

Join us, if you can, in reading this with your family and praying at 10:15 on Sunday, April 19, 2020.

### **Acts 5:1-11**

Dear First Southern Baptist Church family,

I hope you are well this morning. I keep saying this, but I miss you all and I'm looking forward to be gathered in person with you all on the Lord's day. I've tried to spend the last few weeks laying a foundation for how we should respond as Christians in light of a global pandemic. I wanted us to remember who God is, and how we should respond in faith according to the Scripture. I hope you have been encouraged from the Word over the last few weeks. I think topical preaching like what we've done over the last few weeks is helpful, especially in dealing with pertinent and timely issues; however, I believe that the regular diet of the church should be verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book expositional preaching. I was wrestling with what text to look to this week and Elise, who is wonderful and full of wisdom, said to me, "why don't we just continue to look at Acts and see who the church is supposed to be?" It was an encouraging and insightful thought that I feel the Lord has also been laying on my heart, so this week we're going to turn back to our study of Acts, jumping back in where we left off. This morning we'll look at Acts 5:1-11.

We read in Acts 5:1-11

"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 man 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."

Notice with me that the first word is a contrasting conjunction. This passage is meant to be read in the flow of the whole book of Acts as a contrast to what has just happened in the immediate context. In order to remember that context, let's back up and remember what we've seen in Acts so far. In Acts 1, Jesus commissioned his disciples before he ascended to heaven that when they received the Holy Spirit, they would be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In chapter 2 when the Spirit arrives, Peter and the apostles boldly proclaim that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. He lived, died, and rose again displaying that he was both Lord and Christ, King and Priest, Savior and Sovereign. Anyone who confesses their sin and trusts in Jesus for salvation can be born again and become a part of the people of God, the church. At the end of chapter 2, we see a helpful summary statement of what this early church looked like in practice. They were devoted to the Lord and one another through the apostle's teaching, prayer, fellowship, the Lord's

Supper, and caring for one another's needs. In chapters 3-4, Peter and John heal a lame man who was begging at the temple gates and use the miracle to declare the truth of the gospel. This enraged the Jewish leaders, but because many saw the miracle and because they were concerned that the crowds would rebel against them, they simply warned the apostles not to speak again in the name of Jesus. The apostles left and when they were reunited with the church, they all prayed for continued boldness to share the gospel in the name of Jesus. At the end of chapter 4, we see another helpful summary statement from Luke about the daily life of the church. They were united together in Jesus, they were continuing to witness and walk in grace by the power of the Holy Spirit, and they took care of each other. In the immediate context to chapter 5, we meet Barnabas. He is held up as an example of a person of godly character, united with the body, filled with the Spirit, who loved God and his church so much that he was willing to sell a piece of property and give all the proceeds to those who were in need. It is in direct contrast to Barnabas that we meet Ananias and Sapphira.

We see in verse 1 that Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property, like Barnabas. We would likely expect that, like Barnabas, they too would hand this money, sacrificially, over to the apostles for the caring for and building up of the church. However, unlike Barnabas who gave the whole of the money from the sale to the apostles in order to bless the church, they kept back some of the money for themselves. The Greek word (*nosphizo*) for "kept back" is rare in the Bible, and it carries a degree of secretiveness and selfishness with it. It is used to describe embezzlement. The word implies that Ananias and Sapphira pledged the whole amount of the sale, yet kept back part of what was promised. This word is used in Titus 2:9-10, where Paul encouraged slaves to submit to their masters, not being argumentative and also not pilfering, same Greek word (*nosphizo*) in order to honor the Lord and be a witness to their sound doctrine. This same Greek word is used in the Septuagint, or the Greek Old Testament of Jesus' day, in Joshua 7, to describe the sin of Achan. Instead of obeying the Lord and destroying every thing in Jericho, Achan held back and hid some of the treasure of the conquest for himself and was accordingly punished for his sin. So, you can see again the contrast. They intended to hide the whole price of the sale from the apostles. They were intentionally deceiving the body about the price of the land and the amount they gave to the church. In verse 2, the text says Ananias did this with his wife's knowledge. The Greek word here describes their like-thinking. They conspired together to deceive the body. Again, consider the contrast. Instead of being of like-mind and being united together with the body, Ananias and Sapphira are of like-mind and united together against the body.

Notice Peter's reply in verse 3. He wants to know why they are conspiring together with Satan to lie to and deceive the body. How he knew that they were being deceitful is unclear, but it seems that considering the accusation is that they were lying to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gave Peter prophetic insight to confront these two in their sin. Consider again the contrast. The verses immediately before and after this passage describe a church body that is united and for one another as they are filled with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Notice that Peter said that rather than having hearts filled with the Spirit, they had hearts filled with Satan's lies. This isn't a "devil made me do it" situation. They were seen in Peter's response as active participants with Satan to deceive the church. In verse 4, Peter was clear that their sin wasn't withholding part of the money, it was theirs to begin with, but their sin was to attempt to deceive the church and ultimately God himself. Just as a side note, notice that in verse 3, they are said to have lied to the Holy Spirit and in verse 4, they are said to have lied to God. This shows early evidence that the church understood the Holy Spirit to be co-equal with the Father and the Son, a full person of the Trinity.

In verse 5 we see the drama of this event unfold with a profound and jarring development. When Ananias was confronted, he fell down in the midst of the assembly and died. There's no explanation as to what happened, but the resulting fear that rose in the community implies that they saw this as an act of divine judgment. This is further supported by the direct link in the following verses to the similar confrontation and

shocking death of Sapphira. Furthermore, the verb used for both deaths is rare in the New Testament. It is only used three times, all in Acts. It is used twice in this passage and it is used in Acts 12:23 to describe the death of Herod which is clearly seen as an act of God's judgment. The implication is that God acted in judgment of Ananias because of his sin. Even the hasty nature of his burial in verse 6 seems to imply that they viewed this death as an act of judgment. This type of hasty, unceremonious funeral was typical only used for the death of criminals, suicide, and those perceived to have been struck down by divine justice.

