

Acts 4:34-5:11 - Don't hold back on God

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Please turn in your bibles to Acts 4:34

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We are going to briefly go over what we covered the last time we were in Acts when we encountered Barnabas and then read the part of the text that is joined in logical sequence to this one.

From our text this morning we going to see a sharp and painful comparison between Barnabas and a married couple that ended in tragedy for them but warning for all of us.

Acts 4:34-5:11

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold
35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,
2 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.

3 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?"

4 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 men but to God."

5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much."

9 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."

10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

In this passage we see the generous Barnabas being directly compared to the false and money hungry Ananias and Sapphira and it will be important to notice a number of things that will be helpful for us.

It really is a contrast between what genuine belief in Jesus does within us.

It changes us from the inside and affects every area of our lives. In particular it affects what and how we look after the money that God entrusts to us.

Psalm 24 says that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

Everything we have comes from him (our health & well being and the jobs that we have) and how we approach our **THINGS** will show us how we approach our **RELATIONSHIP** with God and others.

John Piper says this in summary of what genuine belief does in us.

Two of the effects of believing in Jesus are that the heart is loosened in relationship to things and tightened in its relationship to people

If we were to sum up this passage of scripture we could say and should say to ourselves:

DON'T HOLD BACK ON GOD

Even though Ananias and Sapphira held back on God in the form of their possessions on this occasion, I would no doubt guess that had they lived they would have held back on God in many other areas of their lives.

Now one of the things that strikes me is that Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead. On an initial reading this seems extreme, but what we need to bear in mind is that there are precedents that God sets in scripture, to show us that it is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:31

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

As we saw last week Adam and Eve set a precedent when they sinned against God that

not only affected their offspring after them, including us but also affected the world as well.

Their decision had catastrophic repercussions and we see in the Bible there are a number of other occasions where people made decisions that had disastrous consequences, particularly when in the beginning of God's moves as we see here in the beginning of the early church.

So what can we learn from these two contrasting stories.

Don't say things or commit to things that you will not be able to carry out.

If we cannot commit to things that we say we can we need to be honest up front and let people know that we won't be able to make such and such a commitment.

Don't look for the praise of men and in doing so be a fake in God's sight.

This goes for everything in our lives.

As soon as say something or do something for the praise of man you immediately lose the praise of God.

Matthew 6:1-8

1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Don't fear the fear of God

We see in Chapter 5 verse 5 and 11 that GREAT FEAR came upon all who hear of Ananias dropping dead and also on the whole church when they heard that his wife who had conspired to lie against the Holy Spirit also dropped dead.

The church today needs a good dose of the fear of God. A Holy and wholesome fear of God.

Fear in any circumstance brings incredible focus and attention to the thing or person we are fearing.

In this instance it brought the Holiness of God into incredible focus for the whole of the church.

Let's not fear the fear of God. It has a purifying effect in our lives.

Don't lie to cover up for yourself in anything.

You end up not lying to man only but also to the Holy Spirit who lives in you. The one who sees, hears, feels everything that goes on in your life. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

When we lie we discredit the Holy Spirit.

I want to finish off this morning by reading one more quote from John Piper.

And so it is that the Holy Spirit is discredited in the church today. Some people come to worship and operate totally on the human level, never even reckoning with the living presence of God in this room. Some come and give theoretical assent to his presence but don't really come to terms with the awesome fact that he hears every thought in their mind and sees every imagination of their heart. And others come and convince themselves that the thoughts of the heart are not serious enough to forsake because grace always means tolerance. In each of these three cases the Spirit is discredited and demeaned. Hebrews warns that it is possible to outrage the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29).

So in conclusion let's be like Barnabas who was the genuine article and it reflected in the way he lived in all areas of his LIFE and let's not be like an Ananias or Sapphira who PLAYED with God and PRETENDED to be people that they were not and as a consequence fell into the hands of the living God.

And let's never be a people who hold back on God in any area of our lives.

Let's pray.