

## A Cautionary Tale for the Church

A Sermon on Acts 5:1-11

Knox @ Faith PCA Tacoma

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Last week's sermon text, Acts 4:32-37, showed us the church at her best: sacrificial generosity, unity, powerful preaching, and "great grace was upon them all." It was a summary so heartwarming, so inspiring, and so picturesque, we might easily slip into nostalgia, idealism, or naivete<sup>1</sup>.

This week we have the other side of the coin. Here in Acts 5:1-11, Luke, like a good Calvinist, pours a glass of ice water onto our face: He juxtaposes his glowing summary of the model church with a grim and gruesome cautionary tale.

Due to an unfortunate chapter division we might easily miss Luke's intention for us to connect these scenes. But not only did Luke place them side-by-side, but he also included several parallels within the two accounts<sup>2</sup>. As we read Acts 5:1-11, look for those connections, and consider what Luke wants us to learn from this contrast.

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<sup>1</sup> Given passages like these, one can almost understand the impulse of Christian movements like Restorationism, Revivalism, Pentecostalism, or Wesleyan perfectionism: "If only we could get back to the early church..." "If only God would pour His Holy Spirit in power once again..." "If only we would pray hard enough and long enough for revival... If only we could discover the right method for sanctification or evangelism or church growth...then we could... overcome denominational divisions... eliminate poverty...have a pure church...live a life of perfection, health, wealth and success... experience a second blessing...change the world ..." etc. Acts tends to be one of the most misread NT books by such movements. For that reason, the cautionary tale of Ananias and Saphira takes on added significance. As I'll mention in passing, this story confirms that we (Christians living in the Messianic/Kingdom era) are under the same covenantal structure as our forefathers of the Mosaic era! Dr Rayburn helpfully emphasizes this perspective in his sermon on the same text (see the works cited and consulted at the end).

<sup>2</sup>Those parallels come mainly in the form of contrasts: the contrast between Barnabas versus Ananias and Saphira; the sacrificial generosity of the early Christians versus the greed of Ananias and Saphira; the sincerity and devotion of the early Christians versus the hypocrisy of A. & S.; the Christian-centered unity of the early Christians versus the complicity of A. & S.; the gracious influence of the H.S. upon the church (4:31) versus Satan's influence on A & S (5:3); the "great grace" upon the early Christians (4:33) versus the curse and judgment laid upon A. & S. (5:9-10). We could also note the common motif of laying gifts at the feet of the Apostles.

This is the word of the Lord...

Please keep your Bibles open and may the Lord help us to understand, believe, and obey His word.

Acts 5:1-11 is a cautionary tale for the church. As such, it gives us four warnings.

Warning #1: Beware of Greed! Look again at verses 1-3 and consider how greed factored into the downfall of Ananias and Saphira. Although their sin was primarily one of hypocrisy, it's impossible to separate their hypocrisy from their greed. If Ananias and Saphira were truly as generous as they had pretended to be, there would have been no occasion for this particular act of hypocrisy. Perhaps hypocrisy would have surfaced in other areas of their life, but in this story, the act of hypocrisy was a way of covering up their greed.

Look again with me at verse 3 and notice the phrase "keep back for yourself". Many commentators have pointed out that the Greek verb here is unusual: outside of this story, the only other place it appears in the New Testament is in Titus 2, where it is translated as "pilfer." In the context there, Paul urges slaves not to steal from their masters, but instead to "demonstrate all good faith."

That detail helps us understand that when Peter condemns Ananias for "keeping back for yourself part of the proceeds," he is implicitly accusing Ananias of stealing from God.

Now, that might seem confusing given Peter's rhetorical questions in verse 4, where he plainly acknowledges that this was a voluntary donation, not a mandatory tax. But if that's true, then how could Ananias and Saphira be guilty of greed and theft?

