

## Acts | The Incendiary Fellowship

### Lying to the Spirit

Acts 4.33-5.14

6.5.16

*And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales <sup>35</sup> and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

*<sup>36</sup> Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

*<sup>5:1</sup> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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? <sup>4</sup> "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." <sup>5</sup> And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. <sup>7</sup> Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.*

*<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, <sup>15</sup> to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.*

We've been looking at The Book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles). This is St Luke's history of the First Century Church.

And in the last few sections we've seen THE GRAND REVERSAL of God's program for planet earth. God chose a family (the family of Abraham) and made that family a Nation and situated that Nation, Israel, on a land and then drew all things to the Center of that Nation (like a

whirlpool) ...to the people, to the land and their holy City (Jerusalem) and IN that City, the Temple and IN the Temple...the Center of All Things – God’s very presence represented on the Ark of the Covenant, the lid of it – the Mercy Seat.

But it was always God’s plan to bless the whole world THROUGH His Chosen Nation (Gen. 12.1-3) ...and now He is making good on that Promise and the whirlpool is reversing... Jesus Christ has accomplished Israel’s mission and now everything is moving OUT...from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the Ends of the Earth. Outward: grace for all nations!

So...where the Temple had been the Nucleus...now it’s losing its gravitational field, losing it’s magnetism...all the particles are expanding OUT... and God is building a new Temple on the basis of what Jesus Christ accomplished – His perfect life and His suffering OUR penalty for sin. That’s the basis for a New Temple built on Jesus Christ and made of living stones – people from all over the world!

Last week we saw the human leadership of the Old Temple...It was a bunch of silly old men who were using the Temple and religion to make themselves feel important/powerful and had forgotten God... Today we find that same impulse trying to come into the New Temple...with disastrous results. Let’s see what this famous passage tells us about: Human Nature and Religion, God and the Church and Generosity and True Spirituality.

The Temple is no longer the center of God’s plan... It’s “ichabod” – God has left the building!

This whole section is about the Temple and Power - the Temple was the nucleus and everything revolved around it...but now the gravitational field is weakening and everything will be moving OUT. (1.8) “from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria...to the ends of the earth” In fact, soon (70AD) the Old Temple will be gone altogether...the disciples/apostles will move outward (from Temple to Jerusalem...Judea...Sam...ends of earth).

In our last episode the Temple was exposed as hollow...the leadership was the supreme court (combined with the Congress and Executive) and they are hollow...null & void...w/o wisdom...without power...they’ve turned the Temple into the Tower of Babel and the Temple is being taken from them.

The Temple came to be the epitome of our fallen human nature in combination with humanity’s religious impulse...It had become (as Jesus Christ had diagnosed) a “robbers den” when it should have been a “house of prayer for all people” (Lk. 19.46)...

They made it a commercial center for the selling of sacrifices and the exchange of money... (foreign currencies had to be exchanged for the Tyrian Shekel and profit was made in the exchange).

When foreigners came to the Temple, they found NOT GRACE...but karma...an exchange: we do for God and then HE DOES for us... And WITH that comes the constant fear that I'm not measuring up...and with that comes constant comparisons and competition to determine who does measures up the MOST... Trying to prove yourself...fearing that YOU might be exposed or excluded... That's how the FALLEN NATURE MEETS THE RELIGIOUS IMPULSE. And that was the whole principle on which the Temple worked – they turned grace into commerce and security into peer-pressure and fear.

Second, this story teaches about God and the Church.

God is building a New Temple...the cornerstone ...vital foundation...the base ...is not made of granite ... it's a PERSON. Jesus Christ IS the foundation...and the building blocks will be ransomed people...

This New Temple doesn't look like much at this point...especially in contrast with the Old Temple... This New Temple looks more like a pup-tent (Amos 9.11) ...the only thing they really have going for them is the foundation...the Cornerstone...A N D ...of course...the reality INSIDE OF THE NEW TEMPLE, the Church.

This New Temple is NOT built on karma but on grace! This New Temple is built on Jesus Christ – His blood and righteousness! Here people are INCLUDED NOT on the basis of THEIR measuring up but on the basis of HIS MEASURING UP.

People in this New Temple swap records with the World's ONLY obedient Man – He takes responsibility for their crimes and THEY get credit for HIS love and obedience...

IN THIS NEW TEMPLE (not made with hands and composed of human stones) IN THIS NEW TEMPLE, karma is reversed – we get rewarded before we obey! We become indescribably rich before we work or earn. We get included and qualified NOT by our looks or athleticism or morality or physical wholeness or ability or status or gender or race or self-discipline... WE GET INCLUDED BECAUSE OF WHAT SOMEONE ELSE DOES FOR US... It's grace, not karma: my obedience is not the basis for life in this New Temple – Jesus Christ IS THE CORNERSTONE.

And Luke is trying to show us that IN THIS TEMPLE ...that from the outside looks more like a tent...but inside...God is there. The Spirit (the very Heart of God Himself) is there...His power is there (power is a huge theme – THE theme verse is “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...”)

This is a New Way of doing religion...a new kind of Temple (made up of people) and though it looks unimpressive, God is there... There's prayer (the kind of prayer that should be in the Temple – prayer that shakes the world! 4.31). There was liberty (people were freed from that unbreakable impulse to HOLD ON TO THEIR STUFF). There was true brotherhood and inclusion,

healing, TRUE POWER...and no need...because this new Temple was not built on US (and our achievements)... It is built on Jesus Christ and HIS ACHIEVEMENTS... NOT based on quid-pro-quo but on grace; not on competition and earning but on our weakness and HIS PERFECT LIFE ...salvation received NOT achieved.

