

Acts Series #6

“Serious Business” — Acts 4:32-5:14

I INTRODUCTION

A. *Two Men*

1. Two men met on the street one day.
2. One said to the other, "Have you heard about Harry? He embezzled the company out of half a million dollars."
3. The other man said, "That's terrible; I never did trust Harry."
4. The first man said, "Not only that, he left town and he took Tom's wife with him."
5. The other man said, "That's awful; Harry has always been a ne'er-do-well."
6. The first man said, "Not only that, he stole a car to make his getaway."
7. The other man said, "That's scandalous; I always did think Harry had a bad streak in him."
8. The first man said, "Not only that, they think he was drunk when he pulled out of town."
9. The other man said, "Harry's no good. But what really bothers me is, who's going to teach his Sunday School Class this week?"

B. *Hypocrisy*

1. The greatest complaint you hear against Christianity is that, in general, Christians are hypocrites
2. Just this week I was talking with a gentleman who made the sweeping generalization that *most* Christians are hypocrites
3. To his mind, that is a self-evident truth
4. And indeed, every one of us have to grudgingly admit that there is a lot of evidence for an epidemic of hypocrisy in the Church

C. *Should Not Be*

1. What's shocking, is to realize just how strongly God feels about hypocrisy
2. It is a sin which seems to raise His ire in an especially strong way
3. The Gospels are filled with stories of times when Jesus harshly rebuked the Pharisees and religious leaders of that day for their hypocrisy
4. For example (Mat 23:13-15)

{13} “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

{14} “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

{15} “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

5. Jesus was constantly railing against the hypocrisy of His age
6. And friends, know this—God’s attitude toward hypocrisy has not changed
7. He loathes it; He detests it
8. And we must never forget it
9. That is the lesson our passage today teaches us

II. TEXT

A. 4:32-37

{32} Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

{33} And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

34} Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

{35} and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

1. As we saw a few weeks ago, this was not an early experiment in Communism
2. This was simply an evidence that the priorities of these first Christians had been rearranged
3. The welfare of fellow believers now became a greater priority than amassing a personal fortune
4. So those who had extra lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles so they could be given to those who were in need

{36} And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,

{37} having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

5. Here we get a glimpse into a specific example of what was happening
6. Barnabas was a Levite, a priest—
7. Now, priests were not to own land
 - a. remember that when God divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israel
 - b. tribe of Levi did not get a portion
 - c. the reason-they were the priests and were to live throughout the land
 - d. fulfilling their role of leading the worship of Israel by settling in every village and city
 - e. they were to be supported by the tithes and gifts of the people
 - f. not by working fields themselves
8. But here we read of a priest who owned land-Why?
9. Because the people were not supporting the Levites as they were supposed to
10. Many Levites had had to buy land to support themselves and their families
11. Barnabas was one of them
12. But now that he has become a Christian, he knows it is wrong for he, a

- priest, to own land, so he sells it and gives the proceeds to the apostles
13. Grace changed Barnabas' heart;
 - a. it moved him to trust in God's provision
 - b. it brought him to a new life and a new hope
 14. In this we see the contrast between law and grace
 15. Barnabas had originally purchased land because the law didn't provide what we needed
 16. But now that grace has changed his life, he lets go of the property willingly, *freely*
 17. Love accomplishes what the law never can
-
18. Now, in contrast to this grace filled community another story is set . . .

