

# Ananias & Saphira

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, June 23rd, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So, quick pastoral announcement.

Actually, before that, I'll give you another announcement. So, with the daycare inching closer and closer to opening, likely in the fall, I don't want to alarm anyone, but there is a system that is active in the basement now.

So, do not go downstairs, or you will be alarmed. So, yes. So, please don't go downstairs, either the back stairwell or down here in front, because it is armed, and it will go off, and it's happened once already.

So, we're just trying to educate everyone. It's just to get us all used to the fact that once they are open and operating, that space is licensed, is all sorts of things.

So, we need to keep some boundaries there. So, quick pastoral announcement. Michelle Connor and I will be away for the next three Sundays, and we'll be welcoming Paul Hay.

[ 1 : 06 ] Paul is going to be bringing a short sermon series focusing on the idea of sonship, so what it means to be a child of God. And Paul will be bringing a few more sermons in that series in August as well, to wrap that up, so don't miss it.

So, I listened to wise counsel. Sermons will not be updated on the website while I'm away. The phone line will not be updated, because the guy who does it has two thumbs, and it's this guy.

So, a few people, I said, well, I need to make sure it records. I need to... And people are going, stop it! And I said, but why stop it? And they said, because if you're off, then you need to be off.

So, there you go. So, blame them, and I'll give you names. No, I won't. So, I'm bad at relaxing. I asked Michelle. I confessed it yesterday. I said, I feel guilty not doing anything.

And she said, isn't it your day off? And I said, yes. And she said, didn't you already do yard work this morning? And I said, yes. And she said, then stop it. So, I'm bad at relaxing. I'm bad at not working.

[ 2 : 14 ] And so, I'm going to listen to God, and I'm going to listen to others, and I'm going to try to do better. I promise. So, while I'm away, people can connect with the church office or Vern Castle.

And I'm not setting Vern up. I already asked and made sure it was okay. If anyone has a prayer request or any pastoral care needs. And obviously, if something comes up that's an emergency, I will be notified right away.

So, and we would appreciate your prayers as well for our family, just to get some rest. So, we're continuing in our sermon series, Acts to All the World.

And I know lots of people who haven't been here have been able to listen online or listen to the podcast and stay caught up that way. So, through this series, we've been exploring the New Testament book of Acts, as the name suggests.

And so, as we considered Acts 4, verses 1 to 31, and recognized in our sermon, the persecution begins last week, Peter and John were arrested.

[ 3 : 12 ] Why? Well, for healing a man who had been lame, which also seems like a lame reason for them to be arrested, I think. So, they were also arrested for sharing the truth of Jesus, for giving people, seeking to give people hope that they could only find in Jesus.

So, despite being commanded and threatened to not preach or teach in Jesus' name, they were bold and confident in sharing what Jesus had taught them and preaching the gospel.

So, we also recognize that the early church community prayed for God's will to be done. They prayed for the boldness and confidence that they needed to be faithful to their calling that Jesus had given them.

And God answered that prayer with the dramatic, as we remember, yes. God filled them with confidence. He gave them the boldness that they asked for.

So, before we get into our focus passage for today and unpack that together, I want to set the stage a little bit. So, following the time of prayer and focusing on God that we looked at last week, what was the vibe like in the early church?

[ 4 : 23 ] What were their priorities? What was their focus? Well, let's quickly look at Acts 4, verses 34 to 37. You can just listen to that. And listen for highlights. 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. 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 that all, that, at work in them all, there we go, that there was no needy persons among them.

From time to time, those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money they had from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4, 34 to 37. So, what do we recognize? I said, listen for highlights. So, they were unified, first of all, it tells us.

[ 5 : 35 ] The gospel of Jesus was also being preached. That was a priority. They shared everything they had. We hear that as well, right? Everyone's needs were met.

And you notice there that it says needs, not wants. We get a specific example of this at work in the actions of a man named Barnabas. Now, I don't know why his name was Joseph and they called him Barnabas.

