

Sermon Title: Great Fear In Church
Scripture Text: Acts 5:1-11 (Acts #11)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-2-23

We are indeed going to continue our march through the Book of Acts this morning. And before we come there, I want to turn your attention to two Old Testament events which I believe will show you a pattern for what we see today in the Book of Acts.

I was talking to somebody this week, and I was still crushing to get ready for Sunday, and I said, "I really don't have a lot of time to talk right now. I have to get ready to get the church together and talk about the day that two people died in front of church." Woohoo! That sounds like a wonderful time!

Well, it *is* wonderful because our goal in coming together is to lift our eyes heavenward—to understand God (Jer. 9:24; Phil. 3:10); to see Him, as the song says, in "the beauty of" His "holiness" (Ps. 29:2; 96:9, NKJV). Well, that has implications.

So I want you to follow with me; think about the time in Israel in the wilderness: God gave the Law to Moses. We read about that; we hear about that; we think about, well, the carrying down of the stone tablets from Mount Sinai—the Ten Commandments. Well, you can cover the Ten Commandments in about 15 verses in the Old Testament, but we have whole books. And in that, we have detailed plans for the formal worship of Israel in the Old Testament time.

The formal center of worship was to be this place called the "tabernacle" (Ex. 25:8-9; Acts 7:44) or "the tent" (Ex. 26:7) or the "tent" of "dwelling" (2 Sam. 7:6, ESV) or the "tent of meeting" (Ex. 27:21). It was the place where the required sacrifices were made, once the Law was instituted. And everything that was in the Tabernacle was *very* significant (cf. Heb. 8:5); and the furniture and the arrangement of the Tabernacle became the arrangement and the furniture for the eventual Temple in Jerusalem—which is just a foreshadowing of the ultimate Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40:1-43:12).

The Tabernacle was all about showing Israel how to worship God. Now, put it in context: They had been set free from Egypt. The Passover was all about this *glorious* redemption! "We've been *set free* from our bondage! And now, we can serve the Lord on our own!" Well, in Exodus and Leviticus, you'll find chapter after chapter—and I know that in the annual Bible reading, you tend to speed up a little bit getting through there, and how many porpoise skins do I have to pray about today, and all that stuff—there's all those details for building the Tabernacle, and all the details of what was to be done once it was built. The Tabernacle was always at the center of the encampment of Israel, and the 12 tribes were arrayed in a square around the Tabernacle so that they were all an equal distance from it.

And when the time came for the "grand opening" of the Tabernacle, God gave yet *more* detailed instructions about what was going to be necessary just to do the offerings and the consecration of the priests who were going to lead the first worship in the Tabernacle. It boiled down to more than a week that Moses' brother Aaron, the High Priest, and his assistants and his sons, were actually *quarantined* from everybody else to show the *seriousness* of being "set apart" to the worship of this wonderful God who has set us free from our bondage (1 Chr. 23:13). They had to get everything perfect, from the clothing and every smallest detail to the sacrifices.

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And after endless details all through a week, this happened: Leviticus Chapter 9, Verses 23 and 24; I'll read it to you from the new Legacy Standard Bible: "And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. Then they came out and blessed the people. And the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before Yahweh"—that's from within "the Holy of Holies" (Ex. 26:33), where the presence of Yahweh was seen. "Then fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. And all the people saw it and shouted and fell on their faces."

Well, I guess so! Super, precisely-guided, pinpoint divine lightning consumed all the offerings, and *nothing else*—showing that God was pleased, and He accepted the sacrifices.

Oh...but there are the next two verses: Leviticus 10:1-2—"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron"—the oldest and second-oldest sons of Aaron—"took their respective firepans"—they were also priests—"and put fire in them. Then they placed incense on it and offered strange fire before Yahweh..." "Strange," not because it was different from other fire; not "strange" because it was incense different from other incense—it was "strange" because it was not what God had asked them, and it was not the *time* that God asked them for an incense offering. They "offered strange fire before Yahweh, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of Yahweh"—same fire [that had "consumed the burnt offering" in the previous verses]—"and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh."