B. 5:1-2

{1} **But ----- a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.**

{2} **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.**

1. As people were selling their properties and bringing the proceeds to the apostles so they could be given to the needy, it was the cause of great rejoicing on the part of the church
2. Not just because there was suddenly an abundance of funds,
3. But more importantly, it was evidence of the fundamental change that had taken part in these people's lives
4. You know, it isn't real revival till it impacts a person's wallet and possessions
5. Materialism is a hard sin to shake
6. But when people begin to keep a light touch with material possessions, and see that all they have is but the gift of God to be used for His glory, it is strong evidence God has done a work of changing lives and re-ordering priorities
7. Well, Ananias and Sapphira were a married couple who had attached themselves to the new movement
8. When they saw how those who sold their lands were the cause of special joy and celebration, they decided to sell a piece of land they owned
9. But the motive of their hearts wasn't pure
10. The others sold their lands out of a desire to care for the needy
11. Ananias and Sapphira sold theirs out of a desire to *appear* caring
12. And since their hearts weren't pure, they decided to keep part of the sale price to themselves
13. When Ananias brought his gift, he told Peter it was the total amount

C. Vs. 3-4

3} **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?"**

{4} **"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."**

1. Peter was given a Word of Knowledge about Ananias' charade
2. So he challenges him
3. No one said that Ananias and Sapphira had to sell their plot of ground
 - a. no one was compelling them
 - b. there was not force, no coercion here
 - c. this wasn't a socialist or communist community
4. They could have kept as much of the money as they wanted to, all of it even
5. Ananias could have simply said, "Here is a *part* of the sale of a piece of property Sapphira and I have made."
6. But they had lied, not to the apostles, but to the Holy Spirit
7. Because their motive in giving was wrong in the first place, it was easy for them to misrepresent themselves and try to appear more than they were
8. Very simply, they wanted to *appear* holy
9. So they lied about the gift - trying to make others think they were giving all they had
10. You know, lies and deceit are common to all sin
 - a. where there is sin, you will find the lie
 - b. it has been said that sin has many tools
 - c. but the lie is the handle that fits them all

D. Vs. 5-10

{5} Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

{6} And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

{7} Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

{8} And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

{9} Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed 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."

{10} 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.

1. Whoa—this is heavy!
2. First, Ananias drops dead
 - a. the burial detail takes him out and plants him
 - b. and when they get back 3 hrs later
 - c. they discover they have another job to do
3. In my first years as a Christian, I attended a charismatic church in Orange County that had "catchers"
 - a. no, there wasn't a revival among semi-pro baseball players
 - b. they were men who were detailed to stand behind people being prayed for by the pastor or guest speakers
 - c. they would stand behind them and catch them when they "slain in the

Spirit” as it was called

4. Well the “catchers” in the early church had a bit of a different task than catchers in charismatic churches today
5. The guys we read about here didn’t catch people on their way down—
6. They wrapped them up after they had dropped and dragged them out and buried them
7. That’s be a shock to some of those who fall today - to find they were being hauled out to some ditch

E. Why Did they Die?

1. Why did God judge Ananias and Sapphira? Why did they drop dead?
2. Their sin is clear - they were in gross hypocrisy
3. They were trying to *appear* to be something they were not
4. They were trying to *appear* religious when in fact, they weren’t
5. And they died because God wants us to understand that he abhors such hypocrisy
6. Well then, we might well ask why God doesn’t snuff all hypocrites
 - a. if God judged Ananias and Sapphira because of hypocrisy
 - b. why aren’t all hypocrites knocked dead the moment they lie?
7. The answer is simple but important
8. Ananias and Sapphira died because God wanted to impress the new community with His attitude towards hypocrisy
9. You see, this was a critical moment in the history of the church and in the plan of God
10. They were a community of purity and love
11. Their reputation in Jerusalem was one of holiness and grace
12. But with Ananias and Sapphira, in snuck the insidious stain of religious hypocrisy; a sin which has always weakened and hindered the work of God
13. God singled out this man and His wife so you and I and the world at large might know just how serious a sin hypocrisy is
14. The world may complain about hypocrisy in the church—but the world and the church should know **GOD HATES IT MORE THAN ANYONE**
15. And if it weren’t for His grace and mercy, *all* hypocrites would be toast this instant
16. The early church understood this lesson . . .

F. V. 11-14

{11} So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

{12} 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.

