

Shall we open our Bibles this evening to Acts 5? Acts 5 tonight, verse 1. We continue our study through the book of Acts. It is a great book. If you are interested in how God uses the people of God in the culture that they find themselves in, this is a blueprint, if you will, for the early church life and ministry. We've asked you to ask yourself the question (as you read through it) - see what kind of people God uses because this book is filled with the answers to that question. Who does God use, and can you be one of those folks? The book of Acts only covers about thirty years of history, so it is the first thirty years of the church, if you will.

Last time we finished chapter 4 which, along with chapter 3, is one story - the healing of a lame man that had sat at the Beautiful Gate outside the Temple for at least forty years. He was over forty years old, he'd been there all of his life, he'd never been able to walk. Peter and John went to pray at the afternoon prayers, about 3:00. God spoke to Peter by His Spirit, asked him to minister to this man. He said, "I don't have any money, but I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And immediately, as Luke writes - being the doctor, his bones were restored in his legs, and he wasn't just walking; he was leaping and praising God and running around as the crowd gathered and they remembered who he was. Peter used this opportunity to begin to preach. It was his second sermon. It was given at a place called Solomon's Porch in the Temple area. In the midst of his preaching about sin and repentance, and the death of Jesus for our sins, and the resurrection, he is arrested and taken into custody with John. But even though he is arrested, five thousand men now claim to be part of the church as well as women and children. And so everyone wasn't so excited about the work of God. The religious leaders were incensed, if you will. They kept them overnight in prison. They didn't really know what to do with them the next morning. They didn't want this Jesus stuff gettin' spread everywhere, and so they decided, after they put 'em out for a while, "We'll just threaten 'em. We're pretty powerful. That'll frighten 'em." And it didn't. And Peter, who used to be the guy that would buckle up, now said, "Look, we can't but obey what God has told us to do, and you'll have to do whatever you do. But we have to obey the Lord." And so they let them go basically because this man who was lame was walking, and it was hard to argue against that. And they went back to the church. They prayed together with

the church. They didn't ask the Lord for deliverance from the persecution but rather boldness to continue to preach in the midst of these kinds of threats. The Lord shook the place where they were gathered together (again) and poured out His Spirit again. And as an answer to those prayers, verse 33 of the last chapter talked about the "great power" that the apostles were given and their witness for Jesus, that "great grace" was upon everyone. And then the chapter ends with this wonderful commentary about how the body, in unity, began to meet each other's needs. And Luke picks one guy named Barnabas as the encourager, the example who had sold something that he had owned. He had given it to others who had need. He was just a servant heart, and he was known as an encourager by the early church.

But into that beautiful picture (and you get to the end of chapter 4, and they've had some persecution, but man, everyone's hangin' in there) - into this ideal kind of setting, where the love of God is working mightily, we are given another picture of Satan's work, as he comes to attack this early church from within. So this evening - sixteen verses of chapter 5 - we wanted to look at this attack that comes from within. In verse 17 (to the end of the chapter), we will go back to that same relationship between the apostles and their ministry and the Sanhedrin and their threats that we ended up with, there in chapter 4. But there's kind of this story of the attack from within (kind of stuck in the midst) else we'd have three full chapters about one issue - the healing of that man that was born lame. So tonight the enemy comes to attack from within. Next week - attack from without - Peter and John. And it may very well be (what we will see next week) every one of the apostles was arrested and beaten for just not obeying the word of the religious leaders. But that'll be next week. So, ideal situation at the end of chapter 4 (verse 37), and then we get to the word "but" in chapter 5. It's a contrast word that, in the Bible, huge doors swing upon. There's all this good stuff going on, "but." Not a promising start after the story of Barnabas, if you will, his personal sacrifice exemplified. The early church was doing really well in caring for one another's needs. We mentioned to you a few weeks ago (back in chapter 2) that that was a temporary need. It was temporary because a lot of people were in town for the religious holidays and getting saved. They didn't want to go home right away. They wanted to learn, they wanted to be together, and so there were a lot of needs that kind of got laid upon the people that lived in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church was very poor and would continue to be that way for all of the book of Acts, certainly, and beyond as Paul began to gather finances to help support this very poor church. But for now, by example, there was this wonderful

loving relationship exemplified mostly by Barnabas who, as we said back in the last chapter (verse 36), was a guy that sold (verse 37) land, and he gave it to the apostles. And so there was this outward love and sacrifice.

