

Message Date: 07-26-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real!

Message Title: Week 2, Lying to God

‡ What is the most offensive thing you could do... to God?

- ***What is most offensive thing you could do To God?***
- ***Not just as a person, but as a believer, as a part of the community of faith- as a follower of Christ?***
- ***Quite a question- and lots of answers could easily be given... start with really bad...***
 - o ***Murder. Pretty high up on the list.***
 - o ***But maybe even higher than murder- in some churches/traditions- might be divorce.***
 - o ***All sorts of moral sins, and depending on who you ask, the list of what is worse might look different. NO QUESTION, biblically, that sexual sin is devastating and scripture speaks strongly against it.***
- ***BUT, what if the sin WAY UP on that list is something we've ALL done, and almost certainly will do again, in some form.***
- ***What if the one of the greatest sins you could commit... was LYING. Dishonesty.***

- ***Our story today from acts is one of the most difficult sections for some people to deal with, in the entire narrative... and people have been wrestling with it since Luke first wrote it down.***

- ***You see, in this story we have two people, who from any outside perspective did something very good, very generous... BUT their act of generosity was rooted in a lie.***

- ***This lie, at first glance, was to the leaders of the church- the apostles- but as we will see, the lie was really against the entire community of believers, and ultimately, it was a lie to God.***

- ***And the result, the consequence of their lie, was that they DIED. Suddenly, and supernaturally.***

- ***WOW. What do you do with that? It would be easy to skip on past this section, but it would be to our detriment.***

- ***You see, on one hand, the story of Ananias and Sapphira is a solemn reminder of God's wrath against sin. BUT***

- ***On the other hand, this story points us toward what was- and still is- most important to God about His community of faith- his body of Christ followers***

- ***It's easy to look at this story and see a God who is petty and vengeful. But that would be shortsighted. Rather, LUKE is showing us how God acted to protect something incredibly precious and good.***

- ***AND SO! We are moving into ACTS chapter 5, and today's text is verse 1-11, commonly known as the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira. BUT, before we jump in, THANK YOU for joining us today. It is Sunday July 26th, I'm Pastor Ethan, and this is Trinity Online.***

‡ Enter Ananias and Sapphira

- ***OKAY! We have arrived at the story of Ananias and Sapphira- this is a challenging one, so let's jump in.***

- **Story really starts with close of chapter four, when we are introduced to Barnabas. Remember, Luke has just described for us the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in these first followers of Christ.. how their community was defined by love, compassion, and sacrificial generosity. Within that context, Luke tells us that...**

^{4:36} Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”),
³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

- **Barnabas, out of the love and compassion at work in his heart, sees a need and is moved by the holy spirit to sacrificially give of his resources to meet that need. And importantly, Barnabas’ sincerely and generosity set the stage- as a contrast- for the first major crisis faced by the new church- the actions and motivations of A&S.**
- **A&S were a married couple within the community of believers, very likely part of that upper 10% of the social-economic structure of Jerusalem. THEIR story starts with a subtle irony, and it is their names.**
- **Ananias- The Lord is Gracious**
- **Sapphira- Beautiful**
- **The irony is that these two qualities- The Grace of God, and their God given beauty/value as people, were values A&S rejected in their heart, leading to their actions.**

- **Luke tells us that TOGETHER they sold a piece of property, and their purpose of selling the property was to donate the proceeds to the community of believers. So far so good!**
- **But then we are told...**

² With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

- **Okay, so what’s the problem? Wouldn’t it be fine to say “I want to donate \$1000 to the church, but my land was worth \$2000... so I sold it for the full price and I’m bringing half... And that would be FINE. No problem there at all... except that’s not what A&S did.**
- **You see, the term ‘kept back’, in the greek is a word connected to financial fraud. It’s subtle to us in English, but Luke’s clear message is Ananias represented the gift as being the full value of the land**
- **It would be like if we had a church business meeting, where a need of \$5000 had been represented- and someone stood up and said... “You know, I recently sold my car for that amount, and I’ll donate all of it toward this need.” BUT, the reality is that your car was worth 20k, not 5, and you were contributing 20% of what you received, not all of it as you claimed.**
- **And THIS gets us to the heart of the story, verses 3&4...**

³ Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

- **Okay, lets go through this. FIRST is the question...**

✠ Who is at work here?

