole Church. We need to see something yet, a little something, a little detail. Progression of sin. It is exposed by Peter's questions. He speaks and Peter... remember Peter is speaking from experience here, too. He knows what this is when he says to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?"⁵² Peter knows. He remembers very well the time that happened to him.

He said to Ananias in verse four, "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?"⁵³

He knows what he conceived in his own heart.

He says to Sapphira, "How is it that you have agreed together with your husband to tempt the Holy Spirit?"

That happens, too, sometimes. Husband and wife living in secret sin together and that is what you are doing, tempting the Holy Spirit.

Oh, Satan had an easy time with Ananias and Sapphira. They let their guards down. They weren't on their knees praying. He filled their hearts it says. And then they conceived deceit in their hearts. They even agreed to this and maybe they never thought of the reality that, "You know what? We are really tempting the Holy Spirit here." It

⁵⁰ Romans 8:15.

⁵¹ 2 Timothy 1:7.

⁵² Acts 5:3.

⁵³ Acts 5:4.

probably never crossed their minds. But now we know that that is what is happening when a believer lives in sin.

No, I am not, I don't want a dear child of God to go home all devastated saying, "Well, I sin every day."

Yes, we all sin every day. I know we do and we grieve over those sins and we sorrow over those sins and we confess those sins and we say God forgive us. We know that when we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I am talking to those who secretly and deliberately and willfully persist in what you know is sin.

No matter what you want to call it, addiction, at bottom is sin against God, lying against the Holy Spirit.

"Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."⁵⁴

We have now heard these things. Let great fear come upon us, too. Amen.

Let's pray.

Oh Lord our God and gracious Father, we thank thee for the revelation of thy holy Word. We thank thee, Lord, that we may read here this morning of great power with which the apostles testified of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the great grace that came upon all the Church. We thank thee for this and to see the living example of what it means to be generous within the Church. We pray for grace to do as they have done in giving liberally to those in need. And we thank thee, too, Lord that we may read of this history of Ananias and Sapphira where we have read that great fear came upon all the Church.

Lord our God, when there are those among us living in secret sin, Lord, wilt thou give them to come unto thee, to seek the grace and the help that they need not only from thee, but also from thy people, that we may surround them with our love, with our care. Grant, Lord, that we always may be fearful, we always may pray with thy servant, 'Keep us from presumptuous sins.'

Oh, that shame may not be brought upon the name of our Lord and Savior, that we may indeed live in godliness. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

⁵⁴ Acts 5:11.