

## A Moment of Clarity — Acts 5:1-11

### I INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Karl Marx*

1. A century ago in Germany there was a young boy who idolized his father.
2. The family were dedicated Jews who attended synagogue weekly.
3. When he was a teenager, the family was forced to move to another town in Germany where there was no synagogue.
4. The Lutheran church *dominated* social life.
5. One day not long after they moved there, the father called the family together & announced they were all now Lutherans & would attend the local church.
6. When the children asked why they were changing religion, he said it was necessary for *business*.
7. That teenage boy was *first* bewildered, *then* angry about his father's abrupt religious about-face.
8. His bitterness became a lens through which he saw the world & history.
9. A few years later, he left Germany to study in England.
  - a. Daily he sat in the British Museum formulating radical ideas & composing a book.
  - b. He introduced a philosophy & world-view designed to change the world.
  - c. He described religion as an "opiate for the masses" – something *used* by the rich to *control* the poor.
10. His name was Karl Marx. His new political ideology—Communism.
11. His father's *hypocrisy* led to the death & suffering of millions during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century & continues to dominate the lives of hundreds of millions today.

#### B. *Hypocrisy – It Ought Not Be!*

1. Probably the biggest complaint we hear today about the Church is that it's filled with hypocrites.
  2. It doesn't help when modern day Elmer Ganttrys stand on a stage before thousands of "Ameners," & a half dozen TV cameras, denouncing immorality,
  3. But a week later are busted for the very thing they condemn!
  4. I'd guess most of us at one time or another in trying to share the Faith with someone have had them throw it back at us by pointing out the hypocrisy of those who call themselves Christians.
  5. If it hasn't happened to you yet, it will.
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6. Hypocrisy is nothing new. There've always been religious fakes, charlatans, frauds.
  7. What's more; they aren't *unique* to Christianity – *every* religion has its hypocrites.
  8. Though they don't realize it, some of the most colossal hypocrites are *atheists!*
  9. The Gospels describe Jesus showing *remarkable tenderness* toward those polite society considered *immoral* while He was quite hard on those who wore a *pious mask*.
  10. And right here in the early chapters of Acts we read about a case of hypocrisy God smoked out from the midst of the first believers.
  11. What's important about this story is what it teaches us about *God's attitude toward hypocrisy*.

## II. TEXT

### A. *Set the Scene*

1. This was a time when both the power & love of God were moving in a dramatic way among the followers of Christ.
2. The Apostles were continuing Jesus' healing ministry even as they taught the growing movement what it meant to believe in & follow Him.
3. The **hallmark** of the new community, the main reputation they were earning, was the intense & practical love they had for one another.
  - a. Their relationship with Jesus had radically changed their relationship with others.
  - b. Entering into the love of God had ushered them into a fervent concern for each other.
  - c. **Unity** wasn't something they worked for; it was the **by-product** of following Jesus.
4. When there were needs among them, they simply met them as each was able.
5. As the "Jesus movement" grew, the Jewish rulers issued statements **condemning** it.
  - a. This led to some believers losing their jobs or their businesses were boycotted.
  - b. Unable to support themselves, other believers who were doing well stepped in to assist them.
6. This practical expression of love grew until it became their reputation: They were **known** for their practical & fervent devotion to one another.
7. Some of the more well to do, liberated from materialism by their new life in Christ, sold houses & land & donated the proceeds to the Apostles for distribution to the poor among them.
8. This was a remarkable display of love & at first—was spontaneous, sincere, & completely **voluntary**.
9. Such large gifts were the cause of much rejoicing & praise to God;
  - a. Not just because there was needed relief for the poor,
  - b. **More importantly**, the gifts were evidence of **a deep heart-change** among the rich.
  - c. You know **revival is real** when it impacts the **wallet** & one's view of **possessions**.
  - d. **Materialism** is a difficult sin to shake,
  - e. So when people keep a light hold on possessions,
    - 1) seeing all they have as a gift from God,
    - 2) to be used for His glory,
    - 3) it's evidence the Holy Spirit has re-ordered priorities.
10. So the gifts of these wealthy benefactors were the cause of **double-rejoicing**.
11. But as often happens with such a noteworthy event, the selling of land & giving of large gifts became something of a **program**, at least in one couple's mind.
12. Their names were **Ananias & Sapphira**.

