

The Sanctity of the Church is Threatened

Text: Acts 5:1-11

Introduction:

In our study of the "Life of David," when we get into the Second Book of Samuel (chapter 6), we will come upon a most sobering text, where God invades a time of great joy and celebration, in the life of the newly crowned David, who had finally come to the throne, with a hard hitting calamity. You see, David was excited, as was all Israel, for all that God had faithfully done to sovereignly bring David to the throne, and they decided to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem, where David would fix his throne. David's heart was so set upon his God, that unlike Saul, David was greatly concerned about maintaining the proper worship of God, and of celebrating the presence of God, among His people. And the Ark, was that which represented the very presence of God, containing the mercy seat above it, and set to be placed in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle.

David's singing and rejoicing were good, and his desire to fix the tabernacle in Jerusalem, was a God-instilled desire, but in the process of David's great joy, he neglected to keep one very important fact in mind; yes, God was David's God, and God was *for* David, but God is also Holy. God is never to be approached in some casual manner, but rather He ought always to be seen as infinitely unique and righteous, approached indeed with joy, but not without reverence. David and the people, let their guard down in their handling of the Holy Ark. The Levitical Law commanded that the Ark be carried on poles and by the Levitical priests alone, who were ordained and consecrated unto such a holy task. But David and the Israelites, perhaps a bit negligent and loose in their rejoicing, decided rather to set the Ark on a cart, driven by oxen. And as they sang and danced with joy, trekking toward Jerusalem, they came to Nachon's threshing floor, and the oxen stumbled. And the Ark had become unstable because of this mishap, which led to the well meaning Uzzah, putting out his hand to steady it. And Uzzah touched the Ark. He was the hero...so it seemed. But God's anger was aroused toward Uzzah, and He immediately struck him dead for touching the Ark.

Needless to say, David and the many thousands, who were with him, grasped something about God that day, which instilled a healthy fear within them, namely that, while God is a God to be loved and enjoyed and celebrated, He is also a God to be feared, revered and hallowed.

Later on, David returned to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, in the proper way (according to God's ordained means), but we can be certain that his view of God expanded on that occasion, and he carried that broader view to the throne with him. It affected his reign, and though he was imperfect, and sinned even greatly at times, as a general principle, he dared not make God's grace cheap.

I. Ananias and Sapphira

Indeed, the new born church, under the leadership of the Apostles, was growing and flourishing, even in the face of opposition and anticipated persecution. Miracles were being performed by the Apostles, the Gospel was being preached, thousands were being added to the church, and a precious unity had been solidified in the growing body of Christ. It was a time of great celebration and joy, as a once selfish and "world-focused" people, began to sacrificially love one another, with several even selling their land, and delivering the proceeds over to the Apostles to be distributed according to the need of the people, so that all would be free to serve Christ, without being hindered by a lack of basic life needs. There was a Holy Spirit formulated and driven sanctity that birthed the church, and the testimony was blaringly glorious, such that those on the outside of the church grew fearful, as they witnessed an unmistakable act of God, changing a multitude of people into wholly committed servants of the living God. The testimony of the risen Christ, through miracle, and in the life of a vibrant, unified church, was powerfully impacting Jerusalem, preparing to make its way outward to all of Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

But then something happens right here, at the beginning of chapter 5, which at first may seem quite harmless, but actually could very well serve to jeopardize the sanctity of the church, and the pure testimony of the Gospel of the risen Christ. One couple, Ananias and Sapphira, seek to delve into the flow of a growing divine body, but with ill, self-serving motives, and they will pay a devastating price for it. And God will send forth an additional, critical message to His church, and to all people, showing, that while His mercy and grace are indeed wondrous and beyond comprehension, He is also a God, who is to be feared and hallowed. He must be revered by all who would come near Him, even by way of the Gospel of grace. And while God does not necessarily outright, immediately judge and destroy people, in the way in which He does Ananias and Sapphira (here in our text), He intends to send a message here, a sign, to all

generations, stating, "Be holy, for I am holy," or this will be your end. "Whoever seeks to destroy My church, I will destroy."

Indeed brethren, we have already seen how the healed lame man's, leaping for joy is a testimony to the final outcome of all who die in Christ. Most are not healed from such a debilitating illness, but in the end, our bodies will be perfect, complete and without any ailment or fault, whatsoever. We anticipate that! Well, likewise, while most, who even commit grievous sins against Christ and His church, do not immediately perish, Ananias and Sapphira (Sodom and Gomorrah), are signs, pointing to the inevitable end of all who tamper with God's work (who tamper with the work of God, in the exaltation of His Son, by means of His church), if they die unrepentant and in their sin. As was the case with David, at the beginning of his reign, God would have the church, at the laying of her foundation, embrace a godly fear, which is not slow to remember, that even in our great Gospel joy, God must be hallowed by all!