In verses 7-10, we see Ananias' deceit, confrontation, and death mirrored with Sapphira. When Sapphira entered the gathering, unaware of what had taken place with her husband, Peter confronted her concerning the deception. Instead of coming clean and repenting, she also lied to Peter and the assembly and perpetuated the conspiracy. Notice in verse 9, Peter was grieved that they conspired together. They were united, but not with the body, against it. When confronting Ananias, Peter asked why they would lie to the Holy Spirit; however, notice that with Sapphira he asked why they would test the Spirit. This language is used throughout the Bible and it begs the question, did they think God would not know? Did they think, somehow, God could be deceived? Again, Peter prophetically announced God's judgment, and Sapphira also fell down and died. She was swiftly buried by the same young men who had just returned from burying her husband.

Notice the response of the community to these deaths. They were filled with fear. This seems to carry both the sense that they were afraid at the Lord's power and judgment, but also a fearing reverence for the Lord as holy and just. It's not clear if these two were false believers and died in their sin, or if they were genuine believers who were used as an example to the body of the perils of sin. This is the first time Acts describes any type of division in the church's unity or sin in the church itself. This is a difficult passage. The shocking, instantaneous judgment of God drove the believers in Jerusalem to fear and revere God as King, as it should also communicate this truth to us. To that end, we should see Ananias and Sapphira's death in the context of this passage. Here, instead of being a part of the growth of the church and the expansion of the Kingdom to the glory of God, these two conspired to rob God of his glory by lying to him and his church. Instead of being led by the Spirit and living honest, transparent lives, they were led by Satan in their falsehood. Instead of only seeking the good of others in their generosity, they sought something for themselves and conspired against God's people. It's a sobering passage that we need to think seriously about and learn from. To that end, let me offer a few concluding thoughts to help us apply the truth of this text to our own lives.

- 1) This passage should communicate to us the serious perilousness of sin. God hates sin. That's not an exaggeration or something that just the fundamentalists say. It's something the Bible says. We see it here. Sin is rebellion against God, an assault on his character, and a mockery of his authority. We all deserve this kind of instant, divine death for every occurrence of sin in our lives. The fact that any of us commits a sin and still draws breath is a testimony to the merciful nature of God. If we recoil at the thought of God striking these two down, it is because we have lost sight of the deep evil and wickedness of sin. This is important because it speaks to the heart of the gospel message. God's solution to provide salvation to humans because of their sin took nothing less than the sacrificial, substitutional death of the righteous Son of God to atone for our wickedness. Great evil required a greater righteousness to atone and an amazing love to make it possible. That our salvation required such an extravagant and costly sacrifice, impossible to achieve or conceive by sinful humans, displays not only the amazing love of God, but the horror of human sinfulness. Let us not treat sin lightly. Let us not make peace with it. Let us prayerfully wage open, hostile war against our flesh in order to walk in obedience to God and his Word. I urge you to examine your own heart, praying that the Spirit will show you where your heart resists God's reign. Endeavor through prayer

and reading of Scripture to be humbly ruled and guided by God's Holy Spirit that you might resist the lies of Satan and the temptations of the world and the flesh.

- 2) This passage should communicate to us the necessity for humility and transparency within the church. Perhaps, like Ananias and Sapphira, you are tempted to lie to make yourself look more righteous than you are. It's incredibly easy to erect a spiritual façade that gives others the impression we've got it all together. It's exhausting pretending to be ok. When we do this, we deprive ourselves of one of the greatest tools God has given us for our own sanctification, each other! Consider Galatians 6:1-3. We're commanded to confront one another concerning sin, to seek repentance and restoration, to bear one another's burdens, and to keep watch over each other. How can we fulfill this God-given command when we are ignorant of one another's needs? This is a two-way struggle. You and I must fight for humble honesty with each other which means you must speak honestly concerning yourself, but we also must love one another enough to pursue each other in grace as we seek to obey these commands. Let not my sin, or yours, hinder the unity of the Spirit or the witness of the church. It amazes me that in spite of the horror of this text, in the next verses after the sin issue was dealt with, the church is described as growing more than ever (Acts 5:14). If we want to see true, Spirit-led revival and growth in missional fervor, we need to grow in humility, repentance, and holy trust in one another as we pursue the Kingdom of God. So, consider your sinfulness in light of the holiness of God, and instead of hiding, share with other brothers and sisters that we might encourage, challenge, and sharpen one another in gospel hope and obedience.
- 3) Finally, consider the gospel hope of this passage in its context. God was doing an amazing, unstoppable work to rescue sinners. The hope of Jesus was growing, day by day, throughout Jerusalem. Throughout the book of Acts, it only expands from this point. It's an incredible rescue mission that the redeemed people of God are called to participate in. Why would we want to covetously draw attention to ourselves, like Ananias and Sapphira, rather than the Redeemer? Why would we want to hinder the work of the mission in our sin, when we could be participating in this great work? Wouldn't you rather have God use your life as a testimony to his grace, than a display of his justice? We have a calling to engage in the great gospel story of redemption as we carry the good news to the lost and dying. Let us not carelessly, frivolously, or contemptuously cast that aside for the fleeting treasures of this life. Perhaps spend some time prayerfully meditating on Psalm 86, particularly verse 11. Let us ask God to teach us his way, and unite our hearts to fear his name for our good, the good of the church, the good of the world, and his great glory.

God bless you as we continue to walk through this season. I'm praying for you.

Sincerely,

Pastor Bryan McClelland  
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