### B. *Vs. 1-2*

**<sup>1</sup>But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. <sup>2</sup>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. This married couple had attached themselves to the “Jesus Movement”; the *Nazarenes*, as they were then called. Whether or not they were genuinely saved isn't made clear.
2. What *is*, is that they sold some property.
  - a. Ananias then went & offered it as others had done.
  - b. The difference is that he *claimed* what he was offering was the *total amount* of the sale.
  - c. It *wasn't*; it was only a portion. The balance he kept back.
  - d. His wife Sapphira wasn't at his side when he brought the donation, but she was fully in on the deception.
  - e. The language is clear; she was no reluctant partner; this was as much her plot as her husband's.
3. The 2 had seen how other wealthy members had given the proceeds of sold land & been warmly embraced. They wanted that reception too.
  - a. Wealthy *themselves*, they'd grown *uncomfortable* as one after another of their peers made big gifts.
  - b. They felt pressure to follow suit; though in fact no one was *putting pressure* on them.
  - c. No one that is but the devil.
  - d. He worked on their *pride* & tempted them to *envy* those whose gifts had resulted in great praise.
4. Out of a desire to *save face & be thought generous*, they agreed to sell some land & make a gift.
5. The problem is *their motivation was all wrong*.
  - a. They weren't concerned for the poor, which is what had motivated the others.
  - b. Ananias & Sapphira were driven by a desire to be *thought* of as good, as religious, as generous.
  - c. *They weren't!* They were *greedy, envious, manipulative frauds*, as their actions reveal.
6. For purposes of illustration, let's say Ananias & Sapphira sold the land for \$150K
  - a. They decided to give \$100K, keeping \$50K for themselves – as a secret stash of mad-money.
  - b. When Ananias handed over his \$100K gift, he claimed it was *the entire amount of the sale*.

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7. Now, this is silly! Ananias & Sapphira were free to give or not give as they pleased.
  - a. *Anything* they gave would be wonderful *if* it'd been given with a pure motive of just wanting to help the needy.
  - b. They could have sold their land for \$150 & given *\$20K* & that would have been *fantastic* – *if* they'd only have been *honest* about it.

- c. It was *their* land, *their* money – they could do with it as they pleased.
- 8. **What they did wrong** was use what was supposed to be a freewill gift to help the poor, as an attempt to **buy a reputation** as generous & caring.
- 9. Instead of actually **being generous**, they tried to buy **the appearance of it**.
- 10. That's the **essence** of hypocrisy – **pretending** to be something you're not.
  - a. The **foolishness of hypocrisy** is that it's such a waste of time & energy.
  - b. If you're going to spend resources to **make yourself look** like something, why not **really** do & be it? Why fake it?
  - c. What's the point of going through all the motions & not mean it when you can be sincere, since you're doing it anyway?
- 11. Hypocrisy is **utterly foolish**.

### C. Vs. 3-4

**<sup>3</sup>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?"**

**<sup>4</sup>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 wasn't fooled by Ananias' deception.
- 2. He was given a Word of Knowledge about his charade & called him on it.
- 3. No one had said Ananias & Sapphira had to sell their plot of ground
  - a. No one compelled or coerced them to give.
  - b. The **love** that marked the followers of Christ wasn't a program, a religious hoop to jump through.
- 4. Peter diagnosed Ananias' problem – "Satan filled your heart to lie."
  - a. This was no harmless, little, white lie.
  - b. This deception was nothing less than **satanic in origin** – as all deception is.
  - c. Jesus said it – The devil is a liar & the father of lies.
  - d. Those who walk in deceit, those who practice deception live under the influence of hell.
  - e. It's been said—Temptation uses many tools but **a lie is the handle** that fits them all.
- 5. Ananias & Sapphira tried to pull their little scheme over on the Apostles & Church because their hearts & minds were fertile soil for the enemy's work.
  - a. Note it well – Peter said Ananias' heart had been **filled** by Satan to lie.
  - b. While the rest of the believers were filled with the **Holy** Spirit, Ananias' was filled with a **lying** spirit.
- 6. It **began** with the **envy** they felt when they saw their wealthy peers making large gifts.
  - a. What they should have done was stop & repent of what the temptation to envy ought to have told them – that their hearts weren't in the right place.
  - b. But they didn't resist the temptation to envy.
  - c. They began to think of what they could do to claim some of the praise that was going to God.
  - d. Certainly, the Holy Spirit **warned them** about the danger of touching God's glory – but they refused to repent & pressed on, giving more room in their