And, into the midst of that, we now are introduced (in verse 1 of chapter 5) to a couple who was in that early church, and they wanted to have the same honor bestowed upon them that Barnabas had been for his generous spirit. And so they wanted to be seen as generous as well. The problem is they didn't quite have the same heart. And God will take this couple and make a pretty bold and strong statement through their life that left a mark, a change of heart, upon the early church. It was for their benefit. It is written for ours as well.

So, verse 1, "But a certain man named Ananias, with 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." From all outward appearances, if you were in this church, this just looked like another very gracious and generous couple like Barnabas, who had been such a blessing to so many in the early church. They, too, had a plot of land. They, too, supposedly (we are told otherwise in verse 2) brought the proceeds of the sale to the apostles for the needs of the poor, for the ministry of the saints. But unlike Barnabas, who had no agenda - he just was a man that God had filled with His Spirit, these two - this couple - had an impure heart in terms of their motives. And they conspired together (we are told that right here) to give a phony sale price for the land, to keep part of the proceeds to themselves, and then stand in front of the church and say, "We're giving it all to the Lord." So, they're duplicitous in their actions, if you will, but in order to pull this off (according to verse 2), they would have to coordinate their lies. They'd have to agree together, "What price are you going to say? Well that's what I'm going to say." They would have to recognize that they were doing this on purpose. They would have to follow this route. And, at least through verse 2, only God knew what they were up to (and themselves). No one else was aware of it. God would reveal it because God knows everything. But remember, as Peter would tell Ananias here in a few moments, the couple was under no obligation to bring any money at all. There wasn't any rule in the early church, "Hey, if you sell your property, man, you gotta give it to the Lord." In fact, plenty of people had houses and kept them. That really wasn't the issue. All of it, or any of it, belonged to them, and all was given to them. And what they gave to the care of others (by the love of God), that would have been fine. There's no need to pretend to give it all if you can't give it all. Maybe you don't want to. It doesn't

matter. Their sin was giving a portion, if you will, while pretending to give it all. Their sin was hypocrisy. Right? It was being something that they were not. I remember, years ago, George MacDonald wrote in one of his books, "Half the misery of the world is caused by people trying to appear to be instead of being what they appear to be." They want to just appear to be. They don't really want to be what they appear to be. They just want to put it on. Right? "This is what I want you to think about me."

And Ananias and Sapphira - here is a couple who, in the early church, wanted credit, they wanted recognition, they wanted prestige. But they weren't willing to make the payment. They wanted it all at a fraction of the cost. They wanted to get whatever they could get without having to pay for what, really, that kind of a life would require. So, that's the problem. And we're told about it early. Their motive wasn't to relieve the suffering of the poor. It wasn't to glorify the Lord and say, "God's given me everything." It wasn't even to be a vessel led by the Spirit. All they were interested in was flattering their ego and propping up the perception of others about themselves within the body. They wanted the church to think differently about them than they were truly in their hearts - which was selfish and self-serving and deceptive. They'd gone out of their way, I suspect, to have a family meeting to come up with the ruse to carry it out, to honor themselves. In fact, by the time you get to verse 2, up to verse 2 Ananias could have made this right. He walks into the church alone but in front of many others. He could have said, when he walked in, "We got quite a bit of money for the land, and we were just doing the books last year, and I don't think we can afford to give you all of it. But we can give you half of it, or we can give 20% of it to the Lord, or we could just help out in this area, and that's the best we could do." And he'd have walked out alive. Everything would have been just fine. The issue wasn't the amount, if you will. The issue was the presentation. He could have said, "This is with what joy we can give this to the Lord." But, unfortunately, his love for status was the hook that Satan used in his life to tempt him, and he falls. He wants to be seen more spiritual than he is. He's not the first guy to want that. A lot of people want that. Years ago, there was a guy that would come to prayer meeting, and he would say this. This is how he'd....."Lord, thank You that You met with me at 3:15 this morning as we were up praying." And I thought there's really no reason for him to mention that every time he gets up to pray except for me to know he was up at 3:15 praying. Or maybe he wasn't. But it made it sound like, "Oh, I slept in till 8:30. I am a dog! And this guy is the godliest man I've ever met in my life!" And, "Yes, Lord, that we were up, and You spoke to me." I hated that guy.

