

Acts 5:12-26

"Power, Preaching & Persecution"

Ch 4 brought into focus great power & great grace; in Ch 5 it's great fear. & Understandably so; where there is purity, there is power. God was establishing the foundation of the church, & the apostles bearing witness to the resurrection of J.C. w/great power. *But when impurity sought to permeate, God immediately & definitively dealt w/it & there was no ambiguity, no uncertainty about the message. We might say that God was "deadly serious" about establishing the church on a pure foundation...*

By way of reminder God was moving, people were responding. They were seeking God prayerfully, there was absolute trust in scriptural authority, there was unrivaled unity & tremendous generosity (all finger prints of the Spirit's moving).

A man by the name of Barnabas had sold a piece of property & gave the proceeds (in their entirety) to the church. He didn't do it to gain any kind of notoriety, but God used it nonetheless to give him a certain platform among the people. *& It just seems like anytime God is moving in someone's heart in a pure way, Satan wants to mess it up by moving in a counter/perverse kind of way. Where the Spirit of God is moving, we see unification, magnification & multiplication. Satan wants to *divide* the church, *disgrace* the church & *decrease* the church. He walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

So a man by the name of Ananias along w/his wife Sapphira decide to sell some land & give *part* of the proceeds to the church, which is no big deal w/the exception of the fact that they purported, they let on, they implied & straight lied about giving it all. They wanted reputation w/out reality... It was a hypocrisy, deceit & thievery sandwich served between 2 slices of pride...

Peter looks at him & says, "So; you sold the land for 'X' amount, right?" He said, "Yup". Peter says, "How is it that Satan has filled your heart to lie the Holy Spirit & keep back another part for yourself? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You haven't lied to men, but to God." & He fell down dead before Peter, was carried out & buried while the rest stood there no doubt in a sober state of shock, God just killed him...

Bout 3hrs later his wife comes in not knowing what had happened. Peter says, "Did you guys sell your land for 'X' amount?" She says, "Yeah, that's right." He says, "How is it that you & your husband have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? The feet of those who buried your husband are at the door & they're going to bury you just the same." & "Boom" she falls down dead at his feet. God is purging impurity. Look at Vs 11 **(read)**

Vs 12

I mentioned in my introductory remarks that one of the earmarks of the early church is that they sought God prayerfully. In Acts Ch 4 & Vs 30 they prayed specifically (in response to the arrest of Peter & John) that God would grant them boldness, that He might stretch out His hand to heal, & that “*signs & wonders*” might be done through the name of His holy Servant, Jesus.

Now; here in Vs 12 of Ch 5 we read that through the hands of the apostles, “*many signs & wonders were done*” among the people. What’s the take home here? 3 words; God answers prayer.

I would ask, “How many of you realize” but the truth of the matter is, there may be several here who don’t. So let me say this: *I want you to realize*, that when you cry out to God, when you call out to God, when you *pray*... God hears you & He will *always* answer you... Now; let me qualify that.

God always hears the cry of the *pure* in heart, He always hears the cry of the *repentant* heart, the broken heart, the humble heart. He will *not* hear the prayer (that is, respond to the prayer) of the *prideful* or *unrepentant* heart. Remember these words; “*Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*”¹ So it’s not that God can’t hear the words that are coming out of my mouth. It’s as we developed in our last study; God knows what’s really going on *in our heart* & that’s what He’s tuned in to.

So; taking for granted that I *want* to please God, that you *want & need* to hear from God, we genuinely *desire* His direction, we aren’t trying to “pull one over” on God by seeming sincere in our words but having no intent to honor Him in our heart (He knows all that), God hears you, He will *always* respond to you.

He has said in His word, “*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*”² The psalmist bore witness, “*I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry.*”³ & Again, “*I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.*”⁴ Jesus said, “*I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*”⁵

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 59:1–2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Je 33:3]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 40:1]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 77:1]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 11:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Guys, on & on we could go. John said, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*⁶ James said, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*⁷ Now listen; these things are either true, or they're not! Question, is God a liar? NO! So His word is true, He will answer us.

Here you are mom, you've got the wayward child, you're worried about your son, your daughter... pray, keep praying, don't stop praying. God hears you...

So we're developing a principle here. God hears our prayers, He answers our prayers. However; that doesn't always mean the answer is what we want it to be... I have discovered that God has 3 basic answers to our petitions (in regard to the "Yes/No" type things we lay before Him or cast upon Him). You may be seeking peace or comfort, you may need wisdom or understanding, you may need direction; all of those things are found in Him, they come to us *through* Him. But they aren't "Yes/No". For those of you in that context I'd encourage you to act upon Prov 3:5-6, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."*⁸

But as for the, "God, will You..." "Father, teach me how to..." "Would You make a way so that..." God may answer "Yes", He may answer "No". He may answer "Yes, but not now." You/I may be told to wait, sometimes God gives us the what, but not the when... & We're placed in a position to trust Him by faith.

