



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Acts 4:32-5:21

The Church in Jerusalem, Part 2

The community life of the Jerusalem Church was utterly amazing. It is described as such in 4:32-37. But there was also sin in the early church and God dealt forcibly with that sin, because there was actually a figure lurking behind the scenes: Satan! Cosmic forces were very interested in what happens in God's church. How will God defend His church against this attack? Why was God so severe in His judgment of Ananias and Sapphira? Was there no grace or mercy? As the Apostles continued their bold preaching and performing of Messianic miracles, the Sanhedrin again arrested them.

Community Life in the Jerusalem Church, 4:32-37

The community life of the church was characterized by remarkable unity ("one heart and one soul") and by voluntarily sharing material things ("everything in common"). Notice the phrases "great power" and "great grace" in v. 32. Furthermore, there was "not a needy person" in the church because wealthier Christians sold property and distributed the proceeds to those in need. Barnabas is highlighted as an example (v. 36-37).

The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1-11

In contrast to Barnabas (note the "But" in 5:1), Ananias, with the full knowledge and support of his wife, Sapphira, sold some property but "kept back" (a term used of intentional fraud) some of the proceeds. It is late AD 33 into early AD 34. As they presented their proceeds to the Apostles, Peter asked "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit" (v. 4), "to lie to God" (v. 5). Immediately, Ananias was struck dead. Three hours later, his wife Sapphira was struck dead (vv. 7-11). Why so severe a judgment?

1. Demonstrated how serious sin is to God
2. Reminded the community of its call to holiness and loyalty to God.
3. Demonstrated how destructive and dangerous deceit and deception are.
4. The church is not a place of perfect people.
5. Sin is never "secret"; it affects all in the community (see the case of Achan in Joshua 7).
6. God does deal with sin - often immediately and decisively, but sometimes His grace postpones it.

The Apostles: Signs and Wonders and Another Arrest, 5:12-21

It is late AD 34 into AD 35. The signs and wonders summarized in 5:12-16 represent an answer to the prayers of 4:24-31, especially v. 30. The ministry of the Apostles occurred in the very center of Judaism and resulted in two responses: fear, which kept many from joining the movement, while others believed and joined. But all this attention drew the ire of the leadership. The second arrest of Peter and John followed. The Jewish leadership was exercising considerable care in challenging the emerging, popular

new movement. They took on Jesus and then the two leading disciples (see Acts 4). Now they challenged all the apostles (v. 18).

When the apostles refused to obey the Sanhedrin's directives, the leaders were perplexed. They do not quite know what to do. For that reason, Gamaliel's speech is rather profound (vv. 33-39): He argues that if God was in this, we will not stop it. But if He was not, it will fail just like Theudas and Judas the Galilean.

Jesus offered the Apostles the model of innocent suffering (see Luke 23:1-25) and they followed Him as exemplary disciples. Victory can come through suffering—and political power would not stop them (vv. 40-42)

This week read chapter 5 again and, as you read and reflect on the passage, ponder these questions:

- Ananias and Sapphira did a good thing - sold property and gave some of it to help meet needs. But, the issues are their motivation, their lying and their deception. Deception is an ugly sin. Why was God so severe in His dealing with deception and lying? Is this something you struggle with? Is this something you need to deal with before God?
- Peter said that Ananias and Sapphira lied to God and then he says they lied to the Holy Spirit. What doctrinal conclusion can you draw from this? Why is this so important for our doctrine as Christians?
- The description of the Jerusalem church is remarkable. Can the evangelical church of North America learn anything from this description? What would you like to see in our churches today?
- Gamaliel's speech in vv. 33-39 is profound. How would you apply this today?

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