{13} Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

{14} And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

1. A new attitude settled over the city of Jerusalem with the report of the death of Ananias and Sapphira
2. A new respect for the holiness of God came upon the church

3. And the outsiders, who until that time had been coming to the temple to hear the Apostles preach, started staying away
4. They realized that going and standing with the Christians, and appearing to be something they weren't could be harmful to their health
5. So the crowds thinned a bit, but those who were really coming to faith continued to join the new community

G. Dealing With Hypocrisy

1. The modern church seems to have lost it's fear of God
2. Holy Awe seems obvious by it absence
3. Many Christians rejoice in the mercy and grace of God but they have forgotten His holiness
4. Many more look to God as a giant bellhop in the sky - a cosmic force to make them healthy, wealthy and wise - but they neglect to consider what *He* requires of *them*
5. How many who sit in the chairs and pews of our churches are merely playing the game, trying to appear holy, but are lying?
6. Christian - listen, whether here or on tape, listen to me
7. Learn the lesson these did when Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead that day
8. GOD HATES HYPOCRISY!!
9. He abhors it when people only try to *appear* holy and not *be* holy

H. Hypocrisy Defined

1. We get the word "hypocrite" from the Greeks, who used this word for their actors
2. In ancient Greek drama, actors would often stroll across a stage holding a mask over their faces while reciting their lines
3. The mask would either be a smiling or a crying face - trying to giving the audience the impression of a happy or sad character
4. But they were just masks - the person under the mask was an altogether different person
5. A hypocrite is an actor or actress
 - a. they present a mask to the world
 - b. but under the mask, they are something else
6. The famous actor Robert Redford was walking one day through a hotel lobby. A woman saw him and followed him to the elevator. "Are you the real Robert Redford?" she asked him with great excitement. As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, "Only when I am alone!"

I. What God Wants

1. You know what, God doesn't want us to pretend or put on a show
2. He wants us to be real
3. He wants to be with people who are just real, and not pretending to be something they aren't
4. He loves us the way we are
5. And the areas that need to be changed, He will, in His time, by His Spirit

- and His Word
6. We are the freest of all people -
 - a. we don't have to be churchy
 - b. we don't have to adopt some special posture that looks anointed
 - c. we don't have to pray in KJ English
 - d. we don't have to speak with some kind of an anointed quiver in our voices
 7. Paul says that we have this treasure I earthen vessels
 8. And have you noticed how in the gospels Jesus loved to be with the earthy people, the common people who didn't put on airs?
 9. But His most scathing denunciations were for the pretentious and hypocrite religious leaders
 10. Am I saying that being holy isn't important -No, not at all
 11. What I am saying is be real -
 12. Don't play act at being a Christian - *Be One*
 13. You see friends, God doesn't want us to play a religious game
 - a. do you know what the word *religion* means?
 - b. it means to *bind up*
 - c. it speaks of tying one's self to a set of rules and regulations
 14. Jesus didn't come to make us religious
 15. God didn't send His Son to bind us up
 16. He came to set us free - He came to give us life
 17. that's why we so often say that Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship; a relationship with the God who loves us as we are
 18. Playing a religious game only isolates us from Him and locks us away from enjoying His love
 19. That is why He hates hypocrisy so
 - a. it binds us up and steals *our* joy
 - b. but it also misrepresents His love to *others*

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Painted Balconies*

1. On French Riviera, such an important status symbol to have a balcony on one's apartment, many people have painted them right onto the flat walls around their windows
2. Some have even gone to the extreme of painting wet laundry hanging on a clothesline to give it a touch of reality
3. Hypocrisy is a facade meant to impress - But ultimately, it's just worthless paint

B. *The Lesson*

1. This passage teaches us that while the Church is a rejoicing community of people who have been given life -
2. It is also a sober community of people who must not play a religious game
3. Church is serious business
- 0 If you don't think so, ask Ananias and Sapphira