(Laughing) I mean, he sounded more devoted, he sounded more committed and concerned, you know?

But here's a couple, and they stand up individually, three hours apart, and say - before the congregation, "Everything I have here I give to God. It all belongs to Him." When, in reality, that wasn't true. Now how often do you suppose that happens today? People glory in positions. They want the name tag. They want people to look up to them as godly. They want to sound spiritual. They act spiritual. But they do so for the consumption of others. I'm always interested when I say to people, "Can you open in prayer?" and they go, "Oh, no. I don't pray publicly." I'm thinking, "You talk to me publicly. I'm sure God'd be much more gracious to you than I would be." But they worry about what people are thinking about them while they're talking to God. It's a ridiculous argument in so many ways. But that's the ego, it's the problem, it's the hypocrisy in our hearts. We love to be thought of as spiritual. We do it just so that we can create a perception, even if the reality is far different. And it's a good thing that God normally withholds judgment for that. Don't you think? I mean, if the Lord, every time you put on a false face, dealt with you, how long would we survive? It'll be just a week or two, all of our pastors - we'll all be gone. No worship leaders. Nobody'll be here. So if you make it through that.....but praise the Lord that He gives us plenty of time to repent. But, look. Learn from Ananias, first and foremost, that God knows everything. He knows your heart. He knows what you're thinking. He attended the open house. He went to the escrow office. He followed them to the bank with their check. He sat in at dinner while they had the family conference about how this plot could be hatched. "We're gonna look pretty good in the eyes of everyone that we want to be glorified by." And He follows him, and then her, to the church. God knows all of it. The Holy Spirit had walked with Ananias over to Solomon's Porch where the church was meeting, convicting him every step of the way. Yet Ananias refused. And so what happens? The Holy Spirit now says to Peter, "Here, I want to tell you what's goin' on," and Peter gets wind of it, spiritually so. Right? Spiritually discerned. God speaks to Peter, and God reveals the secret of a man's heart. And it's the only way you can sometimes receive it.

Foolishness, here, is that we're unable to see people's hearts immediately. You can fool me. People fool me all the time. I'm sarcastic, and I'm skeptical, and I still get taken a lot. You can fool each other because love believes all things, and so we want to think the best of our brethren. Not the worst. But you can never fool God. You'll just get busted every time. There's no way to pull the wool over His

eyes. And I think the young church was going to learn that in no uncertain terms. Everybody's going to walk away from this day at church saying, "We've got to be honest in every way that we can."

Verse 3 says this, "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.'" Oliver Wendell Holmes (a great writer, Bible teacher) wrote in one of his novels, "Sin uses many tools, but the handle on every one of them is lying," that it is at the heart. The handle that fits them all is to be a hypocrite. And I don't know, I want to see this on playback when we get to heaven. I was trying to imagine what Ananias' face must have looked like because he made a big deal about giving them his all. This was his shining moment. And then Peter goes, "Hey! That's not what you sold it for." "Who told? Only my wife and I know. She ratted me out, do you think? I don't know." I imagine he just looked shocked. One thing for sure - he never got the chance to respond. It never got out of his mouth. Peter points two things out, I think, that are important. Number one - that this temptation to hypocrisy originated with Satan. In other words, Satan's desire is to play on your flesh in such a way that you would pursue a lie rather than the truth. Not only that, he forgot that he was trying to fool God. It is only the Lord that alerts Peter to the ruse. "Why are you lying?" And notice in verse 3, it is lying to the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, it is lying to God. If you ever wonder if the Holy Spirit is God, well, verses 3 and 4 will tell you exactly that. I like sometimes people say to me things like, "Well, you know the word 'trinity' isn't in the Bible." That's true, but the tri-unity of God is certainly exemplified as it is here. The word "rapture" is not in the Bible. The doctrine is. The word "millennium" is not in the Bible, but the thousand-year reign of Christ is in the Bible. The word "Bible" is not in the Bible, but you've got a Bible. Sometimes you just beat yourself over the head.