The fire of God consumed the sacrifices that He accepted. Offer any other sacrifice, and *that very same fire consumes you!* Wow! This is kind of *serious!* Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, failed to respect God's precise instructions that He had given them in love. And that same divine lightning this time consumes the two who decided, "Hey, let's do that same cool trick that our uncle and our dad just did!" Didn't work.

The message was clear. The next verse says: "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what Yahweh spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be glorified." ' So Aaron kept silent." He had just lost his *first two sons* in front of *all* of Israel. He didn't say a word, because he knew that the action of God was right and pure and holy (cf. Ps. 51:4), and God demonstrated that holiness in a spectacular way on that day.

Now, fast forward about 40 years. A generation has died in the wilderness for their unbelief. Only two—Joshua and Caleb—have survived to enter the Promised Land. And you know the story: They finally crossed the Jordan River; God made the way for them. And the first fortified city they came to was Jericho; and God had promised: "I'm going to 'deliver' all of these things into your hands" (Deut. 7:16, 23-24; 31:5).

And you know what happened: As God miraculously brought down the walls of the city, He delivered it into the hands of Israel; and He did it in a way that was absolutely beyond doubt: *He did it*—it wasn't their military genius; they didn't have any of that, at that moment.

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And God gave another specific instruction before He brought down Jericho. Joshua Chapter 6, Verses 17 and 18—"And the city shall be devoted to destruction, it and all that is in it belongs to Yahweh; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest as you are devoting them to destruction, you also take some of the things devoted to destruction and make the camp of Israel devoted to destruction and bring trouble on it."

There's a repeated phrase there: "devoted to destruction"—that which God was sweeping away was to be destroyed; and you don't want to bring trouble on your people.

Well, it was a glorious victory at Jericho, and Chapter 6 closes with these words: "So Yahweh was with Joshua, and the report about him was in all the land." So, God is going to make Israel's enemies to be trembling as they come.

Ah...but *then*, the beginning of Chapter 7, Verse 1—"But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things devoted to destruction. Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things"—the "things devoted to destruction"—"therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel."

Now, interesting: That starts and ends with "the sons of Israel"—"The sons of Israel acted unfaithfully..." There were about two million that came out Egypt; we are not sure exactly how many entered the Promised Land, but it was a lot of people. One man did this, and brought problems on the whole group.

And while the sin of Achan remained silent—he had the shiny things all hidden—God then led Israel to the next city that they needed to take: the city of Ai; and God caused Israel to be *defeated* at Ai. *Glorious* victory at Jericho, total *defeat* at Ai—well, what's the *problem*? One guy.

And God eventually forced the secret sin to be made public; and eventually, Achan confessed. And then we read this, in Joshua Chapter 7, Verse 25—"And Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day.' And all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones." In other words: they did what *should* have been done to everything in Jericho. "Then they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and Yahweh turned from His burning anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day." (vs. 26)

Do you see the pattern? It's not very easy to miss! When God begins a new work in a new era—He set His people free from Egypt, and there was going to be this *whole new thing* built around the Tabernacle; He says *precisely* what He requires of His people, and He expects them to obey (Ps. 119:4; cf. Ex. 25:9). He brings them into the Promised Land; He says straightforward, simple words, precisely what He wanted, and He expected them to obey.

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I introduced today's sermon in our Kids' Bulletin with these words: I said, "In the early days of the Church"—this was another new era—"In the early days of the Church, God showed how important it is for His people to be honest and to honor Him. He dealt severely with a husband and a wife who lied."

And here we come to Acts, Chapter 5. And don't forget, this is in a flow of things: Acts Chapter 1—Jesus ascends; He promises that the Holy Spirit will come; "You'll have power when He comes." Chapter 2—the Holy Spirit comes; there is miraculous phenomena; Peter preaches; 3,000 people are saved and baptized. In Chapter 3—Peter and John heal a man in the Temple; more people are saved; but by the end of the chapter, the Temple mucky-mucks have put Peter and John in jail; but more people are getting saved. And then in Chapter 4 is the first outward persecution on the church: They bring Peter and John before the Sanhedrin; they just "Harrumph" all over the place and they can't find anything that they did wrong, so they threatened them; we are not told what else they threatened them with, but they said, "Okay, we're going to let you guys go. Just don't preach anymore about Jesus!" And they said, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen" (vs. 20). And, guess what? More people got saved.