The Old Temple looked impressive (see Mark 13.1-2). The Old Temple looked impressive but there was NO INNER REALITY... God had departed. The New Temple looks unimpressive ...but inside...is the True Ark of the Covenant...the dwelling of Jesus (the True Tabernacle/Temple).

AND this is why...this whole crime of Ananias and Sapphira was so serious. God was making a statement in the earliest stage of the construction of the New Temple – “THIS TEMPLE will not be built on karma...”

The Church of Jesus Christ will not revolve around our comparative goodness and all the games we play to try and show that, “I am good enough...smart enough...generous enough...that I measure up ...that I color inside the lines...that I raise my kids the right way...that I have good manners...I’m punctual... I’m committed... That it’s up to me to convince my religious community that I AM A GOOD PERSON...”

Ananias and Sapphira were trying to pour the NEW WINE of grace and the Spirit into the brittle OLD WINE SKINS of Temple religion...based on show... based on effort and fooling others...a religion based on human merit and people who were obsessed in proving themselves to other people.

But the True Temple built on Jesus Christ is NOT THAT KIND OF RELIGION...And since a LITTLE of that old yeast can spread VERY quickly and leaven the whole lump of dough (Gal. 5.9) – it had to be snuffed out immediately.

So, when this couple conspires and schemes together...when they figure, “Ah! We got this! We know how religion works...you make a big donation and then the leaders recognize you and YOU'RE IN!...So honey let’s just do that, OK? We give a big sum of money like this Barnabas guy and in turn we get acceptance from the leaders...that’s how religion works...” ...“Great idea, Sweetheart!”

But this is the UN-Religion!... People are NOT at the center of this as they were in the Old Temple...God is at the center...and they’re really NOT fooling people; they’re trying to fool God... And the deadly bacteria of man-centered religion based on fooling others...based on fear of being excluded by PEOPLE because you don’t fit in or measure up...religion with all its maneuvers will NOT be allowed in this New Temple and God makes a statement... because... you know...He’s not a tame lion.

So what do we learn from this hard story about TRUE Generosity and True Spirituality?

Well...truth is...there is in this church...St. Andrews Presbyterian Church and every other church...there's a lot of this same kind of sin. And it deserves the same kind of punishment but we don't get what we deserve...mercifully.

Sometimes God holds up people as cautionary tales...but DO remember...when we try to impress one another AS IF what's most important about me is that I'm educated or how much I give or how accomplished my children are or that I served in the Peace Corps or military or in some sort of ministry... whenever we act as if THIS...this Living Temple (the Church) functions on the basis of our deserving rather than on God's grace in Jesus Christ...we are lying to the Holy Spirit...and defiling the Temple.

And when Paul the Apostle wrote that scathing letter to the Churches in Galatia, he turned the Ananias and Sapphira story into a principle, (QUOTE from ch. 1) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is accursed! (Galatians 1.8).

In other words, "Let's get used to looking each other in the eye and saying, 'I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH...I NEVER WILL BE...and neither are you! WE LIVE IN THE NEW TEMPLE because a Perfect Man lived in our place and died in our place...The Other Gospel that says that some people are so accomplished that they measure up by their giving or their self-discipline or their prayer-life or holiness, understanding of the Bible...THAT OTHER GOSPEL is NOT Good News – it's the road to hypocrisy, to lying and self-justification and it has no place in the Church (The New Temple) – it's accursed.

So...where does heroic generosity originate? Well, it's not insecurity but SECURITY that leads to True generosity. My life is not IN my money but in the God who loves me and included me at the cost of His own Son ...I can part with my stuff...because it's NOT my life!

In the Gospel, God's recognition PREcedes our obedience. If you give out of insecurity, then you're really giving in order to get (to get rewards, protection, recognition) and that's really not true generosity – it's business...an attempt to make a deal.

See a vision of security in Barnabas or in that poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And Jesus took note... even in the Old Temple there were flashes of GRACE.

They could both give with a sense of freedom...even sacrificially... (one gave a few cents, the other gave Real Estate!) NOT because they wanted to be recognized by people ....not even to be recognized by God...but because they evidently had a sense that they HAD ALREADY BEEN RECOGNIZED BY GOD.

Memorize this verse – Romans 8, v. 32 "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (END)

If He freely gave the ultimate Gift...I can trust Him for lesser things. My generosity won't buy His love – it's already mine...and I don't need to impress people – I already have all things in Christ... I can let go of stuff because it's NOT my source of life! Christ is the Basis and Cornerstone...stuff doesn't own me.

It's a vision of security that propels generosity...not insecurity looking for recognition, but a Vision of Security that comes from the Cross: "I'm secure in Him who holds back no good thing from His ransomed children.

### **The Communion**

I hope you read the section on p. 11 in the bulletin today. It gives our understanding of the serious warning in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians CH. 11 about taking the Bread and Wine in the wrong way.

We come today knowing...believing ...trusting that while we fail again and again...the Good News is that our acceptance with God is NOT based on our strong commitment to HIM...but on HIS STRONG COMMITMENT TO US.

We come admitting, "Lord, I fail to obey, fail to love You and others... and all my failing is rooted in my lack of Trust in YOU... I think I have to do something, to prove myself... HELP ME KNOW TO SIMPLY TRUST YOU AND TO RECEIVE Jesus Christ...as all I need...as the very nourishment that I need. HE IS THE BASIS. (Pray that now in silence as we come...)