Notice (in verse 4) Peter's logic with this deceitful man. There was absolutely no need for this. You had no obligation. God doesn't covet what you have. He doesn't need what you have. He won't even take what you give Him if you don't give it to Him with a heart that is thankful and open and all. But yet Satan is the father of lies. He lies from the beginning. His calling card is first seen in the Bible with Eve. "Has God really said?" (Genesis 3:1). That's what he started. And, "He doesn't want you to be as smart as He is. What is He keeping back from you?" But God

can't be lied to or fooled, and we're going to answer to Him. These words from Peter (in verse 4) are the last words on the earth that he hears, and it speaks about his dishonesty and his misrepresentation of his gift.

And so we read, "Then Ananias," verse 5, "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." This is slain in the Spirit. He drops dead! And I tried to think about Peter. The Lord didn't say to Peter, "He's going to die." The Lord said to Peter, "Call him on his gift." So I think maybe the most surprised person in the church was Peter. "Why are you lying to God?" (Sound of Ananias hitting the floor). "Uh oh. Maybe I was too harsh on him. Maybe I shouldn't have raised my voice." I can just imagine poor Peter watching this thing unfold. "Oh, my goodness." But here's the picture - Satan has sought to introduce dishonesty and darkness and selfishness into a body that, up to this time, was operating in love and in purity, and the Holy Spirit puts an immediate stop to it for the moment, with ongoing results. Beginning, there in verse 5, there was (tremendous) "great fear." I would think so. Ananias would never get a chance to spend the money he saved. He never had a chance to glory or revel in it, the honor he hoped to receive. A new ministry was born in that church for the young adults - the burial ministry. The first two funerals, I guess, in the book of Acts involved two people who sought glory for themselves and met the judgment of God instead.

Now let me just address something that people ask sometimes. I truly believe both of these folks went to heaven. They faced the judgment of God in this life, but this isn't the unpardonable sin. Paul would write to the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 11) about the way they were coming to the communion services and how they were serving themselves and showing up drunk and ignoring the poor around them and just serving themselves. He said, "Because you're not discerning the Lord's body, for this reason there are many weak and sick among you, and some of you have died, have gone to sleep" (verses 29-30). God's judgment in this life. Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 5:5, "You should deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of their flesh, so that their spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Lying is, like I said, not the unpardonable sin. But this event you can bet purified the church. Nobody was going down that road for very long, not for now. The words "great fear" I think you can realize. Right? Would you go to the next service? Would you think about puttin' anything in the offering plate? "Lord, I just want to be clear. I don't want anybody to get the wrong idea." No doubt

this was wholesome fear produced in the heart by a tremendous amount of self-searching of the heart, if you will, self-examination, scrutinizing, analyzing. "What am I coming from? What am I doing?"

So we read last week (in verse 33 of chapter 4), there was "great power," and there was "great grace," both of them in that verse. Now you can add (in verse 5), there was "great fear." Great power, great grace, great fear.

Instead of adding to the church (and we've pointed out to you how the church continued to grow as God's Word would go forth, adding as He desired), it won't be long now before we start reading the words, "And God multiplied the saints as the Word was being preached." It scales it up from "adding" to "multiplying." But before that happens, here's some "blessed subtraction." God removed from the church two folks who were really not going to be very helpful to it in the long run, and they would become their death's catalyst for thousands of people to be added to the kingdom. If you go down to verse 14, "believers were increasingly added to the church, and multitudes of men and women came." So it turned out for the best that these few were moved out. I think it was Alan Redpath who did several studies that he called "blessed subtraction," that sometimes it's a blessing to see God take people out of churches. I don't mean die. I just mean move them along, move them somewhere else, take them wherever He wants to take them. Because there needs to be that scrubbing, that purging, I think, from time to time. But Redpath said in his sermons, and he used to come and teach our pastors' conferences, "God will add, and God will multiply, and God will even subtract. God will never divide. He leaves that to man." And I thought that was an interesting point. It's not the Lord's work to divide. But He does definitely take away sometimes, and He certainly did that here.