And now, you have this *throng* of people in Jerusalem; it was *filled* for the Feast of Pentecost—it was one of those feasts when you would come to Israel, if you could. *Thousands* more people than lived in Jerusalem were there, and now *thousands* of them get saved; and then *more* of them get saved, and then *more* of them get saved. And they keep meeting in "Solomon's Portico" (Acts 5:12)—the biggest open public part of the whole Temple area. And we saw how *furious* the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin were about that: "You're just clogging up *our temple!*"

And they were taking care of each other. Most of these people were from out of town, and they had stayed; they didn't want to walk away from the "Apostles' teaching" and from this "fellowship" and the daily "prayers" and the Lord's Table together (Acts 2:42) and having "meals together" (vs. 46), so they began just taking care of one another and treating one another like family. And we come to Chapter 5; and just before Chapter 5 is that description of the believers taking care of each other.

We are going to go through the first 11 verses, and we're going to see—

Ananias: The Aberration
Sapphira: The Sycophant
and Congregation: The Concerned Ones

Chapter 4 ends with these words. We had the explanation how they didn't regard anything as their own, they just considered: "Everybody is family; we are all in this together." They took care of each other. "There was not a needy person among them" (vs. 34). And the last two verses of Chapter 4—"Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

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That is what was happening when they heard about needs; they would meet the needs, and even to the point of *liquidating assets* to meet those needs; and that was a *wonderful* example of them caring for one another, like we explained last week.

It was also our first introduction to Barnabas, who will play a significant role in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul.

But Satan is not pleased about all of these people coming to Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25-26). So he attacked them in Chapter 4: "I'm going to go after their two most visible leaders!" And so he did—and thousands more got saved. Now, they are preaching with more boldness than ever; they are showing more love for one another than ever—and *more and more* are believing!

Then comes Ananias: The Aberration from this. Ananias is among the believers. There is nothing here that says that Ananias and Sapphira didn't know Christ. As a matter of fact, the crucial thing is: They *did* know Him, and so they were expected to obey God; they were expected to do the right thing.

Chapter 5, Verses 1 and 2. Remember: immediately after Barnabas bringing his offering. "But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet."

Now, do you see one really ominous word in that verse? It's the first one: "but." Right after the *glorious* example—they're taking care of *everybody*, and you have what Barnabas did—"but," on the heels of that good example comes this heartbreaking event.

Satan had tried an attack from the outside, by intimidation—and more people got saved. So *now* he decides, "I'm going to attack from within." And somehow he finds a susceptible couple among the Christians, and he goes after them.

Verses 3 and 4—"But Peter said..." And we are not told how Peter came to know this; it was obviously the work of the Holy Spirit. "Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.' "

Sidebar: If you ever want a verse to prove the Holy Spirit is God: he "lied to the Holy Spirit" (vs. 3); he "lied...to God" (vs. 4)—case closed. There's a whole lot more to that, but this is a good verse for that (cf. Matt. 28:19; Mk. 3:29; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 3:17).

What Ananias and Sapphira did served the interests of Satan. He said, "Satan filled your heart." Well, to "be filled" with something is to be under the control of it (e.g., Eph. 5:18; cf. Lk. 4:28; 5:26; 6:11; Acts 5:17; 13:45; 19:28). You don't have to get weird about demon possession or anything like that. They did something which served Satan's interests, and therefore it was Satan who was in control (cf. Matt. 16:23).

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But would you notice that *one hundred percent* of the responsibility for the sin was upon Ananias and Sapphira! *They* owned the land. They were obviously among the wealthy ones in the multitude of the church, because they had a piece of land that they could liquidate. They were in control of the land; they were in control of the sale; and they were in control of the donation—it was *totally* under their control. The sin came from *their* hearts.

Now, was it *wrong* for Ananias and Sapphira to sell the property? No. They were under no requirement to do that. Was it *wrong* for them to donate to take care of the needs of fellow Christians? No. It was a *wonderful* thing that they did; it was a *good* deed. What was wrong, and what was at the core of the sin, was *the motive* for *lying* about it! They wanted the *spiritual prestige* of being seen for their amazing generosity (cf. Matt. 23:5), but they also wanted to pocket some of the money. Keeping some of the money is not a sin—*lying* about keeping some of the money *is* a sin.

