

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.16.2026 | Free to Give | Acts 4:32-5:11 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Acts, chapter 5. We're walking through the book of Acts, and we're looking at how the Word of God and the Spirit of God work in and through the Church of God. So far, what we've seen as we've walked through the first four chapters of Acts is we've seen the Holy Spirit do some very amazing things. The Word and the Spirit were working powerfully in and through the early Church. We'll see that again today. We'll see something that we kind of saw in summary at the end of chapter 2, continue on in more description here at the end of Acts, chapter 4. The Spirit is doing something special and unique, powerful in the people of God, through the people of God. But last week, we started to see that even when the Word and the Spirit are at work, it doesn't mean that there won't be any opposition. We saw last week that there is oftentimes external opposition that comes against the Church as we seek to carry out the mission of God. People threaten Peter and John, told them to stop preaching the Gospel.

Today, what we'll see is a different type of opposition, one that doesn't come from without, but rather from within. Last week, we were reminded that there's often going to be external opposition, those outside the Church who seek to stop the Church from carrying out the mission that God has given us. But today, we're reminded of another truth, and that is so often is not external opposition, but internal opposition that prevents the Church from carrying out the mission God has given us. Distractions, division, sin from within the people of God will so often prevent us from doing what God has called us to do. Plus what we see in this passage, we see this contrast in this passage. We see how beautiful and amazing and awesome it is when the Word and the Spirit are at work in the people of God to bring love and unity and generosity. And we see how dangerous and destructive it is when we lie to that Holy Spirit. We find our worth and our value not in what Jesus has done for us, but in what people think of us. So we'll see this contrast in this passage this morning.

We're going to read the end of Acts chapter 4 and then the beginning of Acts chapter 5 to see what the Word and the Spirit were doing and the contrast here. So let me read for us Acts chapter 4 starting in verse 32. "And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. And there was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought proceeds of what was sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. But, chapter 5 starting verse 1, "A man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property. And with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds, and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young man rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young man came in, they found her dead and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

You know, we don't normally do this, but I thought this would be a good time for us to go ahead and pass the offering plates just to see if you're inspired to give this morning. I'm joking. All right. You know, there's times in the Bible when you read a story and at first glance it doesn't seem like the punishment fits the crime. Think about the story of Moses leaving the people through the wilderness. And instead of speaking to a rock, he strikes the rock and he is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Or you think of Uzzah who was helping transport the Ark of the Covenant, who God's presence was. And as the Ark began to fall, he didn't want to hit the ground so he caught it. But he wasn't supposed to touch the Ark and immediately he died. Or you think of Ananias and Sapphira. Two people, it seemed, gave something to the church. It wasn't all of it. They withheld some of what they could have given. They kind of deceived people and what

they gave. And they immediately dropped dead. And sometimes people have tried to say, well, maybe it was shock or grief or guilt that took them out. But I mean, Peter predicts Sapphira's death as he says, he's men. They just buried your husband. By the way, that was quick. Three hours later she's there and he was already buried. You knew it was an act of God. An act of God to bring about the consequences of their sins.

And sometimes you just read this and you think, well, what's going on? Is God just especially mad on this day? I mean, is he like a parent that is so often so patient with their children, but at some point his limits get tested. And he just brings something, a consequence, a discipline in a short temper and anger. Is that what's going on here? There's actually something very important for us to see in this. Yes, God does not always bring consequences to our sins in the same way. As someone who has lied and has been a hypocrite before, I'm living proof that God does not always strike you dead. We'll see in the book of Acts, God does not always strike people dead. He gives people chances to repent. Something unique is happening here. It isn't just God being flippant or angry. In fact, any time you see in the Bible these instances where you kind of are caught off guard by how quickly God responds, it's always very intentional. Here, the church has just been birthed. The Holy Spirit is moving in and through the people of God. And Satan, Peter says, is trying to work his way in, bring deception, division, greed, hypocrisy.

I think the sin that we see with Ananias and Sapphira is hypocrisy. We'll talk more about what that means as we get there. But I think happens to Ananias and Sapphira is not because God was angry, but rather because God was giving a grave warning to the people of that day and to his church still today. About how deadly hypocrisy is to our own lives and how destructive it is to the church. But thankfully, there's another example here in this passage. Thankfully, there is a better way. There is freedom in the good news of Jesus Christ. And I want us to begin there as we see the first example that's given to us in this passage. The way the Spirit was working in and through the people is something that we should want in our lives.

And here's the way I would summarize what we see at the end of chapter four. The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ frees us to trust God and love others. The good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel message frees us to trust God and love others. One of the things that I really want to stress for you this morning from this passage is freedom. Because you could read this passage and you could think, man, if I don't really do the right thing, God might strike me dead. You could think if I don't give enough money or if I lie, if I'm hypocritical, then surely God is going to punish me. That's really not what you're supposed to take away from this passage. I think there's this emphasis in this passage of the freedom that God actually gives. In fact, Ananias and Sapphira didn't understand this freedom and that was their problem.

