

“Ananias and Sapphira” Acts 5:1-11 Jerry Arnold, Sept. 9, 2006

Let’s pray! “Father in Heaven, we are about to open Your word, and we really need Your blessing. We are asking for You to teach us, we are praying for You to make the proper impressions upon our heart and mind, and educate us to where we are spiritually in light of You. Teach us Lord. We pray that miracles would take place that hearts would be changed, lives would be transformed. This is our prayer, in Jesus name, Amen.”

The Carnal was upset. There were nine men in his command that he had given a pass to. He’d given each of them a 24 hour pass. They were supposed to be back at 7 am in the morning, it was now afternoon, none of them had returned. He is stewing, he is upset! 7 pm that evening, 12 hours later, the first one arrived. Out of breath, apologetic, humble, he approaches the Carnal and says: “Sir, I am so sorry for being late, but here is what happened. I was on a date, and to be honest with you, I just lost the track of time, and when I realized what time it was, I ran to the bus station, and I missed the bus. So I got a taxi, and was in the taxi, and taxi broke down. So, I ran to a farmer’s house, I bought a horse. And on the way here, the horse died. I had to walk the last 10 miles.” Well, the Carnal, he said: “Well you go to the barracks, and wait there.”

So it wasn’t too long before another one of them showed up. He said, “Carnal, I am so sorry for being late. But I’ll be honest with you. I had a date, and I kind of lost a track of time. And when I realized what the time was, I ran to the bus, it had already left, so I got a taxi, the taxi broke down. I went to the farm house and I bought a horse, and a horse died, and I had to walk the last ten miles.” And the Carnal said, “Go to the barracks!”

Well, six more came in, and would you believe it, they said the same thing. So he is waiting for number nine. Number nine comes in, humble, apologetic, he says: “Carnal, I am so sorry, you see, well, I was on a date. And I lost track of time, and when I realized what time it was, I rushed to the bus station, but the bus had already left. So I got a taxi...” and the Carnal says: “I know the rest. And the taxi broke down!” And he said, “No Sir! The taxi did fine, but it took us forever swerving through those dead horses!”

You know, you may be able to fool people, but God always knows the truth! That’s what I’d like to study with you today. God always knows the truth. Let’s turn to our Bibles, and look at Acts chapter 5. Acts chapter 5 verses 1-11. “But a certain man named Ananias, and Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed

together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”

This is an amazing story, especially in the light of grace, mercy, forgiveness, gentleness, kindness, all these attributes of God that Jesus has been teaching and trying to demonstrate to the church. Now there are, if you go and research people that have preached on this and read sermons about it, you will discover that people kind of fall down into two categories when it comes to this sermon. There is a group that are so convinced that this is the judgment from God, and it’s deserving of death, that they go way out of their way to try to convince you just how violent, evil Ananias and Sapphira were. And God needed to do what He did. And they’ll talk about their deception with the money, and all kinds of stuff. That’s one side.

The other side is the group of people that just can’t imagine God doing this at all. So what they say happened, is that Ananias and Sapphira got caught with their hand in the cookie jar, they were embarrassed, the shock of it, and you know just the, oh man, here now everybody is going to know about it, and Ananias died of the heart attack. Three hours later, his wife Sapphira shows up, finds out that he is dead, that puts her over the age, she dies, and so it really wasn’t the judgment from God at all. I want to show you verse 5, follow along as I read: “Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.” Verse 11, “So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.” One thing is clear brothers and sisters, the people back then, considered this the judgment from God. They were afraid for what had happened. Great fear came upon them.

This is a hard story. It raises a lot of questions. Some questions would have to wait until we are in heaven to get an answer for. Why these people, why now, why this way, what is going on, what is happening here? What was so evil, what was so vile that God had to exterminate the people that were involved? Well, let’s look at it in its context. Chapter 5 verse 1, “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.” That text begins with the word, “but.” The New King James, King James, New Amplified Version, New American Standard Bible, all use the word “but.” NIV begins with the word, “now.” Both of them are the same. They are saying, “This took place, but now this took place.” “This took place, now this took place.” We are in the transition and we are in a comparison. And if you look at chapter 4 beginning with verse 34, you’ll read a description. “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” It’s the description of the church, how it functioned back then.

Verse 36 it says: “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet.” “But another man...” you see that,

“...named Ananias, and his wife...” and the story goes on. So that is the context. We are talking about people who are selling what they have, and they are contributing all of it to the church. They lay it at the Apostles’ feet. I found it interesting that one commentator said, “Notice, they didn’t put it in their hands.” And then he said, “That’s good counsel, you don’t put money in the hands of the clergy, you lay it at their feet. Let the church take care of it, and not the individual Pastors.” And I agree with that.