It would all have been *fine*, except for the hypocrisy of lying. "Hypocrisy" is appearing to be something on the "outside" that isn't matched by what is "inside" (Matt. 23:25-28). Now, we *all* know that none of us live a perfect life where our outside actions always perfectly reflect the Lord who is *in* us (Ecc. 7:20; Phil. 3:12-14; Jas. 3:2), but is our *goal* to "be seen by men"?

Jesus had some words to say about that, right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount; in Matthew Chapter 6, starting at Verse 1, Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men *to be noticed by them*"—which is what the Pharisees lived for—"otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

I have heard it explained—and it certainly fits the text, although I can't prove it—we know that there were receptacles, like horn-shaped receptacles, in the Temple; and that's how you could designate your offerings, by which basket you put it in, and "alms" was giving for the poor. The idea of "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" is that you could walk by there and just quietly, with your right hand, put that in, and somebody standing next to you on the left side would have no idea what happened. Or, you could stop there and you could say, "Hey, Fred, can you break a hundred?"—you can *call attention* to yourself to do it. *That* was what this sin was all about!

Now, when you believe in Christ, you have recognized your "sin" (Ps. 32:5; Prov. 28:13). You understand that Christ took it (Jn. 1:29; cf. Is. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21). You understand that you have "forgiveness" (Col. 1:14), that you are no longer "dead in your trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1); and so, rather than now trying to make yourself *look* good, trying to make yourself *feel* good, trying to make yourself *appreciated* in the sight of men—now you can just say, "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). "God, my Father! Oh, I'm so pleased to know You!"

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Remember the Tabernacle: At the beginning of Israel's life outside of Egypt, God showed something pretty drastic. Remember Jericho: At the beginning of the era of Israel in the Land, God did something pretty drastic. In the beginning days of the era of the Church, as *thousands* have come to Christ in a very short time, God gave a dramatic and humbling display of His holiness.

So, back to Acts Chapter 5—"And as he heard these words"—as Ananias heard Peter's words—"Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it" (vs. 5).

It was just like Opening Day at the Tabernacle, just like Achan and his family on the day that they died: the people who witnessed it realized the *importance* of fearing the Lord (cf. Ps. 90:11).

An autopsy might have shown that Ananias had a heart attack, physiologically. Perhaps. But make no mistake: The actual cause of death was the hand of God, chastising one of His own.

The ultimate earthly chastisement for willful sin can be death. We can go down that rabbit trail some other time (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:30). But, whom the Lord "loves," He "chastens" (Rev. 3:19, NKJV); "He disciplines...every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). Well, press Him hard enough—He will ramp up the chastening.

So, Chapter 5, Verse 6—"The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him." Burials had to take place outside the city. And in that hot climate, and without modern refrigeration technology—not to mention the customs of the Jews—burial almost always took place immediately, on the day of a death.

But this lesson from God has another chapter. We've seen Ananias—he's The Aberration from the good example. Now, Sapphira: The Sycophant. His wife was a co-conspirator in the charade of the public gift.

Now, you get some insight here. People talk like, "Let's be like the Early Church; let's be like the church in the early days." Okay, let's meet from morning till night, okay? *Three hours* go by here, and the service is still going on! And it's not going to get any better. Later in Acts, the service is long enough for a guy to fall asleep in the window, fall out of the window, and die; they take care of him, come back, and finish the sermon! (20:7-12) Let's *be* like that, okay? I mean, we knock out two services before noon!

Okay, we don't want to necessarily try to make our culture fit that culture; but you get a good idea: To these people, being with each other—*it was everything!* Oh, they *yearned* to hear the teaching of the Apostles; they *loved* sharing meals together; oh, and then there's the Lord's Table, and there's being able to meet the needs of the ones that have the least.

Chapter 5, Verse 7—"Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in..." It takes the ladies longer to get ready for church; I realize that. We don't

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know why, but he came earlier and she came later. Maybe they drove two chariots; we don't know how that worked. But she didn't know what happened: "His wife came in, not knowing what had happened." Well, during those three hours, the men had time to finish burying Ananias' body: They had to take it, cover it, wrap it, carry it outside the walls, dig a grave, bury him, and come back. Three hours is about right for strong young men.

