

On Mission with God, p1

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Bible Text: Acts 5:1-14

Preached on: Sunday, April 2, 2017

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Do not go to the book of Amos, go to the book of Acts. Go to the book of Acts. I began working on Amos this week in my study and just kept feeling impressed to revisit some foundational truths about the church. It's been on my heart for some time but just this week it kind of stirred me deeply that we need to look at this again. Now, this is a completely different type message than you've heard but you've heard these precepts and these principles, but if I could charge you this morning as the church family that we grasp and reaffirm our strong conviction about the biblical truth of the church, we'll be resistant and even repentant toward anything other than God's plan for God's church.

Now, we're going to be in the book of Acts, Acts 5 in just a few moments, but when you come to the book of Acts in the New Testament, you come to a great transition book. Acts mentions the work of the Holy Spirit 50 times, letting us know that that transition has taken place. Now, it's something of a mystery. I can't explain how that works but we've gone from the immediate presence of Christ, the second person of the Godhead, to now the immediate ministry and person, the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, the book of Acts is actually the Holy Spirit pastoring the church as it begins. Of course, it is the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant, from Jesus primarily ministering to now his apostles taking the physical earthly leadership, but more importantly it's the change from the immediate presence of God's Son leading the work to God's Spirit leading the work.

Now, that's the dire weakness in professing congregations today and that is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of perversion about what spiritual power means but what troubles me as much or more is the total lack of it. Our former pastor used to say, "The Holy Spirit could leave the average Baptist church and we wouldn't miss him for six months." And he was right. What he meant by that was we've learned to do our deal, we've learned to go through our motions, we've learned how to make stuff work and we really don't need him. I want us to be radically dependent upon him so that if nothing's happening we just pray for him, we don't come up with a gimmick and that's what you see in Acts. The Holy Spirit presently, immediately, personally being involved.

So while things have changed when you get to Acts, one thing you need to grasp and hold onto is what I mentioned earlier before the offertory prayer and that is that there is a great continuity that continues as the book of Acts goes and that is the divine purpose of God

to save for himself a people who will know him, love him, treasure him, and be with him for all time and eternity. That just continues on. Now, it's progressing, it's unfolding, it's being unveiled in ways like it never had before but it's continuing on. As a matter of fact, Acts puts in full bloom this truth. As Acts unfolds, the spiritually minded read it and say to themselves, "Oh, that's how God intends to make his people and how he intends to save them and use them and how they're to function until he comes and sets up the kingdom."

Now, foundational in the work of God saving for himself a people is the preaching of the word of God. We saw that as being thoroughly foundational under the old covenant as we've been preaching through the prophet Amos and we just have a book of his sermons, basically. Now, they are in brevity. They're not the thorough every word of a sermon but are just in context his sermons, his preaching. Then you come to the book of Acts and you have 14 major sermons recorded in Acts. By the time we get to our text today in Acts 5, Peter has preached a sermon at Pentecost, of course; then he preached another sermon in the temple; and then he preached another sermon in the Sanhedrin. Then as we look further to God's blueprint for doing his work, we find some things that build off of the mainstay of preaching the word in the power of the Spirit.

So what builds off of that? Well, you might be surprised to learn this: we see every member ministry through small groups. We see there early in the book of Acts that the people are organized into households so there are household settings where they kind of know each other or learn to know each other; where they bond together; where they are ministering one to another. So we see those small groups coming to bear.

Then we see, and this unfolds throughout the totality of the book of Acts, personalized strategic world missions out of the local churches. There is no such thing in the New Testament as any other kind of missions than missions which comes out of, is overseen by and supported by local congregations and the missionaries are exclusively to the end of preaching the word, saving souls and starting new local churches.

Now, a third aspect that's not specifically spelled out but is understood would be family discipleship. It's just understood all through the book of Acts that families should be in the process not in a real structured or formal way, as a matter of fact, I caution families in your family devotions and in your family discipleship, don't make it a cold, structured, look at your watch, "Okay, we've got to do our 20 minute Bible study or family altar today," because what happens often when you do it that way is that kids just look at their watches and get through it instead of being heart aligned. No, make family discipleship as you rise up in the morning, as you walk along the way, as you sit by the wayside, as you lay down at night, Deuteronomy 6. Make it just what you are. Speak of the Sunday School lesson that week. Talk about the verse you memorized to your children, what it's telling you. Find an event, an issue, something you can point out and say, "Now, what kind of biblical truth is being displayed there?" Talk. Let it be lifestyle in the home. I'm not against the structure but I've seen that become just so cold and you want your kids to know, "No, the Bible and Christ just comes out of my parents' lives," and then they'll become real too, or God's Spirit will work in their hearts and they'll become real.

