

# Jesus is working to grow his church

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Date: 09 November 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Think about the sin that we see from Ananias and Sapphira. So we're told in verses 1 and 2 that this is something they plot together. They have full knowledge of the plan. And the plan is that they are going to sell some property. They're going to keep some of the money, but they're going to present the rest as if that was the full amount.

And when Peter begins to talk to them, it becomes clear that they could have kept it all if they wanted. They were under no obligation. Verse 4, didn't it belong to you before it was sold and after it was sold wasn't the money at your disposal?

But what they've done is that they have sinned against the Holy Spirit as they have lied in front of God's church. Isn't that striking to see again how closely God identifies with His church, with His people?

So Ananias was guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit. Later on, we're told in verse 9 that Sapphira too is guilty of conspiring to test the Spirit of God by keeping some of the money back, claiming they were giving the whole gift. That's what they did. Why they do it is important for us to think about.

And I think at root, the problem is hypocrisy. The problem is that they want to be seen as something that they are not in the eyes of others. They want the praise of others more than they care about being honest before God.

[ 1 : 39 ] They want the reputation for generosity. Maybe they hear people talking about Joseph, giving up a whole piece of land and people admire and respect Joseph. They want a piece of that, but they don't want the discomfort of being sacrificially generous like him.

And so they're putting on a show. They are faking it spiritually before the church and before God Himself. Again, a moment's honesty perhaps helps us to reflect on times where we are tempted to pursue the approval of others.

To do that good thing in the hope that somebody else is watching because that will make me feel better about myself. And whenever we fall into that trap, we recognize that it's opposite to the way grace works. Grace is selfless.

We're invited to live forgetting ourselves to live to the glory of God. Hypocrisy matters.

And so judgment comes. And we recognize this is a unique event like what happened to Achan in the Old Testament. But this unique event stands as a general warning.

[ 3 : 04 ] That Jesus cares deeply for His church. That judgment will fall to protect the church.

That this event shows us that God's holiness matters. And our personal holiness matters within His church.

That the church, that we as a people, followers of Jesus, we become God's holy temple. And so holiness really matters.

If we go back to the Gospels and to the life of Jesus, the one group of people that frequently get Jesus' righteous condemnation is the Pharisees.

Why? Because they are guilty of religious hypocrisy all the time. And they're even polluting the temple. Jesus cares for His church and He cares about holiness.

[ 4 : 12 ] It's interesting, in a couple of verses, we see the response of the church to these events. The church gets it right. Verse 5 and verse 11, we hear the same thing. Great fear seized all who heard what happened.

There is a right awe and reverence before the Lord who is holy. And so we have in Acts chapter 4 and then in Acts chapter 5, a revelation both of God's active grace in saving, in transforming, and His active wrath in judging.

So back to our question, wasn't that a contradiction? How can you be loving and also wrathful?

I think in the end, the best way that we answer as Christians is by going to the cross of Calvary. So if we think about what's happening to Jesus on the cross, if we were to strip away the reality of God judging sin, if we were to strip away the reality of God's wrath against sin, if we were to take away the reality of hell as the consequence for people who never turn from sin, then what happened to Jesus on the cross would become trivial and pointless.

He's not saving us from anything if those things are not real. We cannot actually fully understand the love of the God of the Bible without seeing how seriously He takes sin and rebellion, unless we see the wrath and judgment of God.

[ 5 : 51 ] How loving is the God of the Bible? He is so loving that He sent His one and only Son to endure the judgment and the wrath of God on our behalf.

He is so loving that He came to experience hell on earth upon the cross. He is so loving as to take upon Himself the curse that our sin deserves.

The same God who punishes and judges sin is the same God who came in His Son, the Lord Jesus, to absorb it for you, to take it for you, that by faith you and I might be healed and saved.

And the moment that we understand that in our own hearts we too at different times are guilty of hypocrisy, guilty of lies, guilty of seeking glory for ourselves and not giving glory to God, and as we understand that before a perfect God with perfect justice we deserve to be condemned and punished, that's the point where the message of the Bible and the God of love becomes really good news.

as we understand that Jesus went to the cross for me, for my sin, for my selfishness, that I can be forgiven and live free of fear because of His sacrificial love.

[ 7 : 20 ] Let's return to another summary and to conclude almost where we began, recognizing that Jesus is working to grow His church in power.

So it begins there, the apostles perform many signs and wonders among the people and all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade. So in this summary I think we have like an encouragement at this point.

So we've just seen a really hard thing in the life of the early church and we've heard of persecution and people being thrown in prison but still the church is worshiping and we're going to see still the church is growing.

So no persecution stops the work of Jesus and no hypocrisy or failings within the church stops the work of Jesus. No scheme of Satan prevents Jesus from building His church, both in depth of faith and in number.

And so again we see in this summary that Jesus is continuing to work in power. He sent the Spirit. He's working through the apostles. So verse 15 and 16 we see these dramatic healings that are taking place.

[ 8 : 32 ] People who had unclean spirits, satanic influence are being released by the apostles in the name of Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

Every time we read about the miracles in the Bible we're being shown here's what the kingdom of God will be like in the end.

It's like a preview. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is near. And when Jesus the king came near your illness, disease, demons, even death would flee.

Giving us a preview of what His coming kingdom will one day be. And we see that the church is growing. Nobody's taking this lightly.

So verse 13, no one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord. So some people are still staying at a distance but others are being compelled to trust in the God who loved them so much to send Jesus.

[ 9 : 42 ] Jesus who died and rose again. They're experiencing God's powerful grace and they're being saved. What's happening in these two summaries is a reminder that God's loving kindness through Jesus is creating a community of loving kindness.

where Christians are now seeing the poor and the needy and they are responding to help. Where the apostles are seeing the sick and the suffering and their needs are being powerfully met in Jesus' name.

And again, that's one of the great patterns that you see when you read about the early church. So there's a great letter. I think the guy was called Aristides. So he was sent by Emperor Hadrian to act almost like a spy in the camp to go and figure out from the communities of Jesus what's the secret to their power?

Like Hadrian was persecuting them, throwing them in prison, executing them but numbers were growing and growing and growing and Aristides came back and he said, look, here's the answer. Nobody loves like the Christians love.

They love their own poor. They love our poor as well. And so Aristides was trying to help the emperor to see that God's love creates this unstoppable force that builds his church.

[ 10 : 59 ] And that's what we see in verse 14. More and more men and women believed in the Lord. Isn't that what we want to see? Isn't that what we pray for?

Here in Becloot, here in Edinburgh, around the world. That Jesus would be working in power to grow his church and to establish and to build this kind of community of kindness that would make an impact in the lives of others.

Where does it begin? It begins with personally experiencing the love of God ourselves. Have we had that experience where we know that God loves us and he gave Jesus to die for us?

Have we received his kindness in sending his son to be our savior to forgive us and give us eternal life? That's where it begins as we come to him to experience his love for ourselves and then as we experience his love by God's grace we extend it to others.

To those who are inside the church and to those who are outside. From hearts that are set free to show selfless, generous love to the glory of the Lord Jesus.

[ 12 : 13 ] and to those who are