Well, I imagine that Peter *dreaded* what he had to do next. And as we know: God had given Peter information on what was going on. Look at Verse 8—"And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' " Now, whoever was within earshot at that moment must have gasped. If you had been there for that three-hour time and seen that, you'd think, "Oh, no, Sapphira." Peter gave Sapphira a *golden* opportunity to do the right thing, but she didn't. She didn't even know that she was a widow, and she clung to the sin that she and Ananias had cooked up.

So, Verse 9—"Then Peter said to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.' " The guys were just returning. That was *one lousy day* to be assigned to usher's duty for the church service!

Verse 10—"And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband."

And thus ended Ananias' and Sapphira's foolish showing off in front of the church. It was *completely unnecessary!* The contribution was a *good thing*, and God got glory from it! They *could* have just rejoiced in the fact that they were able to give, and they could reinforce that spirit of generosity and compassion and caring that just swept through that group every day. But by embellishing the story with a lie, they attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit, and test the patience of God.

Hey, um, has God been patient to you? Is there anything you have ever done that would be worthy of you being struck dead? Well, yeah—pretty much *every day* since I've been sentient. God is patient—but don't *test* His patience!

If our good deeds are for the purpose of attracting attention to ourselves *more* than for giving glory to God, they profit us *nothing* in the realm of heavenly rewards (Prov. 16:2). Like Jesus' words: If you do something good; and people see you do it; and you *wanted* them to see you do it; and they say, "Wow, you really did good doing that"—that's your reward. There is no *heavenly* reward for that.

There is another very relevant passage that includes the general principle that should apply to using all spiritual gifts, and that would include the gift of giving. Those people in Solomon's Portico that day did not understand spiritual gifts—the gift of giving, or anything else; that wasn't revealed until later, through the Apostle Paul. But they were seeing these real-life things playing out, and Paul would one day write this in the so-called "Love Chapter"; the beginning of that chapter—First Corinthians 13—is all about your

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motivation for serving God. In First Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul says: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels"—speaking hyperbolically there—"but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

God's dealing so dramatically with Ananias and Sapphira was meant to impress upon the *whole church* the seriousness of sin among Christians! Forgiveness is *fantastic*: to stand "complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28), all my "sins...forgiven" (1 Jn. 2:12)—there's *nothing* better than that! And there is nothing earthly better than being with people who "stand" together in this "grace" of God (Rom. 5:2)—this is a *wonderful*, wonderful thing! But that is *not* permission to go on sinning, as if you have a "Get Out Of Jail Free" Card (Deut. 29:19; Ps. 68:21; Jer. 7:8-10; Rom. 6:15; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16; Jude 4).

It was like the first day of worship in the Tabernacle. It was like when Achan and his family were stoned in the wilderness. And our final verse explains. Ananias is The Aberration; Sapphira is The Sycophant; they went down together. The Congregation is The Concerned.

God *intensely* desires that His Church—the "bride" of Christ, His Son (Rev. 19:7)—be pure (Eph. 5:25-27; cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4), and this event made it obvious. And no doubt, I'm sure there was a lot of self-examination that took place that day. All the talk around Jerusalem now, for as many days since the Holy Spirit came, has been about Jesus, and it's been about forgiveness; it's been about preaching the Gospel; it's been about sin and repentance and forgiveness and a new life in Him. And we have seen how these *thousands* of people have this *stupendous* collective testimony of caring for each other and loving their Lord; it was very powerful.

So Verse 11 is no surprise: "And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things." It was a sobering day!

One benefit of church discipline—something else these people didn't know about yet, because there had not been the epistles to explain the application of Matthew 18—but one of the purposes is to deter others from sinning, and *especially* leaders: First Timothy 5:19-20—especially in the case of spiritual leaders who persist in sin, they should be "rebuked in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." Well, I think two dead bodies is a pretty strong rebuke. And they understood it—that yes, we celebrate who we are in Christ, but we walk "in the fear of the Lord" (Acts 9:31; cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; 6:5; Phil. 2:12; Col. 3:22; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17; Rev. 19:5).