Now, as we think about this and that's why you see the wheel on the screen, there are two key pillars that these things function upon and that is the local church, spiritual power. All of God's work in the world centers on the local church empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and that's what you see there. So in God's work, you could actually make the Holy Spirit the axle and the drive train of this wheel. The Holy Spirit is the axle and the drive train that brings the power to the centerpiece of God's work, preaching the word. That's why overwhelmingly 98% of all of our mission work is helping those called to preach the word because that's all we find in the New Testament. So we're going to err on the biblical model. And then coming out from that, every member ministered through small groups, personalized strategic world missions and family discipleship, and when that is functioning right in its propriety, in its balance and order, that's the local church doing God's work in the world. That's the outside of the wheel but it has to be. You can do every bit of this right and if you miss Spirit empowerment you've got nothing.

Now, here's what I say to people through the years. You just wouldn't believe after these 38 years of ministry how many people have come up and said, "Well, pastor, is this okay? I like this kind of ministry idea or that kind of ministry idea, or me and some guys are going to do this, and me and some friends are going to do that." And probably it's all okay and I don't want to be against all those things but here's what I say: scripturally this is the mainstay, if you might say, that we must all be a part of, and if you do those well, you're not going to have the time and energy to do much else. I mean, now listen to me: but if you do those well, based on the authority of Scripture, I feel confident as your preaching pastor you can stand before God and hear him say, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant." You may do some other ministries and things but make sure you do that well which presupposes, of course, that you're in a church that gets this and is not chasing secondary things or even extrabiblical things.

Do you remember me telling you about Manuel Scott, the African American preacher in Dallas, Texas? He was preaching when I first was converted and first went into the ministry, a man of very small stature. He was pastoring a great predominantly black church in Dallas but he was such a sound theologian and there were a lot of needs in Dallas, a lot of hungry people that needed to be fed, a lot of homeless people that needed homes, a lot of social ministries, and here's what he said about that. He said, "We feed the poor in my big church in Dallas," then he'd say, "but other folks are doing that. We house the homeless if we can, but other folks are doing that. We have programs to mentor and tutor young people, adolescents who get into trouble, but other folks are doing that." He said, "But the church is most truly the church when she does what no other group even claims to be their job and that's preaching the Gospel, saving souls, and starting New Testament churches." Are you with me, church? We may do other things, by the way, we serve our school system in any and every way we can. We've spent tens of thousands of dollars serving the school systems around here and glad to do it. We've got a conviction here that when our community has a legitimate need and something that doesn't violate Scripture, count on us. Other folks are doing that. That's not what... the church is most truly the church when it does what no other group even claims as its job and, of course, that centers on preaching the word and the Gospel.

Now, so here we come to this book of Acts and it's the acts of the Holy Spirit and God wants to do this his way and for his glory. Now look, when God went to the trouble of giving us this blueprint that's most expressly spelled out in Acts, though it's taught throughout the Scriptures, we must remind ourselves here at Grace Life Church, God has no Plan B. Do you know why? Because he's God. He doesn't make mistakes. He doesn't mess up. He didn't miss a point. He didn't understand the latter cultures who would have the Scriptures and miss something. No, he has no Plan B. He only has his plan. God does not want nor does God need man's cleverness or creativity or various amusements or entertainments or anything else – now listen – because if these things are needful and if these things are effective in accomplishing God's work – and here's the key factor – then man gets the glory and not God. God is sitting in heaven and just kind of worried and hoping that somebody could make his old Gospel culturally relevant to the modern age. No, God's not sitting in heaven wringing his hands over anything. He gave us his plan and it worked yesterday, it worked the day after yesterday, it works today, it'll work tomorrow, it'll work forever and that's the way he intends to build his church because when we strive to stick with the means he's revealed in his sufficient word and then his Spirit empowers that plan and it becomes effective, then God gets the glory and that's why we're here, to show that his wisdom is better than man's wisdom, his ways are higher than man's ways, and his power can do what no man's creativity and power could ever accomplish and that way our church and God help us that Grace Life Church is a testimony that God is the wise one, not us. It's God's power and not ours, that he might be highly esteemed, that he might be thought highly of, and that he might be glorified.