It feels like a stretch, but we don't know if it was a nickname. You know, there's no explanation. So, his parents named him Joseph and he decided Barnabas was better, I guess.

So, there you go. So, we recognize that in his behavior and his actions, though, right? He's very gracious and generous and giving and all of those things.

So, he was walking the talk. He was living out the values that he and others had been taught by Jesus. So, our passage for this morning is Acts 5, verses 1 to 11.

[ 6 : 36 ] So, go ahead and turn in your Bibles. Turn on your Bible. Listen to your free narration. Whatever you choose. So, Acts 5, 1 to 11. Let's look at that now.

Now, a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. So, this comes right after Barnabas. 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.

Then Peter said, And great fear seized all who had heard what had happened.

Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

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

Yes, she said. That is the price. 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.

[ 8 : 09 ] At that moment, she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and found her dead, carried her out, and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who had heard about these events.

Nothing like me throwing a hand grenade of a sermon into the middle and then going on holidays. So this is a crazy story, right? It is a crazy story.

So don't panic. Yeah, it feels dark, but we're going to look at this together. So, our sermon this morning is titled, simply, clearly, Ananias and Sapphira.

And so we've just heard this fairly intense story. So also, this is not a story on tithing that I'm going to say, Give everything you have or God will kill you, or I will be really mad and throw a water bottle at you.

That's not what's going to happen. So, and that is not how it works, and that is not what happened here. So, stay with me. So as we've been looking at the characteristics of the early church over the past several weeks, we've learned that there was a spirit of generosity, right?

[ 9 : 17 ] Caring for others, caring for the greater good of the community. There was a selflessness vibe that set them apart from the way society at large would have been.

And it's something that Jesus taught and modeled to his disciples from the beginning, and we still have that model and that example to follow now. So the story we've heard this morning presents a dramatic contrast to that.

And it's met with a pretty clear and actually terminal judgment, isn't it? So Ananias and Sapphira are a married couple. We assume they're married. It doesn't say that in Scripture, but we get there's a relationship there.

They're clearly part of this church community, but their behavior and their priorities stand in stark contrast to what they would have been taught.

That's what we need to recognize. What would have been modeled for them? They had the same examples, the same teaching, and made drastically different choices. So what can we learn from this remarkable incident, this story from the early church?

[ 10 : 23 ] Let's take a closer look at the case, the strange case of Ananias and Sapphira. Let's look at this together. So what happened to Ananias?

So let's work through this a bit. Acts 5 verse 1 says that Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property. So we get the sense that this was something that they personally owned.

There was joint ownership. Both their names were on the title. So maybe it belonged to one of their families. Maybe it came to them as an inheritance. We don't know. Scripture doesn't say.

But whatever the circumstances, it had value to it, right? We can recognize that. And they sold it.

There was a transaction. And they got some money. So then we learned something quite telling, in my opinion.

Verse 2 says, So not only is Ananias making a conscious choice here that goes against the values of the community and the church, but he's doing it with his wife's full knowledge.

[ 11 : 32 ] That's what Scripture tells us right there. So there's an intentional collaboration at work here. There's a collaboration and an intent to deceive the community and deceive its leaders.

And so we learn that after he set aside his own prophets, Ananias brought the rest to the apostles to share with the rest of the community. So what do we recognize here?

They knew the values of their community, but they intended from the very beginning to deceive the apostles. So remember what we heard about Barnabas, or Joseph, if you prefer.

He goes by both. He sold some property. He brought the proceeds to the apostles to share. So there's no suggestion there that he held anything back. And that's not to say that's wrong.

So hear me say that. So we can assume that Ananias brought the money to the apostles with the implication that this was all the money. That's probably fair.

[ 12 : 32 ] So there would have been no reason for them to expect or assume otherwise. They would have taken him at his word. So what happened next? Well, Acts 5, 3, and 4 says, Then Peter said, This immediately jumps on this.

So Peter challenges Ananias immediately.