- **Who is the protagonist in this story? It’s NOT Peter... it is GOD.**

- Peter is in a very unique circumstance here, as The Holy Spirit reveals to Peter what A&S have done. There's no evidence that Peter somehow suspected A&S and investigated this on his own. This was work of Holy Spirit, leading Peter- in this instance- to function in an almost prophetic role.
- But even though Peter is the one who identifies Ananias's guilt, it is GOD who exercises judgment.
- THIS IS KEY to understand. What happens here is GOD AT WORK, this is GOD's initiative, both in revealing to Peter the intent of A&S's hearts, AND in bringing His judgment and consequence.
- Here's why this is important--- people who assume they know the inner motivations of another person's heart often get themselves, and others, into trouble. Only God knows a person's heart, and it is a serious thing to assume we can sit in that position. How many relationships have been damaged because of our assumptions and misunderstandings about the motivations of what another person did or said?
- EVEN MORESO, it is a serious thing to pronounce judgement on another person's actions, even outright sin. There are times when consequences must be brought within the church, but doing so must be with great humility, prayer, and the leadership of the spirit.
- FAR TO OFTEN in history of the church- and sometimes in the present- a person in a place of leadership will use scripture such as this story as COVER to claim God has given them some authority, or told them to take some action, and if you don't agree and submit, then you are outside of God's will, and you need to be punished- cast out of the community, or worse.
- Example- In the earlier history of the Catholic church, the threat of excommunication- which meant not only being barred from the church but also cut off from the Grace of God- this was a pretty effective means of keeping people in line.
- BUT, it is CLEAR that this is NOT what is happening here! Through the Holy Spirit, God has uniquely revealed these things to Peter, and God- not Peter- both determined and carried out the consequence. BUT WHY? Why did this happen?
- Here we see the other character in this story, almost unseen, lurking in the shadows. It is satan.

‡ Enter, satan

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart

- This is one of only two references to Satan in all of Acts. Peter declares that Satan has "filled Ananias' heart".... This is contrasted to the multiple times Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit has filled the disciples hearts.
- Picture here is that A&S- rather than trusting God and living in dependence upon God- they instead opened their hearts and minds to the lies and self-condemnation of the enemy. AND, the result of listening to Satan's lies was to themselves choose a lie.
- But, even though A&S had allowed themselves to fall under the influence of the enemy, Peter makes it clear they were responsible for their actions...

- *Ananias... this was your land right? No liens, clear title?*
- *And, once you sold it, that was all your money, all under your control...*
- *This also demonstrates that A&S were under NO compulsion by the apostles to donate any of their money- it was fully their choice to do what they did.*

† Lying to God

- *And so Peter asks... WHAT MADE YOU THINK OF THIS? Why would you do this? Don't you understand? You haven't just lied to me and all of the community, YOU HAVE LIED TO GOD. HEARING HIS GUILT, Ananias falls down and dies, and Luke tells us that a great fear seized all who heard this. I bet.*

- *NOW.. before we examine THAT, let's finish out the story.*
- *Ananias is carried out and buried. Few hours later, Sapphira shows up, not knowing what has happened... and the whole scenario repeats itself. VERSE SEVEN*

⁷ *About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."*

- *And Peter exclaims to her the same essential question he had asked Ananias...*