So as we think in terms of the fact that Acts gives us the core precepts, Acts gives us the blueprint for God's church for all generations, I think when you get to Acts 5 you have the basic blueprint thoroughly laid out. There are a lot of subpoints to these main points but the basic thing is there. So I've entitled this message "On Mission with God." God is doing a work. He's saving himself a people for his own glory and he's invited us to get in on the work with him. Now listen: God has not asked us to do the work and he get in on it with us. He is going to build his church and he's looking for some people who will be humble enough to grasp his way of doing it and get in on the mission with him and that's what we've been striving to do here for many many years.

Now, leaving that aside, that's all introduction, we come to Acts 5, a very familiar passage of Scripture, and let's read it down through, let's see, verse 14, and then we'll unpack it a principle at a time. This might be a two-parter. It depends on how quickly you can listen this morning.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 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. 3 But 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? 4 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." 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 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." 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."

Now stop right there for just a moment. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was that they paraded before the people in the church that they were doing one thing but they actually were doing less than that. People were selling their property and bringing everything from the proceeds and just giving it to the church treasury, laying it at the apostles' feet, and then the apostles would oversee the distribution because there were so many in need in that time in that church. This is not a pattern for every church of every age. This was a one time situation where there was a very very special need and not under compulsion, this was voluntary; the people were coming in and doing this. It would have been fine for Ananias and Sapphira to have sold the property, given $\frac{3}{4}$ to the church or whatever it was, and kept back $\frac{1}{4}$ of it, but the point is they lied and paraded as if they too were bringing everything but secretly they were keeping back some of it. They were lying about it and that's why God dealt with them. Now this was a unique day, this was the commencement of the church age and so that's why you have such a powerful, if you might say, drastic exercise of church discipline in this case, God taking the lives of this couple during what would be parallel to us, the Sunday morning worship service.

Continuing on, verse 11,

11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

Now, what I'm going to give you are these five next points are something of a continual cycle of a true or a healthy New Testament church. I've sometimes called it the powerful New Testament church. These components, these precepts, these truths, are continually working. Now, in an immature church, some of them are huge, but as the church matures, they don't have to be such a big deal anymore. But all of them are always in cycle together and they're like interlocking links in a chain. You don't get one of these without the other and they depend on one another. Actually, as they're lived out in the church, these five things so bleed over into one another you can't separate them out. I'm only separating them apart for sake of illustration and understanding.

Now, I. The purification of the church. This is a continual, ongoing, ever-present process in a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't some rare or unusual thing. This is just part of it. It's part of daily life in God's church and we see that in verses 1 through 11 as Ananias and Sapphira are purged from the congregation and that purifies the congregation. But not only that, verse 11 tells us, "And great fear came over all." That means all those who were remaining in the church after God removed Ananias and Sapphira were purified in their hearts to be more genuine, more humble, and more committed to God's work and doing God's work God's way. So it was an overall purifying effect but, my friend, every keep it understood in your heart and mind about God's work. God purifies everything that's his. God purifies everything that's his. That's why he keeps messing with you. That's why he keeps humbling you. That's why he lets those infirmities pop up and those distractions and those irritations and those dead-ends. You had an idea and it just didn't work out the way you wanted and it humbles you to let you know you're not God and God's still working on you. And that's what he does to his church collectively, the local church. He's always purifying us. Now, praise be to God, perhaps it doesn't have to be radical and drastic. I'm convinced and I think the New Testament bears this out and church history definitely bears this out, as God matures a body, they don't need the kind of radical purification seasons that they might have had in their early days. Can I get a big amen there? I'm very grateful for that because they're tough to go through.

1 Peter 1:14-15, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" So God says once you're converted, there's still that pull and that draw to go back to the former lusts but you are to maintain a repenting spirit. You're to keep seeing that, calling it evil and saying, "Lord, I do have a desire for that still but that's not the new true me anymore and I want to repent of looking to that as my hope, my treasure and my joy, and I want to continue learning that you and your truth is my hope, my treasure and my joy."

Folks, we come to church – listen to me – not to have cleaner version of the world's pleasures. We come to church to find a whole new, radical, better than mention of pleasures, the pleasures of God. That's why it's such a drastic error for the church to take all this stuff. I'm hearing so many nutty, fruity, goofy, evil things being done in churches. Bringing in, I mean, secular rock music because it proves a point and what it does, it just throws people back into a worldly pleasure mode in their thinking and feelings instead of causing them to strive for the higher pleasures of God.

So God in this purification of this first church in the church age kills Ananias and Sapphira during the worship service. Now, two things I want to say about that at this point. 1. That was needful for this church. If this church was to go forward with God's power and do God's work for God's glory, this open, willful hypocrisy had to be removed. So it was needful for this specific church. Secondly, it was needful for all succeeding churches as an example. We look back on this and say, "We need to understand this too. We need to understand the purification principle."