There's something that Peter was going to write years later; and I can't imagine Peter writing this verse, and not remembering the sight of Ananias and then Sapphira dying at his feet. It's First Peter 4:17, where he said: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God..." Oh, yeah: Do we want God to come and judge this *horrible* world, these *awful* sinners—these people who are just *bent* on blaspheming and trying to force us to accept the things that are an abomination to God? Oh, yeah, we *yearn* for

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that judgment! "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20, NKJV)—*Get 'em!* (cf. Ps. 139:19; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). And Peter says, "It is time for judgment to begin with the *household of God*; if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

God calls us to "discipline" ourselves for "godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7; cf. 1 Tim. 6:11; Titus 2:11-12), to "pursue...sanctification" with all our hearts (Heb. 12:14; cf. Mk. 12:30; 1 Jn. 5:3; Rom. 6:19; Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:3-4, 7). And you know what? *We can—because* we are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). We have "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in" Him (Eph. 1:3). We have the Holy Spirit; at *every turn* when we are tempted, we have the option to resist (Gal. 5:16; cf. Ps. 119:173).

It's interesting that two things get said side by side, concerning this incident. Now, don't count this against me—I'm going to borrow a couple of verses from next time we come back to the Book of Acts. Sneak a peek with me into the next section that we will study: Verses 13 and 14. It says: "But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number."

What are the two things that are said there? Well, nobody wanted to "dare associate with them," and "multitudes" came to associate with them. Both of those things are true, and they are side by side. "The people held them in high esteem"—even the ones who hadn't yet joined the group, hadn't yet come to Christ—there was a certain respect: "Oh, these people *have something*. They *love* one another, and they stick together tenaciously—even though you die if you mess up!" Probably, somebody described it that way. That's not the whole point, though; that's not the whole story, but it *was* a powerful impression.

But I would point out to you this: Holiness is the most important prerequisite for evangelism! (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 6:3, 6; Titus 2:7-10) Do you want people to come to Christ? Well, let judgment begin *here!* I need to be *completely devoted* to Him—*loving* "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42, NKJV; cf. 1 Tim. 4:6); *loving* the "fellowship" of the saints (Acts 2:42); *wanting* to be with God's people (Ps. 16:3); *wanting* to give generously (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:7)—and all of those things that come with it!

I also wanted to make a little theological point from Verse 11. We dare not skip over this, because it is germane to the whole big picture of the Book of Acts. Would you notice what it said there? "And great fear came over *the whole church*, and over all who heard of these things."

Here's the theological point: This is the first use of the word "church" in the Book of Acts. "Church"—*ekklesiā* in the Greek. It's the most common word to describe the assembly of God's people. It literally means: "called-out ones." When you hear the Gospel, you are convicted of your sins; you hear the message: "Repent and believe" (Mk. 1:15); you are being "called...out" (1 Pet. 2:9) from "the world" (Jn. 15:19); you are being "called" to the Savior (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 5:10). Like Jesus said: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (Jn. 6:44). You're being "called out." And so when we have been "called out" and we've come, we are "the called-out ones."

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Scripture Text: Acts 5:1-11 (Acts #11)

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You're a sinner. "Christ died for your sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). He calls you to "repent and believe" (Mk. 1:15) and be forgiven (Acts 10:43), and He "calls you" (Gal. 5:8; 1 Thess. 2:12; 5:24).

The theological point is that what we are studying in Acts is, indeed, like Israel at Jericho, like Israel in the wilderness; this is the beginning of a new era in the redemptive plan of God (Eph. 2:13-22; 3:4-6). The era of the "New Covenant" has begun (Jer. 31:31; 2 Cor. 3:6). It began with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, like He said: "This...is the new covenant in My blood" (Lk. 22:230; 1 Cor. 11:25). "The veil of the temple was torn in two" the next day (Matt. 27:51); He screamed, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30). *It was done!* The price for sin has been paid (Heb. 9:15); the New Covenant is here!