Before we look at the positive example in Acts chapter four, just see what Peter tells Ananias in Acts chapter five, verse four. He says to Ananias, "While you still had this property, while it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?" And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God. Peter's whole point to Ananias is, you didn't have to do anything. You didn't have to sell that property. It was yours. When you sold that property, you didn't have to bring all the proceeds from it. That was your choice. There's this freedom that Peter is trying to get before Ananias and Sapphira and all who can hear him. He wants them to know this is not some pressure that the church is putting on you to do something, to live up to some standard.

First Baptist Jerusalem didn't have in their membership covenant that you have to give X amount of money or a certain percentage of your salary to the church. And by the way, neither do we. There should be this freedom that comes in Christianity and following Jesus in the gospel. And that's what Peter's trying to stress here. The following Jesus and living the Christian life isn't about some external force that makes you change, makes you live up to some requirement. It's about an internal change that frees you up to give, that frees you up to be generous, that frees you up to show love to others. The gospel sets you free. The good news of Jesus Christ sets you free to trust God and to love other people. That's what we see in chapter four. Look at just how Luke begins this section. He says something that we've kind of already seen back in chapter two as the community was coming together and just showing love to one another and being generous with one another. He says in verse 32, "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

Because just think about what Luke just said there in that kind of long verse. He said, "All who believed, every person who had believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who believed with these three young ladies just professing

their testimonies, that Jesus had saved them from their sins, they did not see the things they had as their own. Something in their hearts changed when they believed. Where they recognized all they had was from God, so they didn't claim it or they didn't hold on tightly to it as their own. And it says they were of one heart and one soul with the other believers. Meaning something about believing in Jesus caused them to have a deep love and affection for others who believed in Jesus. There was something that changed within them where they no longer held on so tightly to the things of this world, but rather they held on really tightly to the people of God. This is what the gospel does in us. When we really believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we really believe that he is the only one that satisfies, our hearts begin to loosen towards the things of this world. And they begin to tighten towards people.

This is the way that John Piper put it, that just kind of stuck in my mind, this idea of loosening and tightening. John Piper said that when you believe the gospel, it's not just an intellectual belief. In fact, even one of the testimonies, I think Jaden's last one was kind of speaking to that. It's not just about believing with your mind. It's about following in faith. When you really believe the good news of the gospel, it's not just belief that something in the past has happened. It's actually the fact that you are satisfied for all that God is for you in Jesus Christ. Believing the gospel message is to believe that your worth and your value is set not based on who you are or what you do or what other people think about you, but all by what Jesus has done. And when your heart is set in Christ in that way, something happens where your heart no longer holds on tightly to the things of this world, but begins to loosen to money and possessions.

But something happens where your heart begins to be tightened, strengthened in love towards other people. I just want to think about those two parts that we see here in this passage and that we just, I put there for you, that the gospel frees us to trust God and to love others. Think about that first part, that the gospel frees us to trust God. Why do we so often hold on so tightly to the things of this world? Why do we so often want more money, more possessions, more things? Why do our hearts love money? Well, I think in part at least, it's because we know we need money. You need money to make it in this world. You need a lot of money to make it in this city. Something about with us knows that we need it and in our fear and in our wanting to be in control, we start to want more of it to protect us from what might happen. So we build up our checking account and our savings account and make investments and build retirement plans and build 529 accounts so our kids can go to college and all those other things.

And I'm not saying any of those things are bad. And we've tried to say throughout this study of acts, it's not always going to look exactly like it did in acts. That's not what Luke's telling us here, that we all have to sell everything and have everything in common. But I think we do have to ask ourselves, do we really trust in God to provide? Or do we trust more in what we earn and what we save and what we have? Part of the reason we hold on so tightly to the things of this world is because we don't trust God. We trust ourselves. We want to make sure we've got enough to provide for ourselves and for others. And so we hold on tightly. But when you realize, when you fully believe that Christ is the only one who satisfies, when your heart is in awe of Him, when you're captivated by the generosity that He has bestowed upon you, the riches that you have in Him, something happens. You don't have to hold on so tightly. You don't have to build up so much protection. You don't have to think that you're in control. You can trust that He's in control. And it begins to loosen your heart towards the things of this world. Sometimes I think we hold on so tightly to money because we want to be in control and we live in fear.