- hearts to deceit -
- e. Until eventually their plans were all set, & Ananias went with cash in hand.
  7. What he wasn't counting on – what those who live by deceit *always forget*, is that truth always wins out; the lie is *always* exposed.

#### **D. Vs. 5-10**

##### **<sup>5</sup>Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell . . .**

1. “On his knees, repented of his hypocrisy, and gave the full amount. All rejoiced & God added another thousand to the Church!”
2. That's what we expect; but, it's not what happened . . .

**<sup>5</sup>Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. <sup>6</sup>And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*. <sup>7</sup>Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” <sup>9</sup>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.” <sup>10</sup>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.**

3. This is heavy! First, Ananias dropped dead & was hauled off to burial.
  4. They return 3 hours later only to find their work's not over. The wife will be buried with her husband.
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5. Many years ago, I attended a charismatic church that had “*catchers*.”
    - a. Not the guys who crouch behind home-plate.
    - b. *Catchers* were men whose ministry was to stand behind people being prayed for by the pastor.
    - c. As he'd pray, he put his hand on their chest or head & they'd fall backward.
    - d. “*Slain in the Spirit*” is what it was called.
    - e. The catchers' job was to catch those who fell & lower them carefully to the ground less they get hurt.
  6. “Slain in the Spirit” had a bit of a *different meaning* in the early church & they *didn't have catchers*, but they did have **buriers**.
  7. I remember back in my early days seeing women wearing skirts or short dresses who'd been slain in the Spirit with a coat, jacket, or blanket thrown over their legs for modesty.
  8. In the early church, the blanket would go over their face – “They dead!”

#### **E. Why Did they Die?**

1. Why did God *slay* Ananias and Sapphira? Simple—He dropped them for the sin of *hypocrisy*.
  - a. They tried to appear to be something they weren't.

- b. They *feigned* piety & generosity when what they were was *proud & envious*.
2. ***God is holy***. He abhors sin in all its many forms.
3. But one of the most *sinister & damaging* forms of evil is *hypocrisy* because it's evil wearing a mask of good.
  - a. Hypocrisy not only *damns* the soul of the hypocrite,
  - b. It *drags others with it* by misrepresenting what's good & right.
  - c. Hypocrisy *pretends* to be good while all the while *being* bad.
  - d. In the end, hypocrisy defames the good & causes the innocent to doubt the reality of Goodness.
4. Hypocrisy is a dangerous spiritual cancer – And God used radical treatment here by *cutting it out*.
5. Okay – if that's so: Why don't *all* hypocrites drop dead? Why just Ananias & Sapphira?
  - a. Why aren't *all* religious frauds dropped?
  - b. Why aren't *all* fakers slain?
6. Because the God who's holy & hates hypocrisy is also merciful & gracious & would *rather* we repent of hypocrisy than face the fierceness of His wrath against it.
7. If God treated **ALL** hypocrites the way He dealt with this couple, the Church would be *really small*.
  - a. We can thank God He *doesn't deal* with all hypocrites like this.
  - b. But He DID deal with *them* this way – *Why?*
8. So we'd **NOT FORGET** that our merciful, gracious God is ***ALSO HOLY!***