The answer lies in the fact that Ananias and Saphira chose to devote these proceeds to the Lord. Look again at verse 2 and consider the symbolism of laying money at the apostles' feet. This was a symbolic way of bringing an offering to the Lord, of making a spiritual sacrifice as an act of worship. Although it's not stated explicitly, it's implied that this symbolic action was either the fulfilment of a sacred vow that Ananias and Saphira had previously taken to devote this to the Lord, or at least that the action itself had the symbolic force of a sacred vow.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kudos to Peter Leithart for this insight. *The Theopolis Podcast Episode 340 @ 17:33*

Along those lines, Alistair Roberts has pointed out that this symbolic action has precedent in the Mosaic law. Passages like Deuteronomy 26:12-14 and Leviticus 27:28 emphasize the solemnity of devoting something to the Lord, and thus the need to act with integrity and faithfulness.<sup>4</sup>

As we try to understand the significance of Ananias and Saphira's actions here, it's also helpful to remember our sermon on Acts 1:12ff, which is the story of how the apostles replaced Judas. In that passage we saw that the 12 Apostles were the uniquely authoritative representatives of Christ. Acts 5:1-11 builds on that identity. Notice here how Peter has prophetic insight into Ananias' heart, just as it says of Jesus that he "knew the thoughts" of the scribes and Pharisees<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, Peter prophetically pronounces Saphira's doom in the same style as Ahijah pronounces the doom of Jeroboam's son in 1 Kings 14.<sup>6</sup>

Remembering the unique identity of the Apostles helps us to understand the symbolism of this action: Ananias and Saphira weren't merely donating to a charitable cause; they were bringing an offering to the Lord Jesus as an act of worship.

Along those same lines, Jeff Meyers<sup>7</sup> has pointed out that in these early chapters of Acts, there is a transition happening between the temple and the church. Prior to Pentecost, the center of faith and worship was the temple. But on the other side of the cross and Pentecost, the center shifts to the church. In fact, Paul and Peter both teach in

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 26:12-14, "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, 13 then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. 14 I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me'"

Leviticus 27:28 But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the LORD, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD.

In a broader way, the many Biblical warnings and exhortations stressing the need to keep vows and oaths are relevant for the sacrilege of Ananias and Saphira. For example Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. It's also helpful to remember that our WCF has an entire chapter on Oaths and Vows!

<sup>5</sup> For example Luke 5:22

<sup>6</sup> Another point of correspondence between the two stories is the motif of feet: notice Peter's mention of feet here in verse 9 and remember from 1 Kings 14 that 1) Ahijah recognizes the approach of Jeroboam's wife by the sound of her feet (1 Kings 14:6) 2) that according to Ahijah's prophetic pronouncement, Jeroboam's son would die as soon as his wife's feet entered the city (1 Kings 14:12) Kudos to James BeJohn for these insights. *The Theopolis Podcast Episode 340 @ 20:42*

<sup>7</sup> *The Theopolis Podcast Episode 340*

their epistles that we are the temple of God, and they apply the language of sacrifice and priesthood to the church.<sup>8</sup>

So...under the Mosaic covenant, people brought tithes, tribute, and sacrificial offerings to the temple; now, in the Messianic era, Christians bring those expressions of worship to the church. As the psalms describe the temple as the footstool of Yahweh, so now, it's implied that the Apostles are the footstool of Yahweh, the place where Christians bring their tribute. Just as the freewill offerings were used to build the tabernacle and maintain the Levitical priesthood of Moses, so the gifts of these Christians are being used to build up the body of Christ and extend His kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

There's one more Biblical connection that helps us to understand that Ananias and Saphira were stealing from God, and that is the story of Achan in Joshua 7. The rare Greek word translated here in Acts 5 as "hold back for yourself" not only occurs in Titus 2, but also occurs once in the Septuagint: Joshua 7:1, "But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things devoted to destruction. Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took (held back for himself) some of the devoted things; therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel."

I'll mention just one more Biblical connection that helps us to understand that Ananias and Saphira were stealing from God: the story of Achan in Joshua 7. The rare Greek word translated here in Acts 5 as "hold back for yourself" not only occurs in Titus 2, but also occurs once<sup>10</sup> in the Septuagint<sup>11</sup>: Joshua 7:1, "But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things devoted to destruction. Achan, took (or held back for himself) some of the devoted things; therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel."