& That's not always an easy thing to do. You've heard me quote in the past from the philosophical resource of Tom Petty, "You take it on faith, you take it to the heart. But the waiting is the hardest part..." ☺ That's true! But God always answers prayer & we know that if we ask according to His will, we have what we ask. The apostles & the early church had asked that God would continue to show Himself strong on their behalf by stretching out His hand to do signs & wonders & here we read that's exactly what happened.

As for what the signs/wonders were? We don't know. Presumably they were much the same as we see in other places in Acts and in the Gospels – healings, deliverance from demonic powers, unusual blessings... & We note again that they were "all of one accord". There was tremendous unity (which in reality is a wonder in & of itself). It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to unify our stubborn & selfish hearts, believe you me. ☺

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Jn 5:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jas 1:5-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 3:5-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 13-14

You get the idea here, right? Were people joining them or not? Yes. The whole Ananias & Sapphira event rattled people to the core. People were reminded that being a follower of Jesus was more than just the latest trending/popular thing to do. If you weren't serious about giving your life *to* Him, following wholeheartedly *after* Him. You didn't try to join the movement. There was no such thing as the "casual Christian" at this time.

However; people who truly wanted to be right w/God, who were surrendering their lives to Jesus were being added to the Lord in droves. What happened w/Ananias & Sapphira in reality only affirmed people who wanted to be serious about a right relationship w/God. It didn't hinder what God was doing, in some measure it actually helped. (W/regard to keeping the movement pure & culling out the uncommitted).

Btw, for the sake of pointing out the obvious there's only one way you're "added to the Lord" did you see it there? It's by "*believing*". "Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved." Look again at Vs 14 (read).

Vs 15-16

Here we see the difference between what we might call the "modern faith healer" & what was happening here. "They were all healed." They were essentially emptying out the hospitals, God was moving in an incredible way!

Dare I even say, "strange" ways. People were so convinced of the reality & power of what the Christians were declaring that they believed that they would be healed even by the mere touch of Peter's shadow!

Of course it doesn't say if in fact the falling upon of his shadow did indeed heal them, but certainly seems to allude to that... The question is how do we account for that? I mean, was there something "magical" or "miraculous" about Peter's shadow? Was he "so holy" that even the shadow that fell from him had the power to heal? No.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Faith is an interesting thing. & The different things that people will cling to "trigger" their faith is fascinating as well. There is definitely a difference between what we might call a "passive" faith & an "active" faith. Passive faith is the faith that believes God *can* do it & perhaps He even *will* do it at some point. Active faith says, "Not only do I believe that God can do it, but that He *will* do it now."

But many of us rely on some point of contact in order to trigger such faith. For instance in Matt Ch 9, the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 yrs believed that if she could only get to the hem of Jesus' garment, if she could only touch it, she'd be healed.

And she was... Was there something magic about His garment? Did it do anything for the soldiers who gambled for it while He was hanging on the cross? No. But it was a point of contact that she needed in order to trigger her faith. She could've said, "If I can only look into His eyes..." She was drawn to the hem of His garment, same thing happened in Matt 14 for all kinds of people.

The bible speaks of anointing people with oil. Jesus spoke of laying hands on the sick. Is there some kind of healing energy that transfers from the hands of the one praying? No. These are contact points for the releasing of faith.

Later on in the book of Acts we'll see where people would take the sweat bands that Paul wore & when they were given to someone who was sick or demon possessed they'd be healed, or the spirit would leave them... How weird is that? ☺ But sometimes it's a strange thing that provokes our faith. & That's the important part, God is looking for faith. Doesn't mean everyone will be physically healed every time, but there are times, it happens!

Sometimes God will heal someone on account of *their* faith, other times He honors the faith of others on their behalf, but faith is the means by which God moves on our behalf. & For these people, at this time they would be satisfied w/even the shadow of Peter. But make no mistake, it wasn't Peter who was healing them, it was God.

& Let's not miss the connection between the purging of impurity & the outpouring of power. Spiritual power & purity are connected.

We also see the 1st mention here in Vs 16 of the work of the apostles extending beyond Jerusalem. Multitudes gathered from the surrounding cities. The only glitch in the system is that the apostles were to go out *from* Jerusalem, rather than wait for others to come *to* Jerusalem. They won't do that until persecution forces them out.

Vs 17-18

Let me just say that harmony isn't always blessing, and opposition isn't always an indication of failure. We have an enemy & his desire is to disrupt, distract, divide & decrease the work of God.

This is the age-old conflict between living truth & dead tradition. New wine can't be poured into old wineskins. It's been said, (Hugh Latimer), "Whenever you see persecution, there is more than a probability that truth is on the persecuted side."

The high priest rose up (& all those who were w/him, the sect of the Sadducees) being filled w/indignation & put presumably all 12 of the apostles in jail.