Chapter 5 verse 2, “And Ananias kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostle’s feet.” He kept back part of the proceeds, so therein is the sin apparently, or is it? Was that the sin? Let me ask you. Have you ever heard the story about the man who put the \$100 bill in the plate as it went by? And then he realized to his horror later, he only intended to put a \$10 in? So he ran to the Deacon and said, “Brother, I’ve made a terrible mistake. I meant to put the \$10 in, but I put the \$100 in.” And the Deacon said, “Sorry, sorry, what’s been given is given, and we have it now.” So the guy said, “At least I’ll get a credit for a \$100 donation,” and the Deacon said, “Oh, no, you’ll get credit for a \$10 donation because that is what you meant to give.”

So is that what is going on here? Is money really even the issue? Notice what Peter says in verse 4. “While it ...” the possession, “... remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?” He says, “You are under no obligation to give a thing to the church.” It was not required of the people. But apparently some were and are giving their all, and these folks, they presented themselves as doing that. They were under no obligation. Verse 3 Peter said: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...” The last verse of verse 4, “...you have not lied to men but to God.” That was the sin, lying! Lying was the sin! How did they lie? I am not exactly sure. There are a couple of scenarios that are possible, they could have said to God, “Look, we’ll sell our property for X amount of money, and if we get it, we’ll give it all to the church.” Maybe they did that? And when they got the money in their hands said, “Hum, wow, you know, I’m going to retire in 5 years and...” you know, who knows?

It could be that with a little bit of fan fair, they want to get some attention, they said, “Yeah, we sold this for X amount of money, and aren’t we wonderful too?” I don’t know? But the sin is lying. They lied to God. Which is a fascinating concept when you think about it? I want you to work that through in your mind, how can you lie to a Being who already knows everything? How can you deceive God? You can men, but you can not God; He always knows the truth! Is it not a foolish prank we play upon ourselves to think we can lie before God and He not know? Well, in verse 4 Peter confronts him, “While it remained was it not your own, and after it was sold was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Verse 5 says Ananias dies. That’s it, he is dead. And what’s amazing is next verse it says, “Young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.”

There is no ceremony, they didn’t notify the authorities, they didn’t even tell his wife. And I am thinking as a Pastor, “Wow, you know, somebody comes into the office and

they die right there, ‘Kevin, quick, grab a couple of Deacons wrap this person up and burry him! Get him out of here!’ One of us would be going to prison. And it wouldn’t be me☺, yeah! I mean, this has lawsuit written all over it. So what is going on with that?

Back in Bible times, when a criminal was sentenced to death, and when he died, they just wrapped him and boom, buried him right then. No ceremony, nothing! They are kind of associating Ananias’ death that way. They don’t even tell the man’s wife. The guy is dead, and he is buried, lying. What about lying? I did some research about lying, do you know, I am not going to bore you with the statistics, but while you are turning to Revelation 21, I will tell you, lying is an epidemic in the United States of America. It’s a way of life, it’s what people do. They justify, they rationalize, they don’t think it’s wrong anymore. You lie to get a job; you lie to get a better job. You lie while you are in that job. You lie at home, you lie in school, and we even have phrases for them. Well, it was a white lie! Hum, I guess that would put you in a white part of the lake of fire.

I didn’t know we are color coded in our sins. “It was a little fib, and I only did it to protect them.” Interesting study, I am not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, or counselor, but I like reading their books. I was reading in a magazine, you know what’s fascinating? Do you know why we don’t tell somebody the truth? It’s not because we love them. We are protecting ourselves. Hum, chapter 21, Revelation, verse 7, God is speaking here, He says, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.” God continues speaking, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

All liars, God says! I am telling you brothers and sisters, lying in the eyes of God is far, far, more severe of a crime than it is in our eyes. God says, “All liars will have their place in the lake of fire.” Do you know what’s that a description of? Wrapping him, and burring him, and no ceremony.

Now let’s go to Ephesians chapter 4 because the Apostle Paul is going to weigh in on this. Ephesians chapter 4 he is going to be talking about the new life we have in Christ, and how we should be living with Him. And you know brothers and sisters, Paul, the great preacher of grace, the great preacher of righteousness by faith, he had a lot to say about how we are supposed to behave. Did you realize that? What our character is supposed to be. In Ephesians 4 verse 25 it says, “Therefore, putting away lying, *“Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”* for we are members of one another. *Be angry, and do not sin:* do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”

Lies, do you know in verse 31 “evil speaking” can be translated, “slander?” Paul is saying, “Look, you can get angry, but don’t sin! Put lies aside, put slander aside!” Do you know what most of us do when we get angry? We rip into somebody, or we rip into somebody about somebody. And we slander, and God does not like it. That’s a lie! God hates lying! Paul says, “Put it away, don’t do it. Put this evil speaking, the slandering away!” And people, who run off to discredit other people and hurt them and harm them, will have their place in the lake of fire. That’s what the Bible teaches. And it’s so much a part of us, so easy to do. We don’t even see how hennas it is in the eyes of God.