1 Corinthians 5:6 reminds us, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" Now, they had a man in gross immoralities in their church membership and they were somehow boasting about it. You think, "How could that be?" That's the same thing when there is undealt with, open, willful rebellion on church membership rolls all over our country and churches say, "Well, we're too loving to deal with that." No, you're not loving at all. The Bible says sin leads to death. You're helping that man ruin his life by not dealing with it. That's not loving at all. It's loving yourself and being a coward, is what it is.

So all succeeding generations need this principle, this blueprint that begins with the purification of the church. Again, this was the commencement of the church age and Ananias and Sapphira are dealt with very severely because of the significance of this day. They lied about their gifts and here's what they're doing: in effect, Ananias and Sapphira used the church not for Christ's gain and Christ's glory but used the church for their own gain and their own glory. You don't join a church to do your ministry. You don't join a church to do your thing, to cause people to be impressed with you. You join a church with a heart that is striving toward, "O God, may you get the gain and may you get the glory for my service in this local body of believers." Ananias and Sapphira were radically contrary, opposite of that, and that kind of wickedness had to be rooted out of this early church or it would quickly multiply and metastasize and corrupt the church for the following generations.

Now, we have a powerful parallel to this in the Old Testament with the sin of Achan. The children of Israel have gone across and they have conquered Jericho and it was a magnanimous miracle victory to conquer Jericho, but God said, "This is for my glory and this is unto me so don't keep any of the spoils of the victory for yourselves." Everything is considered sacred unto the Lord but Achan and his family secretly kept some of the treasures, hid it in their tent and didn't tell anybody. The next battle comes up and it's the little battle against the little country Ai. Ai was very insignificant compared to Jericho. It should have been an easy rout in half a day. So they march against Ai and guess what? Israel is defeated. Their soldiers run for their lives and Joshua seeks the Lord about, "What in the world has happened? Your power has departed. Your blessing is not with us. What's going on?" I love the story as it goes. God in effect tells Joshua, "Why are you sitting here praying? Do something about it." Basically that's what he says. I see a lot of churches praying about situations, nothing to pray about, you need to do what the Bible says. Now as you're doing it, pray, but get going.

So he goes and he finds that it's Achan. He finds that Achan had kept some of the treasure and God does something drastic, God kills Achan and all of his household, or has them killed. Again, because that was the initiating, that was the commencement of God's people coming into the Promised Land so that was a foundational principle for all time to come. But one of the things that I want you to understand is – now listen to this – Israel lost God's power when they allowed sin in the camp. Israel lost God's power when there was undealt with sin in the camp. Now, there is sin all in the camp this morning, is there not? But here's the difference: I hope you're all humble repentant sinners, not outward,

openly willful, deceptive, unrepentant sinners. That's the difference. The church is full of sinners but they are humbled, repenting sinners. Achan was not that way and Ananias and Sapphira were not that way because, friend, the purity of the church affects the power of the Gospel. The purity of the church affects the power of the Gospel.

Here's what happens, are you listening to your pastor, this morning? When a church coddles willful, open wickedness and does not do what God's word requires, God's power comes off the church, and when God's power comes off the church, what is she left with? She's left with whatever she can come up with to make it work and that's why you've got the silly, worldly, ungodly amusements, entertainments and gimmicks you see in church life today because the power has departed and they're left to prove what impotent fools they are without the power of God. Now, we have not arrived but we have been striving now for 30+ years to not walk in that stuff but to try to prove to the world that God's power will accompany God's word done God's way and he will glorify himself.

One of our mentors that we've looked to for years is Dr. John MacArthur, author of the MacArthur Study Bible, I think probably the greatest local church pastor, theologian that is living today. No telling how many books he's sold in all different ways but we learned years ago that when somebody leaves Dr. MacArthur's church and they go to another congregation that has no concept of accountability or discipline in the body, they will not send a letter of recommendation because they say it's a non-church, because if they're not committed to strive toward purity in the church, then it's a non-church. It may be a religious organization, it may be a lot of things but it's a non-church.

J. L. Dagg was the first scholar among Baptists in early America. J. L. Dagg's kind of the intellectual theologian that Baptists come from in the United States of America. He wrote the first systematic theology among Baptists in America and J. L. Dagg used to say to local churches, "When discipline leaves the church, Christ goes with it."