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Paul calls his ministry of evangelism and church planting, "priestly service" and calls the conversion of Gentiles "an offering...sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:16. Similarly Paul calls the Roman Christians to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1. Peter describes the church's calling to be a "spiritual house...a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

<sup>9</sup> Again, credit to Jeff Meyers for these insights: *The Theopolis Podcast*. Episode 340 @ 13:25

<sup>10</sup> As many commentators (*most of the ones I listed at the end of this*) have pointed out, given how rare this word is in Biblical Greek, it seems very likely that Luke here in Acts 5 is alluding to Achan's sin in Joshua 7.

<sup>11</sup> The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It was the most common copy of the Scriptures during Jesus' day, and thus provides helpful insights into the Greek New Testament.

Aside from the repetition of this rare Greek word, Luke draws other parallels between Achan's sin and Ananias' sin: both come as shocking disappointments in the midst of an otherwise upward trajectory for the people of God; both result in their own death, as well as the death of at least one immediate family member; in both cases their community forgoes the normal rituals of mourning as a symbolic acknowledgement of God's curse,<sup>12</sup> and both stories serve as dreadful warnings to the people of God.

Putting all of these Biblical connections together helps us to see why Ananias and Saphira were judged so severely<sup>13</sup>. The church is God's temple, the place where His holy presence dwells. These proceeds had been entirely devoted to the Lord, and were being symbolically brought to the feet of Jesus as an act of worship. But like Achan keeping back the devoted things of Jericho, or like Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire, or like Uzzah touching the ark of the covenant, Ananias and Saphira committed an act of sacrilege: thus, immediate capital punishment, with no ritual mourning.

And that leads to an even more fundamental point of theology implied in this story, one that Dr Rayburn<sup>14</sup> helped me to see here: on the other side of the **cross** and Pentecost, we are still in the same boat as Israel. We live with the same covenantal structure of blessings for obedience and curses for unfaithfulness, the same dangers of apostasy, hypocrisy, and unbelief within the covenant, the same liabilities for worshipping God according to the right form but with a heart that is far from Him, the same warnings not to use ritual and liturgy to manipulate God like genie in a bottle, the same sinful human heart, and, most importantly, the same holy God, who is jealous for His people and for His glory.<sup>15</sup>

Let us beware of the facile theology that drives an artificial wedge between the Old and New Testaments, as if life in the Messianic era is somehow less serious, as if God is

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<sup>12</sup> This explains the seemingly heartless fact that Ananias is buried in less than three hours, before his wife is even notified! In similar fashion, Achan and his family are stoned and burned, not buried.

<sup>13</sup> Some commentators try to soften the blow by arguing that Peter killed Ananias and Saphira contra God's intention, that they died of natural causes (heart attack), or even saying that they "hope that Ananias and Sapphira are legendary" instead of historical! (quoted in John Stott's commentary pg 92). But all such arguments contradict the clear implications of Acts 5:1-11 (namely, that God judged them by striking them down just as he did to Uzzah, Nadab and Abihu, the Israelites in the wilderness, and Jeroboam's son).

<sup>14</sup> Rayburn, Robert. "Not Again?!" Sermon on Acts 4:32-5:11. Nov 8, 2015. Faithtacoma.org

<sup>15</sup> With its inspiring stories of the early church, emphasis on the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, emphasis on the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, and condemnation of the Judaizing heresy, (*The Judaizers were Jewish Christians who believed that Gentiles had to be circumcised (and thus subjected to the ceremonial law of Moses) in order to be saved. The book of Acts firmly contradicts this doctrine, especially in the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. Paul also clearly condemns this error as a fatal form of legalism.*) the book of Acts is probably one of the most abused books of the New Testament when it comes to the question of how the Messianic age relates to the Mosaic covenant.

now more merciful and less cranky, as if we are in such a privileged position that we no longer need to tremble at the warnings and cautionary tales of the Bible.

The story of Ananias and Saphira is meant to lead us to the same fear of the Lord so frequently commended by the prophets and sages who lived before the Messiah's advent.

So, instead of greed, let us remember Jesus' promise, that if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all of these other things will be added unto us!<sup>16</sup>

Beware of Greed!

Secondly, the story of Ananias and Saphira warns us to beware of hypocrisy. Look again with me at verses 3-4 and notice that the primary sin here was that Ananias and Saphira put on a show of righteousness. They pretended to be more generous, sacrificial, pious, and devoted than they actually were. Notice especially the second half of verse 4, "Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?" The NIV has it, "What made you think of doing such a thing?" You have not lied to man but to God."