So, Ananias just falls down dead. His fifteen minutes of fame didn't last very long, and he's in the grave. Verse 7, "Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened." I don't know. Maybe Sapphira went shopping. She had some extra money to spend (that no one knew about). I don't know what Peter was thinking for these last three hours. I don't think he relished this meeting with her. "What am I gonna say? What am I gonna tell her?" Ananias' name means God is gracious, and he got wiped out. Sapphira's name means beautiful, and I'll bet she was. So she walks in (verse 7) unaware. The tension, I think, must have been high in the church - if anybody stuck around. I think when she looked around, she wondered if those were looks of admiration. "Boy,

everybody's looking at me. I guess they got wind of the offering that we brought. Maybe they're jealous. Man, we're on the map now! This is exactly.....it's workin' out perfectly! They're all lookin' at me." How deceptive sin is. You look forward to its fruit and find out it's just poison.

Verse 8, "And Peter answered her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?' She said, 'Yes, for so much.' " I want to point something out to you. The fact that she's looking for honor and glory is evidenced by the words "and Peter answered her." What did she say? We don't know. But Peter responded. The word reads very clearly. He responded to something that came in his direction. I suspect that she said something about, "Are you going to be able to use the money? We're so happy to give it." She's going to read her own giving and generous heart. She's going to put it on display. And Peter, in response to that, said, "Did you sell it for that much?" Maybe she even mentioned the price, how much that they gave. "Did you sell it for that much?" And she says, "Yes, that much." I don't know what kind of tone Peter used with her. "Did you sell it for that much?" But without hesitation, playing her deceitful role with her husband, she now bypasses the conviction of the Spirit, and no opportunity to repent. I think if it was me, I think I might have slowed down a little bit. That sounds like a loaded question. "Why are you asking me that? Of course - that's what we gave you, isn't it?" I might have just gone, "Hmmm. I wonder what he's up to there. I wonder if it didn't go so well." Never worried about it at all. She just went in there and jumped out with, "Yes."

Verse 9 says, "Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed' " (with your husband) " '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.' " Peter's not a fun guy, is he? "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." We're not to tempt the Lord. Jesus said to Satan, when He was tempted in the wilderness - and remember Satan suggested that if Jesus wanted a big following, He should go to the pinnacle of the Temple and jump off; he even quoted a psalm to Him, said, "The angels will give you charge, and they'll bear You up, You won't even dash Your foot against a stone" - Jesus said, "Yeah, you're out to tempt the Lord. You can't do that." Maybe Ananias and Sapphira didn't think this was such a big deal. But Peter made it clear it was a big deal. It was the sentence of God's Spirit, who they had lied to. Hypocrisy is the sin of lying to God while seeking man's approval to glorify yourself.

Now you read this story, and you want to say to yourself - it sounds a little harsh. Right? And I agree. From the standpoint of our experiences, if God, like I said, dealt this way, we wouldn't last very long. But let me say this to you - if God wanted, He would be absolutely in His right to do that to all of us. Right? He's God. He's holy. We're not. We're standing by grace tonight, not by earned. And if this has ever been a part of your life, then I guess we deserve what they got - trying to be something that we're not. God usually deals with us very graciously. But once in a while, and you can follow it through the Bible if you want, God will enforce standards that He has established so that no one will forget that they exist. It is usually found when a new work starts. For example, when Joshua led the children of Israel into the battle of Jericho - their first battle - the LORD said to the people, "I'll fight the battle. Don't lay your hands on anything. It's all Mine. The spoil is Mine because the work is Mine. You can't have any of it. It belongs to Me." Now He won't do that in every place, but He does it for the first battle. And you remember the story - how there was one man, his name was Achan. You can't forget his name because he was achin' by the time he was done. Right? He steals some stuff that he sees, he hides it under the corner of his tent, and he subsequently is called out by the LORD. His sin, which was hidden for a while, led to the death of plenty of soldiers in the next battle. But he is found out and exposed. He and his family are all killed on the spot. It's almost like - my goodness. Joshua 6 and 7. So, everyone pretty much went with whatever the LORD said after that, for a while. When the place of worship (the tabernacle) was built in the wilderness (before the children of Israel moved forward), before the first sacrifice was offered, the priesthood was established and all, the LORD took fire, and He shot it into this place of sacrifice, and He actually lit the fire the first time. It cause everyone to fall on their knees. Except there were two guys, two sons of Aaron, who, attending the institution of the sacrificial system, got up and started running around with fire that they'd lit. And all of the people's attention from this miracle of God went to them as they were runnin' around. And the indicators are (in Leviticus 10) they were drunk, or at least drinking, not quite all there; got excited, wanted to be a part, drew attention away from the LORD. And in so doing, they brought profane fire, and they offered it, and fire that the LORD lit the offering jumped out and consumed both of those guys, and they died on the spot. It didn't happen every time, thank the LORD. It happened the first time. And people went, "Yeah, we'd better not do that!" Moses told Aaron (Leviticus 10:3), "This is what the LORD wants me to tell you. 'By those who come near Me, I have to be regarded as holy. And before the people, I must be glorified.' " It's been my ministry of yours for fifty years, almost. If you're going