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9. Remember the context – The most *noticeable thing* about the Church at this time was its **LOVE**, its unity, its profound sense of community.
  - a. There was such joy flowing among them, such a profound sense of fellowship & love, they were *ecstatic*.
  - b. It's *difficult* for people whose hearts are filled with love & appreciation to *also* have the right sense of awe & caution in dealing with a *perfectly holy God*.
  - c. In his first letter, John says *perfect love casts out fear*.
  - d. Yet there's a *measure of fear* we're to have when we come before God because He is Majestic & Holy!
  - e. Listen—the fact is, IF God were right now to appear to us in His glory, we'd fall on our faces in *utter terror*.
  - f. If you don't think so then you haven't read the Bible.
  - g. John, the one who wrote “perfect love casts our fear,” in Revelation tells us he was given a vision of God's glory **and it wiped him out!**
10. So, here's the early church – filled with the Spirit, filled with & walking in incredible love.
  - a. Satan can't get in. Persecution doesn't work, he's tried that.
  - b. So, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.
  - c. He takes the very thing that's *the distinctive mark* of believers – love; & makes a *mask* of it.
  - d. Then he slips it on & steals into their midst –

- e. His *entire aim* is to *fake* love so he can work *more deceit* & turn good to evil.
- 11. God said “**NO!**” The devil may not join His people. Not yet anyway.

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- 12. Ananias & Sapphira died because God wanted to teach His people about the *danger of hypocrisy*.
- 13. Their reputation in Jerusalem was one of holiness & love.
  - a. But Ananias & Sapphira were infected with a *lethal spiritual pathogen* called hypocrisy;
  - b. A sin which has *always hindered* the work of God.
- 14. God singled out these 2 *so the Church in every generation* would know just how serious a sin hypocrisy is.
- 15. The world *complains* about hypocrisy in the Church.
- 16. Well, the world needs to know *God has a far bigger concern about it than they!*
- 17. If it weren't for His mercy, *all* hypocrites would be *instant* toast; including them.

#### **F. V. 11**

**So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.**

- 1. A new attitude settled over Jerusalem with the report of Ananias' & Sapphira's death.
- 2. A new respect for the holiness of God came upon the church.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. God Hates Hypocrisy**

- 1. The overwhelming lesson those first believers learned was this - **GOD HATES HYPOCRISY!**
- 2. The Apostles had heard about it time & again from Jesus.
- 3. He *abhorred* it when people pretended to be something they weren't.

#### **B. Hypocrisy Defined**

- 1. The word “hypocrite” comes from Greek drama; it was their word for ‘actor.’
  - a. In Greek plays, actors strolled across the stage holding a *mask* over their face while reciting their lines.
  - b. The mask bore a visage appropriate for the character being played.
    - 1) If sad, a sad mask. Happy, a smiling face.
    - 2) Evil, sinister. Good, beautify.
  - c. To this day, the universal symbol for acting & the theater is a pair of masks.
- 2. So the Greek actor was known as one “under the mask” = literally, hypocrite; one *playing a part*.
- 3. And of course the *good actor* was the one who made the audience *believe* he *really was* the character played.
- 4. One of the perils of *acting* is when the actor or actress takes on parts of the staged persona.
  - a. There've been several celebrities over the last few decades who've become *lost* in their on-screen roles.

- b. Robert Redford was once asked, “Are you the real Robert Redford?” He replied, “Only when I am alone!”
5. What’s sad is that all acting isn’t done solely on a stage or the silver screen.
6. There’s a lot of fakery in progress, a lot of people pretending to be something they aren’t.
7. God isn’t fooled by any of it! He sees, He knows.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Queen Mary’s Painted Smokestacks**

1. The Queen Mary was the largest ship to cross the oceans when launched in 1936.
2. Through 4 decades & WWII she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel & museum in Long Beach.
3. During the remodel, her 3 huge smokestacks were taken down so they could be scraped & repainted.
  - a. But on the dock they crumbled into ruins.
  - b. Nothing was left of the original  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch steel plate from which the stacks had been made.
  - c. All that remained was paint - more than **30 coats** of it that had been applied over the years.
  - d. The steel had long since rusted away.

#### **B. Not Just Religious Fakers**

1. As we end today, let’s make sure we’re taking to heart the serious, sober lesson Ananias & Sapphira teach – God Hates Hypocrisy!  
It’s a dangerous evil we’d be wise to resist & repent of.
2. And while the lost make frequent mention of religious hypocrisy, rightly calling it wrong, they need to be careful, because the measure they use on others, is the one that will be used on them.
3. God isn’t just angry at **religious** hypocrisy – He’ll judge the **generic** version too.