Now, this is membership Sunday at Grace Life Church and sometimes for prospects, they'll hear of this and they'll say, "I'm afraid of that. I'm afraid of a church that's trying to be obedient to these clear biblical mandates." But can I say to you lovingly: that is foolish thinking. What you must be afraid of is a church that's not trying to do hardly anything in the area of purity in the church. That's scary. You want your children and your grandchildren to grow up in a church that coddles wickedness in a world of wickedness? How are they ever going to understand who God is? How are they ever going to understand what God's like?

Now, I hope we never have to have a public removal of anybody ever again and it is much much rarer today than it used to be. We've got some we need to deal with now but it is quite rare compared to the early days, that's for sure. But it doesn't something good for a 7 year old, a 12 year old, a 16 year old, to sit out there in the pew and hear that someone has unrepented of open sin and that the church has with compassion and love and patience sought to reach them and they would not have it and they would not repent so they were removed from membership in the church and that teaches that kid, that teaches that fellow or girl this is real. This is really real. Now listen, and it goes a step

further, this is something I can give my life for because they're not playing games. Folks, we live in a culture where you can't raise your kids in a nominal church. You just can't do it. The wickedness to devour them is everywhere. They need a place of holy respite from the wickedness in the world.

So sometimes prospects will say, "I'm just not used to that." Well, we're pushing 30 years of it and God has sustained us, amen? God's been with us. God's been faithful. In all of our blunders and failures and weaknesses, yet he knew our heart was to honor him and he stood with us and I wouldn't trade what I have as the pastor of this church for any church in the world. Period. Period. Because it's precious and wonderful.

Now, there is an application for members, not just prospects. Sometimes members will say, "Well, you know, this scares me." That's why some of you are looking at me like a calf in a new gate right now. My family said, "Nobody knows what that means anymore. Quit using that." Well, go out to the farm and find a little calf, you put up a new gate and he just looks at it. I'll be quite honest, it scares me. I don't want to preach this in my flesh. I don't want to follow this. I don't want to do this but it's not my church and I don't get to write the instruction manual. It's his church and I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

So when it bothers us and it frightens us a little bit and we think about, "Well, what about me? I struggle with sin. I fail sometimes." Well, listen, if you're humble about it and you're repentant about it, then you're in league with the rest of us, but if you're arrogant and brazen and flaunting and unrepentant, now that's different. In 1 Timothy 5:20 Paul is telling Timothy how to pastor and shepherd the churches and he says, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." So Paul actually says you've got to discipline some publicly, only those who refuse to repent publicly, but you do that so that the rest may say, "I'd better keep guard over my life too." That's good because sin will destroy you, the Bible says, and that's good to be scared of sinning. It's no different than when you hear, "Oh, did you hear about So-and-so? A car was speeding and went through a stop sign and hit them and they're in the hospital." Do you know what you hear? "Oh my goodness, I don't want to speed in my car. I want to be more careful." That's good. That's what God designed this to do and what God designed this to be. The purification of the church.

Now I've got a dilemma. Am I going to stop here or go on? If 100% of you will promise me you'll be here next Sunday morning I'll stop here. If you don't get all of this, you're out of balance. You've got to get all of it. You don't get part of, you don't just get the blueprint and one wall put up and leave the house. You've got to get all of it. You've got to get the balance so I'm trusting you to be here so we can finish this without rushing the next time we're together, okay?

But summing this up, would you reaffirm with your pastor this morning we know we're not perfect but we have a long-established pattern of striving to honor God in this precept of the purification of the church. And if I'm the next one in line, I'm going to ask you to do what I have learned to do and what we've been doing for many many years, if you come to deal with me, will you come humbly, will you come lovingly and will you come

in confidentiality to get me right? But by all means, please come. Don't leave me in my sin because I'm one of his and I'm most miserable when I sin. And I'm one of his and I don't want him dishonored by my sin. And I'm one of his and I want him to be glorified in my life and he's not when I'm living openly in sin. So if I happen to get there, please come. Please come.

Would there be anyone in this congregation this morning, anybody, anybody here that would say, "Pastor, I'm asking you today to reverse course. Let's not do what the Bible says here. Let's let wickedness, unrepented of open and brazen wickedness be allowed, be tolerated and in some senses even be embraced in God's church." Would anybody in this congregation stand for that today? I know the answer to that. You wouldn't dare say that. Yet brothers and sisters, somehow in the spirit of the age under the guise of, "Well, it's exciting here. Well, we're loving here. Well, we're compassionate here," this kind of stuff is being tolerated everywhere. Let's strive to be humble and let's strive to be a pattern and an example that God's word lived out God's way empowered by God's Spirit glorifies God and is the best way to go as God's church.