to get near the LORD, remember that He's holy. He's your friend, He's the big guy upstairs, He's your heavenly Father. But He's holy. There has to be a respectfulness in your relationship with God. And if you stand before others in the Lord's name, He's the One who wants the glory. He doesn't want to give you any of it. It's fair enough with me. How 'bout you?

Now here, at the birth of the church, God shows the seriousness of hypocrisy and the need to come to Him honestly. So, you get to verse 11, and you read, "So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things." I mean, the Lord hates hypocrisy. Know that. He loves sinners. He eats with publicans. He confronts phony religious attitudes like the scribes and the Pharisees. He's livid with them. Just go read Matthew 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" I believe He says it seven times in that chapter. "Woe to you, hypocrites! Woe to you, hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. You don't go in, and you don't allow others who are entering to go in. Woe to you, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses, for a pretense make long prayers. You're going to receive a greater condemnation. Woe to you, hypocrites! You'll travel by land and by sea to win one proselyte, and when you find them, you'll make them twice the son of hell as you are." The Lord didn't beat around the bush with hypocrites. He laid it all out.

On the other hand, when it came to honest doubters - even when they were angry with God - He was very kind to them. Never upset. Just look at the way Martha came to Jesus when Lazarus was dead (John 11) - accusatory, angry, in His face, outside of town, yelling at Him along the road. And Jesus took it all in. He loved her. He ministered to her. She was being honest, even in her complaints because she didn't fully understand. With great love and patience, He sought to instruct her. But the "*hupokrites*," the actor with the mask on (which is what the word is), Jesus had little time for. I don't know if you are aware, but there's a restaurant (it's not actually there anymore; I think it went away in 2010 or 2011) in New York City that had separate menus for men and women. And the women's prices on their menus were inflated 300%. So the guy would get the real price. But she'd go, "Man, this guy's a big spender!" "Yeah, order whatever you want." And he'd get the regular bill, but she'd think, "Oh, this guy has gone to town spending this much money on my dinner." And the place was packed for weeks on end. You couldn't get in. And I think someone ratted it out, and that's why they didn't last. But, for a while, it was a very popular place. "God knows our frame; He remembers that we're just dust" (Psalm 103:14). "We have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the

glory would be His and not for us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our weakness makes His strength all the more obvious in us. But when you start lying and deceiving, what you're doing is you're hiding the glory of God, and you're seeking to take glory for yourself. You're pushing Him away and putting yourself forward, which is exactly what these guys did. Hypocrisy will kill you and leave you living a lie. It's horrible. You know, the good thing about getting saved is you get to be free to live a life that's surrendered. He'll do the changing. All you have to do is be honest with yourself and with others. But God hates it. He hates it. He hates it in His own people. I think we hate it in people, don't we? "You bunch of hypocrites!" Nobody ever says that and smiles. "Oh, those guys are just a bunch of hypocrites!" (Pastor Jack smiles with clenched teeth as he says this). Paul said to Festus (in Acts 24:16), "I'm just striving to have a clear conscience before the Lord. I just want to be honest. I just want to be honest."

So, look, here's the Lord working in the early church, and He wants a holiness to the church, an openness, and a kind of life that will draw others to Him. I think sometimes we think that the Lord will work if we're just lax, and we look a lot like the world. But that's not it at all. When the purity is restored (notice verse 11 and then verse 12 and then verse 13 and 14), then God begins to add. When the purity of the church is restored, God can work. When there's a lot of hypocrisy, He can't. He purges it.