Peter's condemnation not only emphasizes how deliberate and artificial this act of deception was, but also how unnecessary. We've already touched on the fact that Ananias and Saphira were under no obligation either to sell the field, or to donate any portion of it. That was an entirely free choice<sup>17</sup>, and that context of freedom makes this hypocrisy far worse. If the church had pressured or coerced Ananias and Saphira into "donating" their land and money to the church, then it would have been almost understandable for them to pretend to give all but keep some back for themselves. But what they did here was an entirely gratuitous act of deception, an artifice, a show, a mask, an act, designed to win honor and a better reputation that they deserved. As John Stott put it, "they were not so much misers as thieves and- above all- liars. They wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity, without the inconvenience of it. So, in order to gain a reputation to which they had no right, they told an outright lie. Their motive in giving was not to relieve the poor, but to boost their own ego."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Matt 6:24ff. other passages worth meditating on in this vein are Malachi 3:6-12, 2 Cor 9:6-8, and Luke 9:25. It's also worth reflecting on the fact that, instead of seeking first the kingdom of heaven, Ananias and Saphira lost it.

<sup>17</sup> The voluntary nature of this donation proves that the sharing of Acts 2 and 4 was **not** an incipient form of Communism or Socialism, but rather the voluntary fellowship of Christian love.

<sup>18</sup> John Stott. The Message of Acts. The Bible Speaks Today series. Intervarsity Press. Pg 92

Judging from the way the prophets and Jesus speak about it, hypocrisy is one of the sins that God most despises, and this story suggests two of the reasons why He feel so strongly about it. The first is that hypocrisy contradicts and undermines God's work in the church. Ben Witherington put it this way, "Ananias' action was a falsification of what the Spirit was doing and was prompting the community to do and to be."<sup>19</sup> Think back to the heartwarming summaries at the end of chapters 2 and 4: the Spirit was shaping the church into a community of generosity, sincerity, and love... a healthy family in which you can safely entrust yourself to the care of others. Ananias and Saphira's hypocrisy contradicted and undermined that ethos. Their actions symbolically declare that what matters is not generosity, but the appearance of generosity...not pleasing God from the heart, but receiving honor from people...not helping the poor and loving your neighbor, but saving face.

This is a photo-op for Ananias and Saphira...this is a chance to get a selfie with Peter, and post a humblebrag on his social media. This is about living on the interest of someone else's investment.

John Stott described the deleterious effects of hypocrisy this way, "Luke seems to be underlining the great evil of sinning against God's people. Falsehood ruins fellowship. If the hypocrisy of Ananias and Saphira had not been publicly exposed and punished, the Christian ideal of an open fellowship would not have been preserved, and the modern cry 'there are so many hypocrites in the church' would have been heard from the beginning."<sup>20</sup>

Hypocrisy undermines the church because it causes people to wonder if the gospel is a fraud. If you are living a life of deception...if you are presenting yourself as something that you are not, then when other people find that out, it's only a small step of logic for them to wonder if the content of your professed faith is also fraudulent. If you have been able to live at ease with a massive, unresolved contradiction between what you confess and how you live, then it's only natural for others to wonder if the faith that you confess is empty.

Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. By no means am I saying that we must achieve sinless perfection to be faithful witnesses. By no means am I saying that we can

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<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Eerdmans. Pg 217

<sup>20</sup> Stott, pg 93

ever expect to be free from sin in this life. Of course we all continue to sin, and we should be upfront about that. But the fact that we continue to sin and continue to fall short of our own standards is not the same thing as hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is intentionally, deliberately presenting yourself to be something that you are not. It's far better to humble ourselves and admit, "I'm not as virtuous, devoted, or godly as I would like to be...and I'm praying for help to grow in that."