But another reason is because we're selfish. So often we hold on so tightly to money because we love ourselves more than we love other people. We build up more things because we would rather upgrade our own lives rather than give to someone to meet their most basic needs. One of my wife, Alana's favorite phrases around our house is that people are more important. And she has to repeat it often, not just to the boys, but to me as well, because it's something I have trouble so often believing. That people are more important than other things I wanted to do with my time. People are more important than other things I wanted to do with my money. That's what the passage is telling us here, that the people believe that people are more important. That something about believing in Jesus and being captivated by Him and believing that God in Jesus Christ is all I need. Not only loosens my heart to the things of this world, but tightens it, draws it towards other people. That other people are being saved. They're now part of this community. They're part of the family of God. How could I see my brother or sister suffer and do nothing? How could I see someone who is in need knowing I could meet that need and just tell them I'll pray for them and not actually meet that need?

There's a word here I think even especially to those of us who have wealth. And I know it's not everybody in this room. But to be honest, we live in a culture, we live in a time and place in history, we live in a city where many of us are very wealthy. And there's something that happens here amongst the wealthy where they're actually taking what they have, selling it so they can give to people's basic needs. To have property in this time meant you were doing pretty well. Like when it talks about people who had property, people who had houses, they were selling it. They're saying there were some wealthy people at First Baptist Jerusalem. There were some people that had some means and yet they were using those means. They were leveraging everything they had to meet others needs. They were living out what, excuse me, Paul says to Timothy to instruct the church.

In First Timothy chapter six, this is what Paul writes. He says, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." If we are rich, if we have more than we need, Bible says we should be generous. Let us be rich in our good works. Let us make eternal investments in people. I've heard it said, "God gives you enough for you and He gives you more for others. If you have more than you need, consider how you might bless other people and meet their needs."

Consider how the gospel loosens your grip on the things of this world and need to be in control and begins to turn your heart and tighten your heart towards people. An example of this that Luke gives us is a man named Joseph, also named Barnabas. He says in verse 36, "Thus Joseph was also called by the name Barnabas. It's a nickname they gave him, which means son of encouragement." It's a good nickname to get, right? Like that people would call you someone who encourages others. He encourages by his example. He was a Levite, a native of Cyprus. He sold a field that belonged to him. So he had something there in his possessions. He sold it. He brought the money in late at the apostles' feet, trusting them to meet needs. This will be the first time of about 20-something times that Luke will mention Barnabas in the book of Acts. Barnabas is often a kind of a figure of an example, someone we could look to as a godly man. He's shown here to be a godly man through his generosity, but also showing that there's this example that was set of selling something, bringing the proceeds and laying it at the apostles' feet, and it sets up this contrast. This bar has been set in Ananias and Sapphira's mind.

Here is what we must do to get that same approval that Barnabas has gotten. If we want to be as impressive, if we want to be as generous, if we want to seem as holy as Barnabas, we need to do this as well. And it leads them in this act of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the contrast of the gospel. The gospel frees us to trust God and to love others, and hypocrisy enslaves us to lie to God and impress others. There's this freedom that the good news of Jesus Christ is offering here. A freedom to trust God with all that you have. A freedom to be able to just love other people, because you're not holding on so tightly to the things of this world. But in contrast to that is this hypocrisy. Hypocrisy being called a hypocrite, I mean it's got many uses. It's probably a very broad term. In the original Greek, in which Luke wrote, the New Testament was written, it really meant acting, wearing a mask, performing. There's this idea that you are putting on a show. You say one thing and you do another. I was talking to a visitor this morning and he said, "I hear you're preaching on hypocrisy." I said, "I am, and I'm very well qualified, because so often I'm a hypocrite." And this visitor said, "You know what? My wife often tells me I'm a hypocrite, because I say I should do something and I don't do it."

I want to talk this morning more about the heart of hypocrisy. Not just like what it is. We see an example of it here, but what's at the heart? I think it's in contrast to the gospel. If belief in the gospel is belief that Jesus Christ is all that you need, as he is the one that satisfies, then hypocrisy really is the belief that you need to do something to be satisfied. That's not just enough to have God's approval of you in Jesus Christ. You need the approval of people. And so you do things that you know you can't do. You say things that you know you can't live up to, so that you can receive the praise of people. You can impress people. This is why the church and religion in general so often draws hypocrites. I mean, there's hypocrites all over the world. It doesn't just happen in church as a religion. But I think one of the reasons you'll find hypocrites so often in the church is because religion will give you so often a bar of saying, "Here's what you should live up to." What do people say? "Well, I want to live up to that so that people will think I'm good enough. I'll have some validation. I'll have some approval if I meet that." And so they're drawn to places that put that bar out there, not realizing that they're missing the freedom that God is offering them. They're living by some external restraint, and that's what happens to Ananias and Sapphira.