& Though we don't agree w/the Sadducees position, we certainly understand their indignation don't we? If you hold to a doctrine that refuses to believe in miracles, yet all these healings are happening that have nothing to do w/the medical, how do you handle that? What do you do? **Evidently, you get mad! I either have to change my mind/heart or change the situation. They opted for the latter, it takes humility to say, "Man, I've got to unlearn some things here. I thought "this", but evidently the truth is "that" ... Often times a person's pride won't let them do that, & such was the case here.**

Peter & John had been arrested once before. Threatened & told to quit teaching & preaching in the name of Jesus. They hadn't done that. So it seems this end was inevitable.

Not to mention the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, spirits, miracles (as I mentioned) & these guys were working miracles, preaching the resurrection, casting out demons--something's gotta give because it's making them look bad... So they lock them up.

Vs 19-20

I thought about calling this message, "Jailbreaks & Great Escapes" because of this right here. ☺ How cool is this, angels assisting in a jailbreak! ☺ The apostles get thrown behind bars, (we note they didn't protest or resist in anyway) at night an angel of the Lord opens the doors & brings them out.

Which is another little jab at the Sadducees who locked them up because they don't believe in angels... BTW, just a little word to the wise, believing or not believing something isn't what makes it true. Truth is not relative, "Well, that may be true for you." That's nonsense, something is either true or it isn't. My believing it doesn't validate it, not does it affect the truth, it affects me.

But isn't this something? Here the religious leaders were trying to *stop* the miracles, yet their actions only multiplied the miracles!

& The angel gives them a directive. "Go, stand in the temple & speak to the people all the words of this life." Terrible escape plan! I'm setting you free, now go to the most public place & speak to all the people. We have a principle here; when God sets you free, it's because He wants to use your life. His primary objective isn't our happiness (though it's not our misery either), His objective isn't our *happiness*, it's our *holiness*. He wants to use us. He wasn't seeking their safety, or their comfort, they were to preach the gospel.

Let everyone know who Jesus was, what He'd done *for* them, who He was *to* them. Give people the words of this life, this life that's in Christ Jesus, resurrection, everlasting life. Again, something completely counter to the doctrine of the Sadducees.

& Much like w/healing; here we see that they were delivered. Such wouldn't always be the case. 11 of the 12 of these men (plus Paul the apostle) would all ultimately meet w/a horrible death (beheadings, crucifixions, thrown from buildings & beaten w/clubs, dragged through city streets etc). They tried to boil John in oil, but he didn't die...

But the point remains. God opened the prison doors & set you free from bondage of sin & death. You're to know that it was for a purpose & the purpose isn't for another day, He wants to use you now, right where you are... notice.

Vs 21-23

"Bamboozled!" 😊 But check it out, they were in jail & it was night when the angel broke them out, yet *early in the morning* they entered the temple & taught... They didn't wait, take a day or 2 to lie low. They headed straight out early the next morning.

It's been said that the biggest nation in the world today is procrastination, & that's so true. How ez is the tendency to say, "Thank you Lord for freeing me, for saving me, for opening my prison doors! One day, I'm gonna serve You... You've told me to share w/others the words of this life & I will; sometime soon." Listen, when the Lord gives you direction, when He speaks to my heart ("I want you to make donation", "I want you to speak *to*, or pray *for* that person", "I want you serve in this capacity") we do well to respond, *not eventually*, immediately. If you put it off, you'll put it off.

Too often we content ourselves w/the intention. It's not those who *intend* to do who are blessed. It's the doer (Jesus said). If we want God to use our lives, we need to be doers (that is, those who respond affirmatively to His directives).

But we can kind of see this, "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" "Good news." The guards were there, the doors were locked, everything was just like we left it." "The bad news?" "The prison was empty..."

Vs 24-26

"They wondered what the outcome would be." They were freaking out; the kept encountering the supernatural w/these guys & didn't know what would be next, who it was they were dealing w/& it put them on edge. The underlying message is, "You can't stop God."

That doesn't mean church buildings can't be destroyed or Christians can't be killed, you can stop God's witness, but you can't stop God's word. Heaven & earth will pass away, God's Word will never, by no means pass away...

But now the guards are all, "Excuse me, guys... we'd like to speak w/you again; if you wouldn't mind, would you please come w/us?"

Now; one might think that being miraculously delivered the night before, they might be kept from arrest the next day; not so. However; they weren't worried about going w/them, why? Because they knew God could release them whenever He wanted. Their past experience of the power of God had filled them with faith for the present.

These religious leaders feared the people. Their problem was that they didn't fear God... Quite a lot to chew on today. The power of prayer, the need for purity, active faith & the fact that when God sets you free, it's for a purpose. Give people the hope of the gospel, the words of this life, let's learn to follow His directives & He'll use us for His glory. Amen?

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the reminder today that You hear & answer prayer. That You move through faith & You want to use us for Your glory. May we be those doers of Your word. We praise You that You are in control; fill us w/Your Spirit & be glorified in our lives.

The words of this life. God loves you, gave His only begotten Son J.C. to die *for* you & if you will believe upon Him, you'll never perish but have everlasting life. It's waiting for you today, God will do it, you have to humble yourself, turn from your sin & believe Him for it.