⁹ *Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?"*

- *The word 'test' here is significant- some translations say 'tempt', but that really doesn't capture the point. A&S aren't trying to tempt God to punish them... "God, we're calling the shots on this one. What are you going to do? Strike us dead?"... No...*
- *Rather, the sense of the 'Test' is whether or not God is even aware of what is going on. They are testing whether or not God can be deceived.*
- *The clear answer is that he cannot... as Sapphira, like her husband, faces instant judgment and dies.*
- *(Pause...)OKAY... lets press into this. What was so heinous about A&S's actions that they faced this judgment and punishment from God?*
- *They lied to God, but what was the nature of their lie? And this gets to the heart of the matter.*
- *If we think about it, while similar, there are two kinds of lies, in a very broad sense. (Btw, just my perspective- I'm not expert on human behavior, but I am an observer)*

† Two kinds of lies

- *First, lie to cover up something you've done. I did something I know was wrong, and when confronted, I lie about it. I don't want to be found out, and so I lie to protect myself. (KID WITH COOKIE behind back)*
- *Variation on this- my actions may not be patently wrong or immoral, but I know if I'm found out, I'll be in trouble, disappoint someone, or lose face. Something about me will be revealed that I don't want revealed, so I lie to save face... again, to protect myself.*
- *Whatever might be our motivation, this is the*
 - Lie of PROTECTION
- *Where I say I DIDN'T do something I DID DO.*

- **SECOND kind of lie is where I say I DID DO something I didn't do.**
 - **"I contributed 10k to a cause when I only contributed 2.... Here we see the..**
 - Lie of **ELEVATION** (for lack of a better word)
 - **This is when we lie to build ourselves up in the eyes of someone else. AND, we do this more than we think.**
 - **Oh man! Do you know who so and so is?.... um.. yeah... NO I haven't!**
 - **That movie was awesome... what did you think of it? Yeah... really good...**
 - **Ethan, have you read that classic theology book by Joe Blow?... yeah, been a while**
 - **What are we doing there? We are lying to make ourselves look good!**
 - **Again, a variant is taking credit for the work of someone else, which is also theft. Things such as plagiarism, and in a military context the idea of 'Stolen Valor'**
 - **Bottom line, this is the lie of POSING. Pretending to be something you are NOT.**
 - **And friends, it is this SECOND lie that came from the heart of A&S.**
 - **Simply put, they wanted to appear more generous than they were. They wanted to achieve a higher standing in the eyes of the community, but they didn't want the sacrifice.**
 - **WE MAY SAY... yeah, that's pretty bad... but is it deserving of DEATH? What made A&S's sin of posing so egregious?**
 - **To get at this, we need to remember what God is doing in the community of believers. Their core values... this precious gift that God has given. WHAT IS AT STAKE.**
- ✠ What is at stake.
- **FIRST, for these new believers, faith in Christ was LIFE ITSELF. Who they understood themselves to be, their purpose and value as people was completely found in who Christ IS, and what He had done for them.**
 - **Through their faith in Christ, these believers understood that they weren't just forgiven, but through the community of faith, they had been brought into the very life and purposes of God.**
 - **Central to their very identity was the reality of the Holy Spirit, that Christ was with them, dwelling in them. They didn't yet have the full understanding of union with Christ that would come through Paul, but the essential concept was there, and theirs.**
 - **The miracle of life in their community was built on the foundation of trust in God, obedience to God, love for one another. As a community, they shared their lives in the absolutely essential context of fellowship- koinonia. The very idea of being a follower of Christ apart from, or in conflict with the community of faith, would have been foreign to them.**
 - **And WHAT A&S did ran counter to, and threatened, all of this.**
 - **You see, for the church (and the community of faith is referred to as the church here for the first time)... for the church, CHRIST WAS EVERYTHING.**
 - **The lie of A&S said "Christ is not enough"**
 - **It's not just that A&S wanted to have 'higher standing' in the community without making the sacrifice... they had completely missed the point of making such a gift in the first place**