The second reason that God hates hypocrisy is that it puts Him to the test. Look again at verse 9 where Peter confronts Saphira, and compare this with what he says to Saphira in verse 4: Verse 9 "But Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord?'" Verse 4 "Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

In his commentary David Peterson describes testing God as, "provoking God to judge, by misrepresenting him, disobeying his commandments, or refusing to believe his promises."<sup>21</sup> Simon Kistemaker puts it this way, "Ananias acts as if God is unaware of the daily transactions in the church and is ignorant of Ananias' deception."<sup>22</sup> And Howard Marshall simply describes Ananias and Saphira as trying to "see how much they can get away with."<sup>23</sup>

And this brings us to the core of their sin. Regardless of what Ananias and Saphira would have confessed with their lips, this action is unbelieving. It's a denial of God's presence in the Holy Spirit. It's a contradiction of Jesus' character. It's a mockery of God's holiness.

And so the Lord executes a judgment that fits the sin. Look again at verses 5 and 10 and notice how both Ananias and Saphira fall before the feet of Peter, Christ's representative. Listen to the way David Peterson describes it, "Falling down at someone's feet was normally a gesture of respect in that culture. Previously Ananias and Saphira had refused to honor Peter by being open and honest about their contribution, but now they appeared to express submission to his leadership in dying."

Calvin applied the passage this way, "We know that even if men hold us in high esteem, as if we were part angel, our while life will be worthy of condemnation unless we

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<sup>21</sup> David Peterson. The Acts of the Apostles. Pg 212 The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series. Eerdmans

<sup>22</sup> Simon Kistemaker. Acts. Pg New Testament Commentary. Baker

<sup>23</sup> I. Howard Marshall. Acts. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Intervarsity Press, pg 120

walk in complete integrity and innocence of conscience before God. That is primarily what we are to get out of this story....That I tell you is what true Christianity is all about after we have been emptied of all pretense and hypocrisy so we can walk in all integrity and uprightness before God and with our neighbors.”

Reflect with me on the fact that the judgment of Ananias and Saphira is a fulfillment of Jesus’ words in Luke 12:1-3, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.”

Beware of hypocrisy!

Thirdly, the story of Ananias and Saphira warns us to beware of other loyalties. Look again at verses 7-9 and consider how Ananias and Saphira’s misguided loyalty to each other contributed to their downfall. Notice in this interaction between Peter and Saphira that he gives her the opportunity to confess her sin and repent, but she doesn’t take it, “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.’ (presumably Peter here quoted the false price which Ananias claimed). And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together (The NIV translates it as “conspired”) to test the Spirit of the Lord?”

We can only speculate about what went through Saphira’s mind as Peter asked this question. Presumably Saphira was savvy enough to realize that Peter was on to her. Why didn’t she just come clean and fess up?

At least part of the answer to that question seems to have been a misguided loyalty to her husband. “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” As Adam chose solidarity with Eve over obedience to God by eating the forbidden fruit she offered him, so Sapphira chose solidarity with Ananias over faithfulness to God.

Look again at verse 10 and consider the symbolism of Ananias and Saphira being unceremoniously buried together. Like partners in crime, they were united in all of the wrong ways: in greed, in hypocrisy, in lies, in Satan’s influence, and in death.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ben Witherington helped me to see this. He calls it “the wrong sort of togetherness.” pg 218

Now, don't get me wrong, in general it's a very good thing to be loyal to your spouse. It's foundational for a healthy marriage.

But this story is a reminder that there is a limit to marital loyalty for the Christian. In a Christian marriage, loyalty to your spouse must come in second place to loyalty to Jesus.

This is what Jesus is getting at in Luke 14:26 when he says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

Christian, the story of Ananias and Saphira is a sobering reminder that loyalty to Jesus must trump all other loyalties. My wish for you is that you would never have to face such a sad and heartbreaking dilemma as having to choose between loyalty to your spouse versus loyalty to Jesus...or loyalty to your children versus loyalty to Jesus...or your parents...or your best friend. My wish for you is that every one of those relationships would be sanctified by the gospel...that you would be united with all of your loved ones by a common love for Christ.

But the reality is that we live in a fallen world, where sinners often reject Christ, where some covenant children apostatize, and where professing Christians may be hypocrites.

Resolve to make Christ your first loyalty. Remember that He purchased you at the cost of His life. You belong to Him. He is a good master, and He rewards faithfulness.

Beware of other loyalties.