We read in verses 1 and 2, it says, "A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid at the apostles' feet." What did Ananias want? He wanted to impress people. He wanted to live up to the bar that he had seen set by Barnabas and others. He wanted people to think that he was generous. He probably wanted to be good. But yet, he still loved the things of this world. He went and he sold that property in the same way he'd seen others do as an example, and when he looked at all that money that he had gotten for that property, he just couldn't bear it apart with it all. He still loved it enough where he just had to keep some back for himself, but yet he also loved the praise of people. So he acted like he was giving it all when he wasn't, because he still loved the things of this world. He didn't trust God to provide for him all that he needed, and his heart wasn't fully open to people. Now, listen, hypocrites still do some pretty good things.

I mean, he still gave a good portion of his money, probably. He still was generous in some ways. Probably the hypocrisy is not that hypocrites don't do anything good. It's ultimately that they are lying to God and doing it for the approval of people. Notice what Peter says to him in verse 3. We've already read that he said you've not lied to man but to God in verse 4. And he says in verse 3, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" Peter doesn't call out Ananias for not giving enough to the church. He doesn't call out Ananias for lying to the apostles or the people of the church. He really calls out Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit. Which one reminds us that the Spirit is not a force. It's not a thing. It's not an "it." In fact, I keep saying "it." The Spirit is a person. He is a person. You can lie to the Holy Spirit. You can grieve the Holy Spirit. They say, "Well, how do you lie to the Spirit who knows everything, who knows your motivations?" That's the whole point. You think that you're deceiving people, but you're really trying to deceive God. You're trying to manage your relationship with God through the appearance of other people. You're not basing your relationship with God on who Jesus is and what he has done for you, but rather what other people think of you. And impressing other people.

And I'll just say, I think this is probably the most dangerous part of hypocrisy. It's how easily you can succeed at it. The most dangerous part of hypocrisy is that you can do it. You remember when Jesus was talking in the Sermon on the Mount about giving and about praying? He actually uses the word "hypocrite" there when he talks about people who just give so other people will see them give, or just pray out loud so other people will hear them pray and they think, "Well, that's a really good righteous person." What does Jesus say? You're aiming for a reward of people thinking highly of you and guess what? You'll get that reward. The problem is you don't get any reward from your Heavenly Father. The danger of hypocrisy is that you can aim to impress people and you can do it. You can succeed. And the problem is that's all that you'll get. The danger of hypocrisy is not that God will strike you dead when you bring your offering. It's that you'll continue living in it. Lying to God, lying to yourself, and just seeking to impress other people.

Let me just say, I've been around the church all my life. I've been in ministry and in leadership for many years. I see hypocrisy all the time in working with people, but also in my own heart. I see within me something that just wants to impress people. I have seasons of life where I'm not satisfied with who God is for me in Jesus Christ. I need the approval of people. I live with this pressure of trying to perform rather than just in the freedom that God has for me. And I hope that just in hearing me say that and hearing our visitors say how hypocritical he is sometimes, that you'll be able to see, yes, we always want to be like Barnabas, but oftentimes we're like Ananias and Sapphira. And really, that should bring about some fear in our hearts.

That seems to be what God was aiming for here. It says in verse five, "When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last, and great fear came upon all who heard it." Luke writes that down for us for a reason. It says the same thing in verse 11. After Sapphira passes and they take her out, it says, "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things." When we see this story, we think about our own lives and how often we can be hypocrites. It should bring us to fear. But not a fear of God, that he's going to be short-tempered one day and strike you dead. Not even a fear of being found out, that you're deceiving, that you're not giving all that you could. But a fear of actually continuing in your hypocrisy. God does this here in this story as, again, a warning. That hypocrisy is deadly to us. It is destructive to the church. It is breaking apart the unity that they're experiencing, the generosity that they're sharing in, as Satan works his way in. The danger is that this hypocrisy would continue in our lives.

So what do we do with our fear? The answer is we look to Jesus and the gospel and experience the freedom that he has for us. If you hear me saying this morning that you're probably a hypocrite sometimes, don't hear in your mind, "Okay, I need to try harder to be better and not be a hypocrite." Because then we're still missing the point. We're saying there's some bar that I just need to reach for on my own. Now the message of the gospel is you are a sinner. You don't have a righteousness on your own. We don't need to pretend like we do. The message of the gospel is that Jesus came and died for you as a sinner. You want to know how to experience the freedom of the gospel, look regularly to the cross and to Jesus's act of generosity to you. The only one who is actually impressive in this world, the only one who is actually deserving of the praise of people, did not just sell some property and lay down his possessions, he laid down his life.

Why? To save you from your sin. you try to act like you don't sin, we try to just live to impress people, we're denying the truth that Jesus in his act of generosity saved us from our sin. Experience the freedom of the gospel by looking to the cross, being reminded how much you need that salvation, and allowing the cross to change your heart from the inside out. To experience the freedom of trusting God and loving other people.