

5 - THE DARK SIDE

Acts 4:32 - 5:14

Why are you here at church today?

Maybe it was to hear Ben share about Camp Illiana, so that you can go and make an impact on people's lives? Or to have your life, or your child's life impacted?

But why are you here today? Why did you come to church?

Did you come because this is your habit? You always do this on Sunday morning.

Did you come because your mom and dad pressured you to?

Or maybe you came because your friends are here and you enjoy being with your friends?

Maybe you came here to go to heaven? You're trying to buy eternal fire insurance.

No matter what the reason is, I'm glad you're here today.

I'm glad because we are working our way through the beginning of the church in the Book of Acts and talking about things that are true for all churches regardless of the time and culture they live in . It's easy to read the Bible and think, "Well that was back then, but I live in the now..." What we are dealing with, especially in our text today, is relevant for what we face every day in our life as we seek to follow Jesus.

Remember what has been going on in Jerusalem...

In Jerusalem, Jesus died on the cross, resurrected on the third day, and then ascended into heaven. Before his ascension, Jesus appeared to his disciples to prepare them for the work to come. He told the apostles about the coming power they would receive, and with that, their mission began. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, causing them to speak in other languages. The Spirit gave them power, purpose, and a plan. Out of joy, the church was born.

Empowered by the Spirit, Peter then gave his first sermon to the people gathered there, and 3,000 people were baptized. This crowd began to walk in unity and made an impact on the lives around them. They were praised by the people around them. Out of joy, the gospel creates life changing community.

Then, as Peter and John began to spread the gospel through preaching and miracles, they were arrested and commanded not to teach about Jesus. But they refused, and when the people began to praise God in the city streets, the Sadducees had no choice but to let them go. Through this, the church grew to a number of 5,000 men, not counting women and children.

Out of joy, the church continues to multiply today. In every day and age, the church faces both persecution and praise, yet God's hand is always at work. We will be misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned, but it should not shock us or confuse us. His plan prevails. Out of joy, the church multiplies.

it's amazing to think the church grows, even in the face of threats.

Actually, the threats in Acts 4 had a positive effect on the church. Threats from the Empire had result in a united and prayerful church! The followers of THE WAY ask God for boldness to continue sharing the Good News.

Acts 4:29-31 tell us this conclusion to the prayer: “**29** Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. **30** Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Can you imagine being in a church meeting where you pray with so much faith, God shows up and shakes the entire place?!?! We’d be so shook (pun intended) that we’d form a committee to examine the foundations of the theater.

The church is threatened. The church prays for boldness. God answered that prayer with more boldness.

When Jesus is shared with great boldness, there is life transformation that takes place. When the grace of God is experienced in all of it’s fullness, you cannot help but be changed.

Check out what happens next in Acts 4:32...

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. **33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. **And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all** **34** that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales **35** and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), **37** sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

The result of God’s grace being so powerfully at work in them all was an amazing transformation.

There are two effects which take place when we experience God’s grace in our life. God’s grace leads us to:

You hold on tighter to people.
You loosen your grip on things.

God’s grace causes us to love others, to be united in purpose with one another in the church. Because we love God, we love people. Isn’t that the two greatest commandments? Love the Lord and love your neighbor? Jesus creates a bond in us to love people and cuts the bond to love things.

This is what is taking place in Jerusalem. The church was growing and God's grace was at work powerfully in them. So powerful, people were taking their possessions and selling them to help those in need.

And why would they need to do this? Think about how many people from around the world were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Those who became followers of Jesus stayed in Jerusalem to continue learning about the way of Christ. This means they did not have jobs or any places to stay. They were truly in need. So the church was making sure everyone had what they needed to live.

This brings Luke to mention Joseph, aka Barnabas, who sold one of his fields and gave the money to the church. Wow... isn't Barnabas a great guy?!?!

They probably dedicated a pew to Barnabas at First Christian Church in Jerusalem.

Barnabas wasn't generous in order to earn God's favor. He wasn't even trying to keep the church rules. Because of God's grace, Barnabas was holding tighter to people, trying to make sure their needs were met, and loosening his grip on things in this world.