- *The Holy Spirits work to lead people into generosity wasn't to elevate or bring glory to the GIVER... it was to sincerely help people, out of Christ's compassion, and to bring Glory to GOD.*
- *EVEN IF A&S HAD not lied, and given the full amount to the apostles, their motivation and desire was distorted from the start. They weren't being generous out of compassion to a need, they were trying to pay the minimum price to satisfy their OWN NEED- their need to elevate themselves, glorify themselves, and satisfy their PRIDE.*
- *THIS IS SO TRAGIC, because the position of self-worth and value- the identity they were trying to buy through their own deceit, is something that can truly only be received- and is freely given, by God.*
- *Peter declares that their lie was against God. As such, their lie was also against the core values and integrity of God's new creation- the body of believers- it was a lie against the precious gift of KOINONIA... the spirit led fellowship of the believers.*
- *And so, in a sovereign act of protecting His new creation against the poison of a lie motivated by pride, God brought judgment and consequence upon A&S.*

Takeaways from today's message

† God is not PERMISSIVE about sin

- *God is not permissive about sin! He is not distant, and He knows our hearts. He is patient, loving, forgiving, full of grace and mercy—but God never whitewashes sin, and in his own time, He will at times, act against it. What happened with A&S is not typical- thank goodness, or we would all be goners... but sin does damage us, it hurts our relationship with God and dulls our experience and awareness of God's presence and goodness.*
- *When Luke records that 'great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about this', this is more than just a reverent awe of God. It was a strong statement by God to the entire community about what Paul would later say this way, in Romans 6:23... THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH... We know the rest of that statement... BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.*
- *God did what he did because the lie of A&S... not just the lie they told, but the lie of the enemy they bought in to... that lie stood against the miraculous truth of God's Gift of new life- eternal life, but also the eternal KIND of life... life that flows from Him, is fulfilled in a relationship with Jesus Christ, and experienced within the community of faith.*

† There is an enemy who LIES

- *THERE IS AN ENEMY WHO LIES. The lie that penetrated A&S's hearts is one of the most basic but insidious lies the enemy throws at us*
 - *You are not loved. You aren't acceptable. Your life doesn't have real value. Sure, Jesus may have forgiven you, you might go to heaven when you die, but Jesus isn't enough for you right now. YOU are only worth what you can do. You've got to take matters into your own hand, and if you have to lie to build yourself up, then well, that's what you have to do.*
 - *Lie of the enemy- God, and who God has made you- is not enough.*

† God OVERCOMES this lies of the enemy

- ***But there's a greater truth, and it is that God overcomes the lies of the enemy. The story of A&S is an extreme example, but God is at work to overcome the enemy's lies in our lives as well. This is a work of the Holy Spirit...***
 - ***He brings conviction. He reveals Truth through scripture. God reveals himself in all sorts of ways to direct us, re-direct us, bring encouragement, hope... BUT WE HAVE TO LISTEN.***
 - ***In verse 9, Peter says to Sapphira... LISTEN! Strong word, NASB says "BEHOLD!"... some scholars have noted that Luke probably also intended that word for us, the reader. BEHOLD! Look at what God has done! He is alive, active, and at work in his kingdom. DO NOT take him lightly... but also, do not miss the power of his presence, his grace, his goodness, and his love.***
 - ***When we listen, set our hearts, our minds upon God and his truth, The Spirit of God within us will overcome the lies of the enemy.***

† In Christ, we no longer have to wear MASKS

- ***In Christ, we don't have to wear MASKS.***
- ***Not talking about COVID masks... but the masks we wear to pretend we are something we are not. The core temptation of the enemy to lie about our hearts, to ourselves, to others, and to God.***
- ***Friends, as we grow in our experience of the Grace of God, and truth of who we are because of our union with Christ... we will increasingly come to know that we NO LONGER NEED TO pretend, pose, or be anything other than who God has made us, because we are his redeemed children who have been brought from death to life, and we are precious to him.***
- ***Years later, writing his first letter to the church, Peter would describe who we are in this way...***

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- ***Because that is true, why would we ever need to lie to be anything, or anyone, else?***