But you don't just *stop* everything and start something new, and turn on a dime. There's about a 30- to 40-year transition here before the exclamation point of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—and now, not only has the New Covenant begun, the Old Covenant *can't function anymore!* You can't have any more *sacrifices* without a Temple! (cf. Heb. 8:13; cf. Matt. 23:38; 24:1-2)

Jesus had mentioned the "church" in the future tense. Remember, He told Peter: "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). And I'm sure Peter said, "Okay. I have no idea what He means...but, okay!" And then the next thing Peter said—remember, Jesus responded, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (vs. 23). Peter didn't get off to a great start on this "church" thing...but now, it's being built; and the Book of Acts is this historical record of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, from Israel to the Church (cf. Matt. 21:43). And now the Church—this worldwide, age-long fellowship of all believers "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9)—it all began with the roots that we see here in the Book of Acts.

And through this transition, it becomes apparent that, indeed, Israel has been set aside (Rom. 11:25). And once we get to the ministry of the Apostle Paul—he's only four chapters away, and then his ministry is about eight chapters away—through Paul, God gave a *whole bunch more revelation* of the details of the church, and how it is to function—just as He gave a whole bunch more details about the Tabernacle and how it was to function.

In the final letter to the churches—the Book of Revelation—it's addressed to seven of the churches that were planted during the ministry of Paul when he was in Ephesus. And stay tuned: You're going to see how Jesus continues to deal with His Church that He is building.

So, what are we meant to take away from a passage like this? I've been preaching a *long* time. There have been a handful of medical emergencies when I was preaching, but nobody ever dropped dead. We are not those people! *Whew!* [with relief] But God is that God, and it's not surprising if this passage makes you shudder. I think it is meant to! "*Great fear* came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things"! And I would say: If you are hiding something from God, this really should affect you! And the best time for you to deal with that is *the next millisecond* (cf. Ps. 119:60; Rev. 3:19)—

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because God is *still this God*; and He still loves His people so much, He wants them to be pure and holy (Titus 2;14).

And it is appropriate if this passage makes you do some self-examination. "Well, Lord, you know, I'm really doing quite well. I haven't murdered *anybody* this week. I haven't committed adultery. I haven't lied about my offering." No, that's not the point. The point is: "Lord, I love You. I am Yours." And this *should* motivate us to refresh our commitment to standing in God's "grace" (1 Pet. 5:12), and thanking Him afresh for His patience (Ex. 34:6)—oh, He is *so patient* with me—for not exposing the sins of your heart.

And of course, another very appropriate reaction: If you have never done so before, this is the time to realize that *you can't trifle with God!* He is holy, and you are not! We can't play games with Him! You need a Savior! And "Jesus" *is* that "Savior" (Acts 13:23; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10), just as we have been hearing. Do you know Him? Do you stand "complete in Him" (Col. 2:10)?

Now, obviously, striking hypocrites dead in front of the congregation is *not* standard operating procedure. I assure you, I do not have the kind of insight that God gave to Peter. You can talk to me, and I'm not going to blurt out your worst sin. But convicting people of sin is always the work of God (Jn. 16:8); and if work needs to be done in our hearts, now is the right time to get serious about it!

Do you need some help with that? Do you have some questions about that? Do you need some encouragement? Come. Let's talk about it. Make sure you are in Christ (2 Cor. 13:5), where there is "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). The names and phone numbers of all of our staff and elders are in the bulletin purposefully every week. And you know, the elders team up together to watch over people and to pay attention when people miss church, and to find the needs and meet them anyway that we can. That's why we are here!

Well, there you are. That's what the Bible says about a completely unique day in the history of the Church. Those people are not us, but now we know how serious it is to commit a similar sin—so, fair warning.

Please, let's leave this place, *full* of the joy of knowing where we stand in Christ. There's a big banner out in the foyer; our church motto is on it: "Spreading the Heritage. Standing in His Grace." Do you know where that comes from? Here: Romans 5:1-2—"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into"—here it comes—"this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

Let's pray:

Father, we do "exult in hope." All the glory is Yours! Oh, Lord, we know how traumatic that day must have been—the day that Ananias and Sapphira died. And we know, Father, that if our worst sins were exposed, we would deserve the same fate, and more. But thank You that we stand "complete in Christ," and we "stand in" Your "grace." And,

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Father, whatever needs to be done in our hearts, in whatever way we might be ignoring Your call to serve together, to meet a need, to help one who is in pain, to help someone who is faint of heart, to introduce someone to Christ—whatever You would seek to do through us, do it, we pray. And we come as Your willing servants, in Jesus' name. Amen.