One man asked a preacher, "Is your church a law church or a grace church?" The preacher could sense this was a trap, but went ahead and took the bait. The preacher said, "We're a grace church." The man replied, "Good, I didn't know if yours was one of those churches that made you give 10% in the offering." The preacher answered, "Oh no, we practice grace. The minimum in the Law was 10%, grace teaches us to give as we are blessed. So we encourage above 10%, 20, 30, 40, 50 and above!"

I know there is a tendency to want rules so we can know what is expected. But God's grace is the key to freedom in Christ.

Paul said in Titus 2:12, "[11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.](#)"

God's grace is the difference maker.

Because God's grace was so powerfully at work among the church in Jerusalem, amazing things were happening.

But this generosity also led to a huge danger for the church.

You see, one of the dangers we face in the church is the danger of drifting towards hypocrisy. It is very easy to become hypocritical in following Jesus.

Here's how to understand what hypocrisy is...

Hypocrisy is when you are pretending.

You want to look more mature and generous than we actually are. We want to appear more Godly so people will praise us and compliment us. We want to appear as holding on tighter to people, when we actually still have a grip on things in this world.

Barnabas, because of his generous donation, is church member of the month in Jerusalem right now, and this causes a man and his wife in the church to come up with a plan for them to get recognized as well.

Acts 5:1 introduces us to Ananias and Sapphira.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

So you get the picture of what has happened? They sold the field, but rather than giving all of the money to the church, they decide to keep part of it. However, the problem is they are going to present this donation to the church as if it's the entire amount they got for selling the field.

And this does not go well for them...

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." 5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Instead of Ananias seeing Barnabas being generous and praying for God to give him a generous heart, help me to hold on tight to people and loosen my grip on this world... Instead, he wanted to be praised by people and sought glory for himself.

Listen, there will always be people like this in the church. Until Jesus returns there will be hypocrites in the church. I wish it was different, but then again, if it was different I fear that I wouldn't be allowed in most of the time if it wasn't this way.

Hypocrisy is a danger every church in every century and culture has faced. There are no perfect churches ever. Not even in Jerusalem. Sure, they had a good run of a few months going, but then Acts 5 happens and hypocrisy shows up. There are no perfect churches because churches are made up of people.

If you're excited about coming to Restoration, I am thankful. I want you to be excited. We should be excited about what God has done in our life.

But if you're new, let me give you some advice... just hang out with us for long enough and we will disappoint you. We will let you down. It isn't what we want to do, it's just that we're human and not perfect. There are no perfect churches.

Now, back to Jerusalem and Ananias' situation... well, his hypocrisy got him killed. Then check out what happens when his wife shows up at church. Verse 7...

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Yeah I would think there was some fear spreading around the church! People dropping dead during the offering... the deacons have to be thinking, "I gotta check the bulletin and make sure I'm not on the schedule next week to do offering."

This is crazy! I would think great fear seizes the church and community after this event. It really caused people to stop and consider exactly what they believed.

You see, if you've experienced God's grace, you're going to hold on to people tighter, and let go of things in this world. You are going to be in the process of being changed on the inside. You are going to be satisfied and content with what God has blessed you with.

Ananias and Sapphira stand for the exact opposite, namely, people who have not really been changed on the inside by being satisfied with all that God is for them in Christ, but who still want some place in the visible church.

The reason they drop dead is not because this is what happens to all hypocrites. For example, it doesn't happen to Simon the Magician in Acts 8:20–24. The reason they drop dead is to give a stunning warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later.

God means for his people to fear hypocrisy. He means for us to be afraid of treating the Holy Spirit with contempt. Notice at the end of verse 5, after Ananias had died: "And great fear came upon all who heard of it." Then again in verse 11 after Sapphira died, "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

This is the lesson Luke wants us to get:

Faking faith in the presence of God is a fearful thing.

The fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit bring peace and growth to the church. Treating the Lord with contempt by religious fakery should remain a fearful prospect in the church, because God is not mocked. And the Holy Spirit is a great comfort here, because it is precisely by his indwelling power that we become real and authentic.

