

# Your most precious item

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[0:00] Um, chat to the personal or people around you for just a minute or two. What is your most precious item?! What is your most precious item?

I have a chat for a minute. I'm about together. Good to hear people chatting. Anyone want to stick their hand up and share with us what's precious to them?

Isabel? A picture of your dad. Lovely. That's really special. Um, other people? Hi. Probably glasses for poor people.

Glasses. Yes. Yes, these glasses are precious. And we just take it for granted. But if something goes wrong with them, suddenly you can't see.

It's, yeah, glasses. Absolutely. Ring. Ring. Wedding ring. Yeah. Um, those of us who are married, wedding rings, an important precious item to us.

[1:07] Any, one or two more? That's what Jen said. Well, funny enough, she has no idea. Because it's so precious. She's got to keep it at home. Amazing.

Well, you know what's precious to God? Um, the church is precious to God. Grace. In 1 Peter, it says, You are a chosen people.

A royal priesthood. A holy nation. You are God's special possession. The church is precious to God.

So precious that he loves his church, his people. And has chosen them by his grace.

Grace is a Christian word. We use it a lot. We're talking about God's undeserved love to sinful people that he would forgive our sin.

[2:09] And he has shown us his grace to us in an amazing way. As Jesus, God's precious son, left heaven to come to this world.

And even though we sin, even though we say that, we sometimes say this at church, Shove off God. I'm in charge, not you. That's what we're doing when we sin. Even though we do that.

Jesus still went to the cross and died for us. We are so precious to God. And God's shown how precious we are by sending his precious son for us.

And this church in Jerusalem knew all about God's great grace to them. Have a look there in chapter 4, verse 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. They were a church who knew God's great grace.

[3:24] And that transformed the way they lived. So we see a few things. This church that knows God's great grace. We see firstly that they're united.

Verse 32. Listen to this again. All the believers were one. United. In heart. And in mind. They were together in this.

They were joined together by the Lord Jesus Christ. Who had died for them. Joined by Jesus. Who together they have experienced his grace in their lives.

Joined by Jesus. Who's the name they seek to share to the world. Even though they have been told not to.

By the authorities. That's what we've seen over the last few weeks in Acts. They're united together in this. Now our England football team.

[4:31] That are playing at the moment. They are united together in playing for England. But most of the time when they play football.

They play for lots of different football teams. Like in the match the other day. Cole Palmer and Ollie Watkins. They don't play for the same team.

Cole Palmer. Correct me if I'm wrong. Plays for Chelsea. And Ollie Watkins plays for Aston Villa. They would never pass to each other. And try and score a goal normally. But when they put on that England shirt.

They are together. They are united. And they are playing for England. And that's like church. God brings people from all over the place.

If we look around this morning in the room. There's people from different parts of this country. And parts of the world. There's people who are different ages.

[5:32] People who do different jobs. People who have different hobbies. Lots of different people. And yet God has united us.

Together in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's like we wear the same football shirt. We're united together. So this church was united.

This church was also generous. Verse 32 continues. And it says, No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own. But they shared everything they had.

So much change had happened in their lives. That no one would go and pick up. Say this Bible over here. And say that's mine.

Don't read this. This is my Bible. Hands off this. Nobody said that. They were generous. In what they had.

[6:36] And freely shared. All things. Because they knew that God had been generous to them. He has given them the gift of his son.

The Lord Jesus. We sang about the gift of grace. That Jesus our redeemer is. Didn't we? He's given that for us. When Becky and I got married last summer.

When we made those promises to one another. Suddenly everything I had became hers. And everything she has is now mine.

I can't say I brought a lot into the marriage. But I had a great vegetable peeler. And that is now hers. And her sofa is now mine. We share everything together.

And that's what it's like for this church family. Everything they owned. They freely shared with one another. And they could do that.

[7:44] And they could do that freely. Knowing that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Verse 33. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

They knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. The apostles taught that to them. And if.

As that's true. They knew that Jesus had set them free from sin. And they know in Jesus. The one who's defeated death.

They know in him abundant life which lasts forever. And so their lives and their things that they have here on earth.

One day it's not going to matter. And so that gives them freedom to share their stuff. Knowing that one day they'll have new eternal life in the Lord Jesus.

[8:48] And so we see finally that they were sacrificial. They were willing to give up things for one another. So look at verse 34. The end of verse 33 actually.

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all. That there was no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them.

Brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet. And it was distributed to anyone who had needs. Nobody was in need.