Let us then look a bit more closely at the actual event, before taking some important concluding applications from it.

It is important to note that at the end of chapter 4, immediately prior to this, we are told about the blessed unity, which the Holy Spirit has infused in the newborn church. And this unity led people to claim no personal ownership of possessions, that they might have all things in common. Great, Holy Spirit driven sacrifice was taking place, as a manifestation of the Spirit's work, and a great testimony to the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead. This was the work of the risen Christ, by His Spirit. And then, we are introduced to Joses, who became well known as a man of encouragement, so much so, that the Apostles called him Barnabas (meaning "Son of Encouragement"). And Barnabas, who had land, following the pattern of what many were doing, sold it, and laid all of the proceeds at the Apostles feet, to be distributed according to the needs of the brethren. Barnabas was one example and testimony of the glorious work of the Spirit, which testified to the resurrection of Christ, as he faithfully expressed his confidence in, and love for, Christ in this way.

Clearly, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, had observed all that was going on, and wanted to be associated with those who made such an awe inspiring sacrifice among the people. And so, they sold their land for a certain price, and came and laid part of the proceeds at the Apostle's feet, so as to align themselves with all who were doing so. However, we are told that they kept back part of the proceeds for themselves, without saying anything. And for this reason, God

struck them both dead, first Ananias, and then Sapphira, who followed along with the lie of her husband. Now, what is the problem here?

The problem is not that they did not give all of the proceeds to the Apostles. In fact, they were under no obligation to sell their land at all...Peter makes this very clear. And furthermore, had they stated to Peter that they were only going to give "such and such" an amount, that would have been fine, and the Apostles would have been grateful---even for less! The problem lies in the fact that they were stating, by their actions, that they were committing all of the proceeds to God. They were offering all to God, in their presentation and clear implication, but they were holding back part, in reality. And in doing so, we are told that they "lied to the Holy Spirit!" Wanting to impress men, they had no regard for the Holy Spirit, who knew the truth of the matter. And so, Ananias and Sapphira were, by their actions, denying the very existence and power of the Spirit, who was greatly at work in the present context, and thereby denying the resurrection of Christ, and His present reign! Indeed, the crime was severe, worthy of death, as their actions were an attack on the Spirit, the testimony of Christ, and the sanctity of the church, in its pure and idyllic state.

Now brethren, there is another clue, given here, which could help us appreciate the gravity and reality of Ananias' sin. [Read verse 2 again]

It is important to note here, that when we are told that Ananias "kept back part of the proceeds," the word "kept back" in the Greek, is the word, "nosphizomai," which actually means he "pilfered" the money (see Titus 2:10- to "embezzle from one's master"). In other words, he stole that which was dedicated to God. And what is interesting, is that this same Greek word is used only once in the entire Greek OT (the Septuagint), namely in Joshua 7:1, where we are told that Achan had "pilfered" some of the devoted things (the accursed things), which belonged to the Lord. You will recall there, how God had commanded the Jews to devote everything in Jericho to destruction, but Achan took and hid some of the valuables in the ground, in his tent. This served to defile the Israelites as a whole, leading to their defeat at AI, and the loss of precious life. Achan's sin brought a curse upon the people of God. But then, when his sin was discovered, the people of Israel stoned Achan and his family, and burned them up, with all of his possessions. They had to purify the camp, in order for God to continue blessing them. Achan became a part of the accursed ban!

Well here, likewise, Ananias and Sapphira had lied to the Holy Spirit, taking that which belonged to God, for themselves, and so, God struck them dead, in order to purge the church, from the affects of their defilement. And they were immediately buried, unto the preservation of the sanctity of the church. And in the end, brethren, nothing that defiles, will remain in the church, but the "Great Searcher of hearts," will deal with all, who, while part of the church visibly, are not truly united to Christ! And woe to those, who seek to tap into the Spirit's work, for their own personal gain! [Note Acts 5:4- "conceived this thing in your heart"; premeditated)

III. Concluding Applications

1. The same God rules over both testaments.
2. God is to be hallowed and revered by His people. Joy must always be accompanied with reverence. [Nadab and Abihu offer profane fire, Moses strikes the rock, Uzzah touches the Ark, Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit...etc]
3. All of these examples serve to warn of the final judgment. Don't be presumptuous toward God's grace, simply because He has not immediately judged you. These are signposts!
4. Can lie to the people of God (pastors, deacons...etc), but God sees the heart!
5. 1 Corinthians 3:5-17 (esp. vss. 16-17)
6. Acts 5:5b, 11 ("Great fear" came upon the church---Through Ananias and Sapphira, God produced fear for His holiness, presenting a balanced understanding of His Person. God is not only mercy and grace and love...He is holiness and purity and righteousness!

AMEN!!!