How did he know? Good question. I'll say God. He questions his motives right away. He points out that in knowingly holding something back for his own benefit, but not disclosing it.

That's the clarity there. He's not only lied to the other members of his community who trust him, but to the apostles and by association to God himself.

So Peter even points out that only a truly evil intention influenced by Satan could have caused him to act in this way. So here comes the truly shocking part.

[ 13 : 54 ] Acts 5, 5, 5-6 says, So it was Peter's words that seemed to have caused Ananias' death.

There seems to be Peter spoke to him. There seems to be Peter spoke to him and boom. And so obviously God's judgment came through Peter's words. And then we read that great fear struck everyone who saw it happen or heard about it.

No kidding. So then Ananias' body is taken away and buried. This happens very quickly. So remember again that the early church was characterized by communal Christianity.

When they sold possessions or homes or land or other things, they gave a free will offering to God that would have been used to help and benefit everyone.

And as you know, we take a benevolent offering on communion Sundays. And that is the purpose of that. So let's be clear here. They didn't have to sell their possessions.

[15:04] That wasn't the mandate. That wasn't the requirement. You can be part of this community, but sell everything first. Show me the receipts and then we'll talk. No. Nor was there an expectation that they give 100% of what they sold.

That was not the expectation. So whatever was given was in response to God's call. Our generosity in response to God's call to us to be generous.

To serve others and to ensure everyone was looked after. That's the model. So what's the problem? Well, it's the deception, folks.

It's the deception that's the key factor here. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles. Plain and simple. They lied to their community who trusted them.

Given the nature of the relationship between the apostles and the Holy Spirit, that they were inspired and empowered by the Spirit, lying to them would have been equivalent to lying to the Spirit himself, which is serious business.

[16:10] Lying to God himself. So what about the missus? What happened to Sapphira? Well, let's hear the words of Acts 5, 7 to 9. About three hours later, now, just a quick aside.

Three hours later, she didn't notice Ananias was gone. Ladies, you don't care as long as we stay out of trouble. He didn't manage to stay out of trouble. So about three hours later, his wife came in not knowing what had happened.

Peter asked her, Oh, and by the way, they will carry you out also, Peter says.

So it's three hours later, and it seems clear that Sapphira had no idea what had happened to her husband. Maybe he went to the market and never came back.

Maybe she knew where he was. Maybe she didn't know. But Peter confirms, you hear that there, Peter confirms the facts with her. Peter gives her a very clear opportunity, I count at least two, to come clean.

[17:38] To own up to the reality and responsibility of what has happened. He all but tells her this is her last chance. They're waiting with the body bag.

Now I'm going to ask you the question again. Do you see the clarity of it? He gives her multiple chances. He tells her it's her last chance, but she chooses to double down.

She maintains that deception. He says, Is this the price? Yeah, that's the price, all right. Hmm, interesting. Acts 5, 10 to 11 says, At that moment she fell down at his feet and died.

Then the young man came in, and finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

So like her husband's, Sapphira's fate was instantaneous and pretty final. So even when given the opportunity to repent, to own up to what they had done, she chose to stick to the wrong course.

[18:49] So we've already recognized that the problem here was that this was a planned and intentional deception. And Sapphira was an equal and willing participant.

She wasn't just guilty by association. She shared equal responsibility for it. Like Ananias, her deception was exposed, and she couldn't just use the, well, Ananias said I had to, so she couldn't use that as an excuse.

She was just as guilty of lying to the apostles and God himself as her husband was. The point and the message is clear here. That God, God's word, God's spokespersons, must be taken seriously.

One commentator I read asked an interesting question. He said, Is this situation an example of the first case of church discipline? Interesting perspective.

And yikes. I think a hard talk is way better than a terminal diagnosis. But, Jesus and the apostles taught about the importance of church discipline.

[20:01] They taught about it. We can see it in scripture all the time. About being true to God.

About respecting and obeying church leaders. In living in healthy community and relationship with other Christians.

These are modeled over and over in the New Testament. So, what can we learn from this dramatic story? Three points. First, all Christians can be led away from God.