So we read in verse 12 these words, "And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed." Look, here's the connection - with the witness and the purity of the church restored, God is free to work again. There're no hindrances amongst His people. Now the gospel was being confirmed by the power of God's Spirit with signs and wonders. Then God began to work. People began to see. Back to good work because the division inside the church was removed, and the attacks from within have been neutralized, if you will. And I think sometimes we want God to work greatly, but all we can do is sit around and gossip about each other and backbite and be talebearers. And then we, "Where's the Lord?" Well, I think He

probably went down the street because He gets tired of that. Yet here, when it's removed, when the deceitfulness is removed, the power of God is seen. I'm glad God doesn't purify like this every week because we'd have to change our fellowship hall into a morgue.

For the second time (verse 11 as well as in verse 5), there was "great fear." A pure church is a powerful church. And the fear of the Lord in the hearts of the people led to an evangelistic explosion. People were getting saved right and left. They were respectful of the position of those in ministry. They were aware of the church. But throughout the book of Acts, when the fear of the Lord took over, people get saved. And notice (if you read this, and it's so unique to our experience) these public deliverances through the hands of the apostles, the people began to hold them in very high esteem. Nobody was quick to want to join them. And who can blame them? I don't think the church, after this incident, was the cool place to hang around. Right? If it was cool because it was a new thing, "Hey, everybody's a Christian! Let's go to church!" If it was cool before then, it's not so cool now. I think this judgment drove the fence-sitter away. The mixed multitude, the fringe dwellers, the divided-loyalty people haven't got time for this. "There was death at the door of the sanctuary last week. I'm not goin' back there!" So, in the purity of God's work, the church attendance might very well have dropped. I don't know. But soon, multitudes of hungry hearts were coming, and the "blessed subtraction" (of verses 7-10, in there) has led to, now, growth and ministry expansion.

Let me point one thing out else to you that maybe you haven't noticed. Dr. Luke - he's a medical doctor - do you notice that he distinguishes (and he will do that throughout his gospel as well) between sickness and demon possession? He singles them out, and he separates them; even vexation, if you will. Because so often people go, "Well, the devil" No. He makes them different, if you will. And I think that's biblically correct. But notice that at just the thought of Peter's shadow passing over them, it's kind of like the hem of Jesus' garment. His shadow can do nothing for you. Right? There's no power in a shadow. There's no power in a hem. There's no power in being anointed with oil, except it becomes a place of obedience and also a place where it allows you to release your trust and your faith in God. Some pastors call it "point of contact," and I think that's a good way to describe it because now you're at a place where you go, "The Lord said if I would anoint them with oil, I would heal the sick." So it gives you impetus to believe God, and it certainly seems to be what was taking place here. That's the rationale

behind James saying, "Call for the elders, anoint them with oil, and the Lord will raise them up" (James 5:14-15). Notice the comment at the end of verse 16, "They were all healed," and yet that his shadow might fall on some of them. But there is this comment, "they were all healed." And, by the way, you very rarely read that in the context of the Scriptures. "They were all healed." Some, many. But not all. That's an all-inclusive word. I think the point is - when the church is back on track, and Satan is held at bay, nothing can stop the work of God through them. And I want to point out to you (in verse 16) it is the first time that you find their ministry of the gospel expanding beyond the walls of Jerusalem because now the neighboring cities are traveling over to find out what is going on, and they come to hear.

So, impurity and hypocrisy limit God's work in your life and in mine and in the life of the church. There's really no way to want to see God's best when you're living in that place or in that arena. So it is important, I think, that we encourage each other to be godly and not to make excuses for those wanting to live among us that are hypocrites. You can't sit and gossip and then come to church and raise your hands for worship. You can't come to pray and then go out to sin. You can't follow the crowds and then follow the Lord. God knows. You can't fool Him. I think we should learn from this couple that the best way to go is to be right with God, be honest before the Lord. It's all right to be who you are because God saved you and loves you just the way you are. We should as well. So, are you being a hindrance, or are you being a help? The same Holy Spirit that brought down Ananias and Sapphira raised up this young body of believers to change the world. He wants to bless. But He can judge, and sometimes He does. But thank God for His grace. It doesn't mean you use His grace and cover your sin. Right? You take it to heart and go, "All right. I don't want any part of that." God, keep us close.

Next week we will pick up with the Sanhedrin, these awful men, and see as the Lord continues to drive this church forward. And then we'll get to the expansion of the church in chapter 6, and the first death in chapter 7, which will lead to the church being sent out into all the world in chapter 8.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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