



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Witness of Life”

Acts 4–5

Paul Johnston

Acts of the Apostles

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Acts of the Apostles

Luke's portrait of the Church

Acts 4:32-5:16

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Witnessing involves both “Proclaiming and Promoting the Gospel” – Evangelism + Real Christian Life. (John Dickson)

Promoting the Gospel Sacrificial Compassion

Acts 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

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 all that there were no needy persons 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 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 4:31-37)

Israel's Rich & Poor

- **Moses: “Be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.”** (Deut. 15:11)
- *Luke portrait of Israel: mixture of economic vulnerability and indifference*
 - *Day laborers, widows, beggars (Matt. 20:1ff; Luke 21:1ff; Acts 3:2) – loss of family farms, sickness*
 - *Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19ff) – Rich ignoring the needy*
 - *Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1ff) – Corrupt financial officials*

The Holy Spirit Transformed Rich & Poor Relationships

- **“God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them”**
(Acts 4:32-34)
- **“One in heart and mind”**
 - *Shared faith in Jesus and love of each other*
(Acts 2:36ff; Luke 10:27)
- **“No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own but they shared everything they had.”**
 - *Contentment, awareness, open-handedness*

God Transforming FHBC

- “[The Macedonian churches’] extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Cor. 8:1ff)
 - *God’s call to ALL of us*
- *Channels of compassion*
 - *Benevolence Fund*
 - *Emergency Meals*
 - *Summer relief offering for sister churches*
- **Are you participating?**

Giving



**Are you like Nemo's
Seagulls?**

**Or are you open-
handed like Barnabas?**

Receiving



Is this you?

To be effective, compassion needs:

- *Honesty about my need*
- *Humility & trust to receive from you*

Promoting the Gospel Disciplined toward Holiness

Acts 5:1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 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, "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 land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who 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.”

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men 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.

(Acts 5:1-11)

Jerusalem Church's Practice

- **“Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal?” (5:4)**
— *owner’s decision on how to use his money*
- **“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 need.” (4:34-35)**
— *total sale price given*

Despite Shared Experiences, Not the Same Heart

- **“Repent and be baptized” (2:38)**
- **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (2:42)**
- **“With his wife’s full knowledge [Ananais] kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (5:2)**

Satan's Effort to Destroy God's Work

- **“Satan has so filled your heart.” (5:3)**
- *Luke echoes the descriptions of Achan (coveted & hid, Joshua 7:1) and Judas (Satan entered his heart, Luke 22:3). Satan attacks God's work, especially in the beginning.*
- *Satan attacked from the inside, using Ananias's desire for Barnabas's reputation, but without his sacrifice.*
- *Instead of the Spirit's filling, Satan's filling.*

God's Discipline

- **“You have not lied just to human beings but to God.... you conspired to test the Spirit of the Lord.”** (5:3-4,9)
– the sin was lying to & defiance of God
- **“[Ananias & Sapphira] fell down and died.”** (5:5,10)
- **“Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.”** (5:11)

**What?
Begin with Grace and End with Fear?**

The Church of 80% Sincerity

(David Roche & Anne Lamott)



**Is This
Our Goal?**

Normal Path to Mature Holiness

- **“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 3:18)**
- **“Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.” (1 Pet. 1:17)**
- **“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Pet. 2:11)**

God's Tough Love

- **“If they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matt.18:17)**
- **“That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.... When we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.” (1 Cor. 11:29-32)**

Showing the World that God Transforms People through Jesus

*Reaching Up to God,
Reaching Inward to Each Other,
and Reaching Out to Our Neighbors, both Near and Far*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matt. 6:9-13)