Notice what takes place after this event with Ananias and Sapphira....

12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though

they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Even though this is a tragic situation in the church, the church continues to grow.

I know this is extreme, but it's important because no matter where we live or what we do, there is always a danger for hypocrisy to take place in the church.

And what we want to do is make sure we never forget how much grace we need from God and how much He has sacrificed so we can experience grace.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

I don't know about you, but I need mercy. I need to confess my sin.

Would you be willing to Face the Truth about your lies?

FACE THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR LIES

___ I lie occasionally.

___ I lie often.

___ I'm living a lie.

I have broken liars down into three broad categories, and I want you to really determine where you fall. The first category, most of you would probably say, "Yes, I do fall into this category," and that would be those who lie at least occasionally. You know, a little fib here, a little white lie. Someone says, "Does this shirt make me look fat," and you're thinking, "... No, your face does... but you say You look fine."

You exaggerate the truth a little bit to get a job, or you find yourself just stretching the truth here or there, or maybe you don't want to hurt people's feelings, or you want to impress people, so you lie.

Next category would be this, those would be those who lie often. Now, I would ask you to admit if you lie often. The only problem is, if you lie often, how do we know if we believe you? You know, it starts to break down somewhere.

Those would be, maybe people who maybe lie often, maybe about finances. We look like we are okay, but we are not. Living beyond our means, really, is a consistent financial lie, isn't it? Maybe we often lie about other people to make ourselves look better.

We often lie at work really, to help ourselves get ahead.

A lot of people have sexual lies. We lie about stuff we didn't do to make ourselves look like we did. Or other people do the flip side, which is, we lie about stuff that we did do and pretend that we didn't.

Some people lie for no reason.

A third category, and this is the one that terrifies me, "I live a lie." You live a lie.

I'm one guy with my friends and I'm a different guy in front of my teachers. I'm one person to this group and a completely different person around another group. My fear is there are too many Christians living a lie... we say we believe in Jesus, but our lives are no different than people who don't believe in Jesus. Sometimes we are even worse.

We need to understand that God hates it all.

You know the ultimate reason why I, Wade Allen, find myself lying?

Why do I lie?

Because I do not trust God enough. When I lie, what I am doing is, I am saying, "I believe that my lie will work better at that moment than truth." But think about it, Who is truth? God is truth. Jesus said I am the way and the truth. When I lie, I don't trust God enough because I think my lie will be more effective than truth.

If I lie to you, I think to myself, "Maybe they will like me better if I embellish this story." But the truth is you cannot have a good relationship based upon lies. So the very thing I think will get me what I want actually keeps me from having what I want.

I think if I lie I will get more of something. More security... more friends... more whatever I want or need at the time...

But what I'm really saying is I do not trust God, I think my lie is more effective than the truth.

I don't know where this is landing for you today, but I know God is working on my heart in a huge way this morning.

And while there is bad news, God always tells the truth about ourselves, we need to also remember there is good news. God comes to bring healing and restoration.

I love this verse Jesus said in John 8:32, "[31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'](#)"

THE TRUTH WILL SET US FREE

To be set free there are a couple things you must do.

1 - Confess our sin to God and receive His forgiveness.

There's an important verse in 1 John 1:9 we must remember: "[If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.](#)"

In Christ, you are forgiven. As far as the east is from the west, so far has God separated your transgressions from you. In His mind, it never happened. Forgiven, clean. In Christ, you are forgiven.

2 - Confess to the appropriate people so you can be healed.

This is a difficult but necessary aspect of healing...

James 5:16 tells us: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

To be set free, we need to confess to the appropriate people. I mentioned appropriate people because we need to be wise in what we confess. **Honesty means that everything you say must be true, not that everything true must be said.**

But always remember Proverbs 28:13 says, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

As we wrap up this morning, I think about the examples of Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira. And I have to ask myself, “**Am I holding on to God and people tighter, or am I gripping the things of this world?**”

As we experience God’s grace, our love for God and people will grow, and our need to grip the things in this world will loosen.

COMMUNION

(Video after prayer)