People would even be willing to sacrifice their field or property in some way. To provide for their brothers and sisters.

So that there was no needy person. It looked a bit like this. I'd love to have four volunteers.

[9:49] Don't be shy. Put your hand up. Ask Sema and Andrew. Do you want to come up to the front? Two more. Maybe younger people. Don't be shy.

Richard, come on. Anyone else? Okay, we've got Isabel. Okay, we've got four people. This will work. Isabel, choose a number between one and four.

Three. Three. There you go. And face everybody. Ask Sema. Choose a number between one and four. Four. Four.

There you go. Angela wanted that one. Angela, one or two? Two. Two. Richard, one. So, Isabel, what's in your cup? Can you take the stuff out? You've got bags of Haribo. How many bags have you got there? Wow.

[10:50] I've got five. Five bags of Haribo. Okay. Great. Isabel's doing well. Number two. What have you got, Angela? You've got two bags of Haribo.

Very appropriate. Number two. Oh, Sema, what have you got? Just one. And Richard. Oh, no, Richard. Richard's cup is empty. I've got three bags. Now, I can tell you there's a total of ten here.

And I think if we were in this church in Jerusalem, it would look a bit like this. So, Isabel has five. So, pass some to Arsema and Richard.

And then, how many have you got left? I've got two left. You've got two left. How many have you got, Angela? You've got three. How many has Arsema got? Two. One.

[11:54] Richard. There you go. We've all more or less got two. One or two of us might have three because it might be an odd number. But it's all fair. Yes. Go and sit back down.

I think that's what it would look like in Jerusalem. Some people had more and they were able to give to those who had nothing. Some people had a little bit more than others and they were able to give a little bit to those who needed it.

Hopefully, that made some kind of sense. If not, there will be Haribo later, so don't worry. That's how it should be among the people of God.

People sharing generously. So, there's no needy person. So, that Richard, who has nothing in his cup, could have some stuff in his cup. So, encouraged last week at the end of the service to hear of someone who was going to go home to nothing food-wise.

To be given a little bag of lunch to take home. That's how it should be. Because Jesus himself has stepped down from heaven and given everything for us.

[13:07] And so, why can't we give everything to him? And to his people who are precious to him.

And we have an example at the end of this little passage of somebody who did this well. Verse 36. 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. Barnabas is a wealthy chap. We know he's wealthy. He owns a field. And he arranges for his field to be sold. In order to give the money to the work of the church.

And he humbly lays down all that money at the apostles' feet. Because if Jesus has lovingly and humbly given everything for him, why could he not humbly lay down the money from his fields to them?

And let me just make something very clear here. There is no command in scripture for the early church or for us that if you own a field that you must sell it.

[14:32] So, don't worry about your fields. They can be okay. It all came out of the generosity that God had put in their hearts.

They felt it was right to give that way. To be generous and willing to sacrifice in that way for the cause of Christ our King. And that is a challenge to us.

Are we willing to be generous? For the Lord. For his people. Because of how generous Jesus has been to us.

All of us can learn from Barnabas' example in different ways. Maybe the Lord has given us riches of time. That we can give some of that sacrificially to help somebody.

Or to come alongside someone. Befriend somebody. If God has blessed us with money. Then how can we use that to bless the church or Christian organizations and missionaries with our money?

[15:43] For children amongst us, maybe you get pocket money. And maybe you could think about giving just a little bit of that once a month to church.

To learn to do this. If God has blessed us with skills, we could offer them. Maybe someone's printer has stopped working. And we have IT skills.

And we think, oh yeah, we could help that person. So, we just volunteer to go over to someone's home and help them to get their printer sorted. Or maybe God has given us a home and time to use

it to be hospitable to others.

Let's get people over for dinner. Or for coffee. Or to watch a football match. If God has blessed us with that. What has God blessed us with?

And how can we be generous with that? And just a final thing. Barnabas's name, it means son of encouragement. And we'll see him a little bit more later in Acts.

[16:50] He's known as an encourager. How could your generosity in giving in some way, how can that encourage others? This is God's church.

They are precious to him. And this is a church that's working well right now. A church that knows God's grace. And is living that out. And this next song that we'll sing, it's a song which asks that God's love would be found among us.

That we ourselves would be loving one another in that way. Because of how God has loved us. So, it should be a song. It might not be familiar, the words, but the tune should be familiar to us.

So, let's stand and let's sing when we're ready. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.