Do you know we are so clever that we can even lie about somebody, by saying the truth? Let me give an example. There was a captain of a ship, and he didn’t like the first mate. He was doing everything he could to get him fired. One day, it was the only day it ever happened, never happened before, and never happened after. The first mate, on his day off, on the ship, got into the room, and sat on his bad, drunk, until he fell asleep. Didn’t bother anybody, he didn’t make a scene, he didn’t do anything wrong, he just got drunk. There in the log and the log book on the ship is a legal document, the Captain wrote these words: “First mate, drunk today.” That’s all he said. When the first mate saw what he wrote, he said, “Now, don’t put that in there, it gives the wrong impression.” The Captain said, “I am leaving it in there, it’s true, and it’s in the log book.”

Couple of days later, the first mate was running the ship while the Captain was off. He had the log book. And he wrote this: “Captain sober today!” It was the truth. The Captain said, “Don’t put that in there, it gives the wrong impression.” The first mate said, “It’s true, and it’s in the log book.” You see, we are so clever at this, we can even slander and malign and discredit somebody, “I was only speaking the truth.”

Let’s go back to Acts chapter 5. Acts chapter 5 verse 7, they buried Ananias. It says in verse 7, “...about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.” “Hey, has anybody seen Ananias? He was supposed to be home about two hours ago.” I wonder what people were saying, hum, “Go ask Peter! There are some guys who know where he is, but go ask Peter.” So in verses 8 and 9 “...Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’” She fell down and died, breathed her last. They wrapped her, and buried her next to her husband.

This is difficult story, is it not? What can we learn from it? Number one: let this be indelibly impressed upon your mind and heart. What happens in the story is a reflection and a true picture of how God feels about lying. Now we haven’t had much of this happen since then, and so we have a tendency to think, “Well, you know...” But let me tell you, we ought to praise God it’s not happening today. We had a pastor’s meeting in a conference where I was working, and funds were low, and the leadership was asking the pastors, “What can we do to help people to realize how serious it is to return the tithe and to give offering, and to do all that?” And one fellow stood up and he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what we should do. At Sabbath, when people are gathered together, we should ask

this question. We want everybody here who is returning an honest tithe and is giving sacrificially, we want you to stand. Okay, just everybody stand.” I am not asking you to. “And then pray this prayer: Lord everybody who is lying, may they be struck dead.”

Well, you think about it, would not fear fall upon those who lived? I guarantee you it would. But I am grateful that God is not doing that right now. I think I am returning an honest tithe, and I don't know if I am giving sacrificially, it feels like it, it feels like it. But, I am glad God doesn't do this right now. But why did He do it then? Where these people more wicked then anybody else? Do you think this was the worst sin going on in the church at that time? In fact, let me ask you something. If He could take out Ananias and Sapphira, why doesn't He do that to Satan? Let's just, you know, common, why not?

There are three times in the Bible that something like this happens. One is back in the book of Joshua where they just conquered Jericho, and Joshua told all the people, “Don't take anything from Jericho. All their stuff is abomination to us, except the gold, the silver and some of the iron, and things like this, and bring those and put them in the house of God, as an offering to God. And destroy everything else as an offering to God, where you are demonstrating that you are appalled at the sinfulness of the Canaanites. So you destroy it all.” So they had a tremendous victory, Jericho is conquered, and they've got another city named Ai, and Joshua is thinking, “Oh man, we only need 3000 guys to conquer that little peanut of a city,” so he sends 3000 guys there, and they get routed, but 30 and some of them are killed. And they come back with tails between their legs, confused. Joshua throws himself down before God, and he says: “God what is going on?” And the Lord says, “There is sin in the camp!”

And you know the story, they go through all the stuff, and they find Achan. He's got this Babylonian garment that he wanted, he's got some gold and silver, and he and his household that day are executed by the church. He dies. They were just beginning to go into the Promise Land, and God had this powerful judgment there.