Did you think you were immune? Surprise! All Christians can be led away from God and his will for our lives. We're still sinners, folks. Any of us can be led to seek to receive recognition from other people for how good we are.

Does that hurt a little? We can seek to greedily keep things for ourselves. I learned a lady from our church is going home for a few weeks. And I said, where's home?

And she said, Jamaica. And I said, I have to confess a sin. And she said, okay, what's that? And I said, I'm coveting your trip. I want to go to Jamaica. I don't have enough sunscreen, of course, but we seek to covet things, right?

[ 21 : 14 ] We seek to do what we want rather than what God wants for us. We seek to say mine or my way rather than submit.

Even if we claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior, even if we seek to follow his example and his teaching, we are not immune to sin. Thinking that we somehow are, maybe you've run into that at times, it's naive.

It's dangerous. It's arrogant at times. It's very risky. We are sinners. sinners. And so we're all in good company, right?

We'll always be swayed by the path that seems easier. We'll be swayed by the possibility of a benefit that is in our favor.

But we always have a God who will give us strength to resist temptation when we ask. And his forgiveness is always available to us. If we repent, if we ask for his forgiveness, and if we seek to do differently after.

[ 22 : 26 ] Second, we need to remember to submit to both God and our brothers and sisters. We need to be open and honest at all times.

That's what we see here again, is deception in that story. And so being open and honest to God and other people is the only way to avoid winding up in dangerous and sinful situations.

Sin thrives in isolation. Sin thrives in the dark. Sin thrives when no one knows that you're doing it. If you shine a light on the sin in your life with friends, family, or your heavenly father, it will run and hide. I promise you. So in a world that constantly tells us to be true to ourselves, hear that all the time, right?

True to ourselves, true to our own desires, we hear that a lot. We need to remember that the truth that God values is having the courage and character to be open and honest with our brothers and sisters.

[ 23 : 35 ] to be open and honest with him. Third, we need to trust God and each other. Trust is hard, right?

Trust needs to be reciprocated at times. Trust needs to come with relationship, with journeying together in good times and bad, but trust is important.

Because it's only when we let go of a desire to control our situations and circumstances that we can be truly freed from the tendency to be selfish and greedy.

That seems so contrary to the world's message, right? Hold on to stuff that belongs to you or someone will take it from you. Versus the truth of God, which is let go and the blessing will come to you.

Very counter. counter-cultural even. So when we trust God with everything that we need, trust that he will provide, and we thank him for everything that we have, then we're better aligning with his will for us.

[ 24 : 45 ] Have you ever been striving for something to happen, wanting something desperately to happen, wanting to get something, wanting to needing something, that craving and anxiety that comes with it, and then either it doesn't happen, or you're able to say, well, maybe that's not meant to be.

Maybe that's not God's will for my life. Do you ever feel the freedom of that? When that weight of expectation and misalignment with God's will is lifted off your shoulders, it's very freeing.

So perhaps the most important lesson of all, while we can't lie to the apostles, they're not around anymore, we can't lie to them like Ananias and Sapphira did, do we respect their teaching?

Do we hear what they're teaching us in Scripture? Do we recognize that their teaching, and I think I've said this before, their teaching isn't something they made up themselves.

This isn't something that they thought, ooh, Paul said, oh, that's a great idea. Where did he get it from? Where did they get all of this knowledge, all of these examples, all of this truth from?

[ 25 : 57 ] From God himself, folks. This is God's truth. And this truth, and I've said it many, many times, and I'm going to keep saying it forever, this truth that we hear in Acts, that we hear in the New Testament, in the Old Testament, everywhere, it still applies to us today.

And that's my goal every time I preach, is to try and show how what we've learned in Scripture still applies. We can still learn from it, because it is as true today as it was when it was written.

And I was encouraged when I thought about all of this, this week, that I believe we do model this in our church, and that we will continue to recognize and seek God's will together in this place.  
Amen.