What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men, but to God.

[18:54] When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young man 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 agree to test the spirit of the Lord?

Look, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door.

And they will carry you out also. And at that moment, she fell down at his feet and died. And 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. The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.

[20:12] And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

And all of them were healed.

Thanks, David. Well, we've heard that the church is precious to God.

And he has shown his great love by generously giving his own precious son to die for us so our sins can be forgiven.

[21:21] And for things that we said to one another that are precious to us, if something happened to them, if they got damaged or they got lost, that would upset us.

And for God, he loves to see his precious people doing well. He loves to see the church working well.

But as Christian people, as human beings, sin still affects his church. And as Christians, we can know God's forgiveness in the Lord Jesus.

We know it freely by his grace. But as we read Acts chapter 5, we see that living for God is serious. And we see that sin is serious. And that God hates to see his people messing around with sin.

[22:40] So how does the story go? Chapter 5, verse 1. We have a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira.

They also have a property that they sold. And like Barnabas, they were thinking, We'll give all of the money of our property to the church, to the apostles' feet.

But then, a sneaky plan enters into their minds. Verse 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.

They've got a sneaky plan. They think, We don't have to give all of the money. But we can pretend that we're giving all of it.

But it won't be. And so we'll get good out of it. We'll get money for ourselves. And we'll look really generous to other people. People will go, Wow, you sold your entire property and gave all that money to the church.

[24:02] That's amazing. You're so generous. Well done, Ananias and Sapphira. But look at verse 3.

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 lands?

Peter. It's shown to Peter by the Lord that some lies have been going on. And so they kept some of the money for themselves. But is this not okay?

After all, it's their own property. They own it. It's theirs. They don't have to give all the money. There's no command in the Bible for them to give it all.

Have a look at verse 4. Didn't it belong to you before it was sold and after it was sold wasn't the money at your disposal?

[25:13] What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God. Peter says to them, This is yours.

This is your property. This is your money. You didn't have to give it all to the Lord. But you decided that you would make it look like you did.

You wanted to look really generous. But instead, what you've done is not very generous.

You have lied to the Lord. It would be a bit like if with all this Haribo, if I sold it to Steve here for five pounds and said that five pounds is going to go to the whole church.

I'm going to put it in the offering box. Thanks for your generosity, Steve. If I then went to the offering box at the back and put, instead of five pounds, I put four in.

[26:17] That would be me lying to Steve. That would be me lying about what I'm giving to the church. And that would not be a good thing. Does anyone know who this guy is?

The Downton Abbey man. Anyone know his name in real life? Jan? He was the Earl of Grantham. He's known as Hugh Bonneville in his daily life. That's his name. And you are right. He's the Earl of Grantham. Or in Paddington movies, he's Mr. Brown.

But in everyday life, he is Hugh Bonneville. He's not the Earl of Grantham. He doesn't own a huge mansion. Well, maybe he does. But not Downton Abbey. And he's not friends with a talking bear. He's Hugh Bonneville. For Ananias and Sapphira, they were known in the Christian community as Christians. And some may even have heard about their selling of the property and giving the money, and they would be seen to be generous.

[27:33] But actually, it's just like they're actors. Acting generously when really they're not. So they lied before God.

And before the apostles. And that's serious. So serious that we read this in verse 5.

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. They lied. And now they've died. He's died.

You cannot mess with the holy gods. You cannot lie before him. Holiness is serious. The way his church lives is serious.

His church is precious to him. He doesn't want people pretending to be generous when they're not. He doesn't want people lying to others of his precious sons and daughters.

[28:36] His church is precious. So Ananias, he's taken and he's buried.

What about his wife, Sapphira? Seems like she doesn't know she's been widowed. Verse 7. About three hours later, his wife came in not knowing what had happened.

And Peter asked her, tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land? And that's a gracious question for Peter to ask. She has opportunity now to come clean, to repent, to say, no, it's not.

We've got a lot more than that. But what does she say? She says, yes, that's the price we pay, we got. And so Peter said to her, in verse 9, 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. And then verse 10.

[29:48] At that moment, she fell down at his feet and died. Another grave. Another death.

Another one bites the dust, as Queen would say. You cannot mess with a holy God. You cannot lie before him.

Holiness is serious. The way the church lives is serious. Because the church is precious to God. But all of us may be sitting here thinking, Hang on.

If they've been struck down because they've lied, how am I still standing? This is not a normal day in the life of the church.

