

## **"Holy Fear and Spiritual Integrity" - Acts Sermon Series / 11.5.23**

Tentative Preaching Schedule:

- Acts thru November
  - Ruth for Advent exploring themes of bitterness, depression, darkness on the way to bethlehem
  - Acts through mid February
  - Lent Seasons: Repentance and Renewal and Formation
  - Easter Sunday thru Eastertide: Teachings of Christ; implications of Gospel
  - Resume Acts for remainder of 2024
- We are continuing our series thru Acts and arrive today at what is a serious and sobering passage. It feels heavy, weighty. And it should feel that way.
- It also may evoke some unpleasant feelings (Why would this happen? This does not feel right, etc.)
  - I want to delineate between 2 responses: (1) Fear that results from a truncated, deficient presentation/ understanding of God and the Gospel and (2) Holy Fear of God that is an appropriate result and goal of knowing God in His fullness.

**American Spirituality:** We have a hard time with scriptures like this because an experience like this seems foreign to what we understand to be Christianity. There are many details to this passage that are foreign to us.

-Doesn't have categories for this type of life with God.

Do you have a category to think of "fear of the Lord" as a good thing?

### **Transition to Text: Ananias and Sapphira**

- 2 weeks ago we talked about Barnabas selling a field
    - Ananias and Sapphira is contrasted with Barnabas.
    - Barnabas give sacrificially of his land for the church. A + S lie to God about it
  - The sin was not in their selling the field. It was in their dishonesty, deceit, and lack of spiritual integrity
    - V1: Conspired together to give only a portion of what was expected
      - Must have entered into an agreement with the apostles
    - V3: Peter, though holding A + S totally responsible, acknowledges how this was Satan at work
    - V4: Peter's questions here show us that there was not an expectation that they had to sell the field. A + S were longing for the approval of the church community seemingly.
      - They did not have to sell it. They chose to sell it and to lie
      - Even after selling it, they told people a lie.
  - Peter says that this was a lie to the church, to the Holy Spirit, to God. Our horizontal dynamics that play out in relationship are connected to our vertical relationship with God.
- This incident in the church leads the people of God to a place of fear and trembling before the Lord.
- And then the rest of this passage shows us the tangible presence of God among His people

### **MPS: Biblical Faith will propel us into a life of Holy Fear of God with His People**

**What Do I mean by Holy Fear: A right understanding of OUR finiteness and fallenness and HIS infiniteness and Holiness that drives us to deeper trust in Christ, a lifestyle of a repentance, and a life oriented around His purposes**

*Illustration: Isaiah in Is 6 when he sees God in His holiness and it propels him into a life of holiness, devotion, prophetic ministry*

**Why? Because God is creating a People in Christ who will be set apart for his eternal glory in the joy of all people**

- The major purposes of this story at this point in Acts is to demonstrate to the reader and to the world that this group of diverse people from different nations gathered in Jerusalem, baptized, and living together in deep community was legit. God has purchased at the cross a people for his own possession. And Acts 2-5 is bearing witness to the fact that this is God's people. This is God continuing the work that He had begun in Abraham centuries before. These narratives demonstrate that God is doing this.
  - God's Eternal purposes in our salvation are for our holiness
    - Ephesians 1:4 "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."
    - Ephesians 2:21 "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."
  - Jesus died for our holiness
    - Romans 12:1
    - It is by God's mercies shown to us in Christ that we are called into a life set apart for God and His purposes

- There is an American Spirituality that understands this differently.
  - It says, "Jesus died for me so that I might be holy, BUT that holiness is disconnected from our lives.
  - The biblical Gospel says that (1) We are declared to be holy because of Jesus' holiness, (2) The holiness of Jesus is increasingly being applied to our lives through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and with us.
- Holiness for the Christian is the only context by which we have any hope in God
  - Hebrews 12:14 "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."
- Because we have precious promises, we are called into life where we are set apart more & more for God's glory
  - 2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

### **How? 3 Questions:**

#### **- Do you Love Jesus more than the things of the World?**

- A+S loved their fame, renown, money so much that they were willing to lie to God
- Augustine from the early church talked a lot in his writings about how our hearts are disordered apart from God. But when we come to Christ, that changes.
  - *"You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped; and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace."*
  - Augustine here is saying that his love for things in the world made him blind and deaf to the reality of God and His calling on his life.
  - Maybe something like this story in Acts will stir some of us up just like Augustine was to hunger and thirst for Jesus over and above the things of the world.

#### **- What Barriers have you placed in the web of relationships in the local church?**

- Church relationships are different from other relationships because we are tasked via a covenant before God and one another to strive for the faith of one another
- East African Revival in Rwanda: Emphasized personal renewal and repentance and living in community with one another
  - ***We are called to live in a house "without ceiling or walls"***

#### **- How are you lacking spiritual integrity?**

- The key to all that God has for us (personal, corporate, missional) is in our spiritual integrity before the Lord.
  - What does it mean to have spiritual integrity? Who you project yourself to be before others in the church and world is who you are with God when no one else is looking. Is this who you are?
- Illustration of the Life God calls us into to cultivate spiritual integrity
  - Great Awakening: Holy Club:
    - The Holy Club was a small association of individuals at Oxford University who were deeply committed to their Christian faith and to living out their beliefs with rigorous devotion and discipline. By disclosing the secrets of their hearts, Wesley meant that the members of the Holy Club would openly and honestly share their innermost thoughts, struggles, and experiences related to their faith and spiritual journey. This practice involved confessing sins, doubts, fears, and any other aspects of their lives that were affecting their relationship with God.
  - Ways we can cultivate it through the rhythms of our church:
    - Men's Gathering Next Friday
    - LTG Each Week
    - Casual, Informal gatherings
    - Prayer

### **Conclusion: Acts 5:12-16: Missional Implications of a Church Set a part for God**

- Signs and Wonders: Spiritual power testifies to the living Jesus
- Reverence for God's Church
  - There was a
- Conversion:
  - Conversions resulted not from dumbing down the Gospel. Removing the offense of the Gospel. If anything, the Gospel was more offensive now to a world that remained unconvinced of its legitimacy and relevance.
    - Instead, the way the local church lived bore testimony to its truthfulness.
  - Newbigin: "The primary Hermeneutic of the Gospel is the local church."
    - The way the world understands and interprets the relevance of Jesus to our lives, the lordship of Christ, is through the Gospel that we profess and the lives that we live.
    - When we embody spiritual integrity - something that A + S did not have - we show the watching world that Jesus is alive and it's a beckoning invitation to enter into relationship with Him through repentance.