Years later, Uzza, grew up in his grandfather's house where the Arc had been for 20 something years. He grew up playing around that thing. And David decides, it's time to bring the Arc home, let's bring it to Jerusalem. They put it on a cart, that's how the Philistines had done it. They put it on a cart, they've got some oxen and they are coming along, and you know, Uzza, he is familiar with that thing, he's been around it all his life, has no sense of sacredness or holiness to him, and it starts to pitch, he reaches out and touches it, paw, he is dead. David says, “Woo, how can the Arc of God come to me?” He goes back, he studies about it, they realize, they haven't been honoring the holiness of that Arc, and God whom it represents. They came and did it the right way.

It was the beginning; it was the return to true worship with God, and there was the judgment. You come to Ananias and Sapphira; it's the beginning of the church. Paw, judgment, and it says, they all feared! God got their attention. I am going to ask you a question. Achan, his wife and all his household, Uzza, Ananias and Sapphira, are they lost for eternity? Are they? You don't know and I don't either. We'll leave that with God.

But what God wants us to have today, is the realization that He is the same God today that He was then. He hates lying.

Now in Acts chapter 5 verses 2 and 3, there is a phrase that is used. Verse 2 it says, "Ananias kept back part of the proceeds." Peter uses the same phrase in verse 3 when he says, "Ananias why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price?" Part of this lying, was keeping back. There is another way to express this in the Greek. It can be translated, embezzled. And this I find fascinating. I looked up the word embezzling, it means to appropriate property entrusted to one's care, fraudulently to one's own use. To take something that belongs to another, and fraudulently use it for your own use. And I began to think, wow, this is what we do. God gave us life, God gave us talents, God gave us time, God gave us money, God gave us the gift of speech, all these belong to Him, and we use it for our own good. We are embezzling from God; we are living the life of a liar.

This is a serious message today brothers and sisters. God has not changed. What happens here in chapter 5, this is what God thinks of this. And when He says in Revelation, "All liars will have their place in the lake of fire," it just make me realize, we take this just way, way to casual. We got grace going for us, we got forgiveness happening over here, we got Jesus blood covering us, we got all this, and we rejoice in that, and praise God for it, it's our only hope. But we have got to be serious about walking with God.

Life, God has entrusted life to us, and we use it for our self. We walk around whining, and griping, and complaining, and unthankful, and critical of others. Is that what God gave us life for? What about talents? We think we are somebody, and you might think you have no talent, but you are consumed with yourself anyways, and opinionated, and judging one another. Life, talents, these are gifts from God, they belong to God. Time, we are supposed to spend our time blessing God and blessing other people, and many people spend their time fantasizing what it would be like being with another spouse, or another job, or another church, I don't care what it is, we waste a lot of time! God has given us time to build relationships in our home, and I know people who are using time to destroy those relationships. They are foolish enough to think they would be happier with somebody else, so they don't work it out. This is embezzling, and this is lying, and those types of behaviors result in an experience that I used to call, kind of tongue and cheek, a day at the lake. I don't want that day, do you?

What about money? There you go; you knew I had to get to it at some point. That's really not what this story is about, it's about lying. But money is involved in our lying to God. I am just going to ask this question. Is there anyone here who can stand before God and really have a good enough reason to not be returning a tithe to Him or giving an offering? Is there any one of us, any one of us? I know the answer and you do to. God is serious about that stuff. We ought to be too. And what about speech? I have been at the bedside of stroke patients. People who were able to communicate freely until they had a stroke, they could hear, they could understand, but something would no longer work. They couldn't communicate, and they were so frustrated, trying to share. I am telling you, speech is a gift from God. How are you using it? Are you using it for death, are you using

it for life? Are you using it to encourage, are you using it to tear down? Are you negative? Are you positive? What are you using the gift of speech for? Are we embezzling it for our own purpose and our own good, or we think is our own good.

This is a hard story, I'll tell you, one thing is clear. This is how God feels about lying. And I really don't know where you are at today? Some of you may be where I am. And you might be thinking, you know what, I need to be more serious in my walk with God. I need to be more careful, I need to be more circumspect. I need to understand that sin is not just that simple thing in God's eyes, it costs, and lying is an abomination to God, and all liars will have their place in the lake of fire. I'll tell you what it drives me to, drives me to a realization that I need a Savior, I need forgiveness, I need a deeper experience and righteousness, so that I can walk with God in a way that pleases Him.

And so today, I'm asking you, if you want Jesus to be your Savior, and if you want to tell God you want forgiveness for your sin, and if you want to say, "Lord I want to walk closer to you," I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at.

"Father in Heaven, thank You that in Jesus we are forgiven; and today Lord we realize we've got to be more serious about our walk with You. Please help us; we pray this in Jesus name, Amen."