If this was, I don't think there would be a church. But I think God is teaching us really serious and important things here. He shows first that God cares about his precious church.

[30:55] He is showing very clearly in the early stages of the church's life that sin is not okay. It's not okay because the church is precious to God.

But it's not okay because the church is not okay. But it's not okay because the church is not okay. But it's not okay. Now, this evening, the football match is happening. England versus Spain. We've mentioned it already. We're looking forward to the big final.

And for many people in our country, football is really precious. And the fact that England have made it to the Euros is so exciting for so many people. But it's extraordinary that earlier on in the tournament, some England fans were booing the England players because they thought they weren't playing well.

They may not have been. But they're in the final. And they booed because they really care. They really care about England football team playing well and winning matches.

And God's church is so precious that if there is sin, it will be judged. You can't mess around with God.

[32:13] You can't mess around with sin. Knowing God's grace in our lives means we are secure in Jesus forever. But that doesn't mean sin is okay.

It doesn't mean we can just treat it lightly. Because God cares about his precious church. The next thing that I think we're shown in this passage is that God is to be feared.

Verse 5. Great fear seized all who heard what had happened. And verse 11. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

We need to remember how awesome and powerful God is. How holy he is. How he is pure and without sin.

Ananias and Sapphira thought they could get away with the lies. They thought nobody was watching. But God knew.

[33:26] Ananias and Sapphira thought they could get away with it. But they didn't. We must fear God. We know and love his grace.

But we also must fear him. We must remember that he is holy, holy, holy. Lord God almighty. I remember at school.

My head teacher very well. Mr. Dyer. He was a lovely man. Really kind. Really thoughtful. But you wouldn't mess around in his presence.

Otherwise you would hear about it. We respected him. We honored him. And that is what it should be like for us and God.

We must respect and honor our God. Don't mess around in his presence. And thirdly, be honest about your sin.

[34:29] The world doesn't like fakes. Doesn't like fake news. Doesn't like fake people. Don't pretend that you are someone you're not.

Don't let people think that Christians are perfect and better than anybody else. We're not. Don't let people who visit Calvary Church think that they are not good enough to be here.

Because before God, none of us are good enough. Brother, we all need to be honest with one another and say, I am a sinner. I get things wrong.

And I know that I need the grace of God. I know that I need to be here this morning to be reminded of the gospel and the songs that we sing. Be reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

And you can pull up a chair alongside me. You're a sinner too. But look, we can look to the grace of God together. Don't pretend. Don't think we can hide our sin before him.

[35:41] God knows our hearts. He knows all we do. All we say. All we think. So don't believe the lie that sin is okay.

Don't think you can cover it up before God. Don't think we're good. And in terms of our own lives, maybe there's sin that we're struggling with.

Maybe we just think, well, I'm a sinner. Nothing I can do. but with God change is possible he changes hearts he's in the business of that confess your sin but maybe you need to find a Christian brother or sister that you can be accountable to about it that you can pray with about it to help you

in the struggle do find the help that you need if you're really struggling with a sin happy to chat with you this week if you want to in all this judgment of God on Ananias and Sapphira can the church still grow we've opened a passage which is about which shows God's judgment on people people fall down dead and sometimes people think we should just avoid passages like this don't speak about judgment but in this can the church still grow well in verse 12 to 16 we're not going to really look at it but God continues to do great things among his people great healings happen wonderful things happen and in verse 13 it says no one else there joined them even though they were highly regarded by the people but in verse 14 it says nevertheless more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number what is it well it's both some people looked at that church and looked at what was going on and thought I just can't be part of that but others looked at it and saw what was happening saw God at work among his people and thought sign me up and the church God's work will split people some people will come in amongst us and maybe we'll never see them again but others may come and they may see as we love one another as we're generous towards one another because of how God has been generous to us they'll see something wonderful they'll see God at work and they'll see that Jesus is their saviour and we'll see them stay and we'll see the Lord add to our numbers but others will come and think that's not for me and if you're here this morning you're thinking about these things maybe it's for the first time or coming back again to think about these things God is holy we see that sin is real it's serious it must be judged but God is gracious to you and he freely welcomes all sinful people who are trusting who will come and trust in Jesus as their only saviour and if you do that you are precious to God precious in his sight if you want to know more please do come and chat to me or someone else here who you know to be a Christian and we'd love to do that but for now let's pray thank you for coming and thank you for coming and ending thank you for coming and ending thank you for coming and ending thank you for coming and ending