Lastly, the story of Ananias and Saphira warns us to beware of Satan. Look again with me at verse 3 and consider the contrast Luke draws between the influence of Satan and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the book of Acts the language of filling is usually used to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, just a few verses prior to this, in 4:31, Luke describes all the believers who participate in the prayer meeting as being "filled with the Holy Spirit."

What a sad contrast here in verse 3, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.'"

The fingerprints of Satan are all over this cautionary tale: Satan is the Father of lies, and here Ananias and Saphira lie both to the church and to God. Satan disguises himself

as an angel of light, and here Ananias and Saphira disguise themselves as generous and sacrificial. Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness to put the Father to the test; here Ananias and Saphira test the Spirit. Jesus said that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Here Ananias and Saphira steal from God, destroy their own souls, and are killed. Satan's rebellion against God is madness, and here Ananias and Saphira act irrationally...what did they think was going to happen? Did they really believe that God wouldn't know and wouldn't care about their unrepentant, high-handed sin?

In his commentary, John Stott points out that throughout chapters 4-6 Satan wages a counterattack on the church. We've already begun to see his most obvious strategy in the coercive opposition of the Sanhedrin, and we will continue to see that kind of external attack throughout Acts. But here is an instance of a much more insidious strategy...infiltration. Like the defection of Judas, this is an internal attack...a sucker punch to the gut.

I think it's no accident that the same Peter who, we can only imagine with tears in his eyes, prophetically declared the doom of his friends Ananias and Saphira, wrote in his first epistle, "Be sober minded. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith."

The story of Ananias and Saphira is a sobering reminder to us that we have a mortal enemy who hates everything about us, who would delight in nothing more than our downfall. And so we pray each day as Jesus taught us, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Beware of Satan!

I realize that this sermon is probably the heaviest one we've had in our Acts series, and probably the heaviest sermon I've had to preach in my time here at Faith. But that is because this passage is meant to drive us to the fear of the Lord. Look again at verses 5 and 11 and notice how the same conclusion is repeated, "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

Acts is an exciting book. It's a travelogue. Toby Sumpter rightly described it as the "Continuing Adventures of Jesus." It's filled with optimism, joy, and warm-hearted fellowship.

But that joy and optimism must be tempered by a healthy fear of God. “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.” Here in Acts 5:1-11, Luke is reminding us that this proverb is just as relevant now as it was when Solomon first wrote it.

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Disclaimer: In my preparation, I try to use a wide variety of resources, praying for discernment as I sift through various perspectives on any given text or issue. Please keep in mind that the fact that I have consulted a resource in my studies or quoted from it in my sermon does not necessarily mean that I agree with or identify with everything that author has written or said! A quotation is not intended to be a blanket endorsement of everything any given author/speaker has done or said.

### Questions and Quotations for Discussion and Reflection

- Why were Ananias and Saphira judged so harshly?
- What is hypocrisy? How is it different from the admission that all Christians continue to sin?
- Why does God hate hypocrisy?
- How does hypocrisy damage the church?
- Sometimes the charge is leveled at the church that “Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites.” Evaluate.
- Evaluate the idea that God is more merciful and less holy in the NT than he was in the OT.
- How can we combat greed and hypocrisy?
- How might other loyalties lead us into greed and hypocrisy?
- How do we fight against the influence of Satan?
- A classic quotation from Calvin to knock all of us down a few notches...

“We know that the natural disposition of human beings is riddled with hypocrisy and lying, which have their roots in all of us. We also know that those roots will remain until God snatches them out by His Holy Spirit. So we must pray that he will be gracious and cleanse us of such a vice so that it will no longer rule over us and our hearts will be completely dedicated to serve and honor him throughout our lives. Because hypocrisy is so embedded in us that it can be rooted out only with great difficulty, the prophets had running encounters with hypocrites and constantly denounced them. As for us, as soon as our Lord cleanses us of this vice, it will sprout again because some vestige of the root remains. Unless he continuously applies his hand, it will get worse, like weeds growing in a garden. Immediately after they have been pulled out, they will grow back unless someone puts his hand to them. And there are in us more than five hundred times as many wicked roots and affections which have great need to be removed continually. Otherwise they will grow in such abundance they will suffocate us and cause us to fall into everlasting hell.” -Calvin. Sermons on Acts pg 196