

14—Acts 5.1-11 (12-16)—And Great Fear Came Upon All Who Heard

I. Introduction

- a. Destruction of an organization, a company even a nation can happen from enemies on the outside or from those on the inside.
 - i. I worked at a large welding and machine shop several years ago that made some pretty amazing stuff. Some of the owners had actually patented several items. Our customers were those for shipyard equipment that unloaded containers from boats, hauled chassis on railcars, a rotator to stack the chassis and trailers to haul containers in the shipyard (we called them bomb carts).
 - ii. We were working more than ever. Business was booming. But something strange was happening. We could not understand why the truckdriver hauling our metal was demanding cash in hand before we could unload it. We knew something was up but didn't know what to do but keep working.
 - iii. Some years later, one of the owners was arrested for embezzlement. The company limped along until it was sold.
 - iv. My point is, it failed from the inside not from our outside competitors.
- b. Do you know the story of Israel's battle at Ai after the miraculous victory at Jericho? We will return to this story later but their defeat at Ai happened because one man kept back things he was ordered not to have from the spoil of Jericho. Israel was nearly destroyed from within.
- c. An attempt from the outside had been unsuccessful to stop the advancement of the gospel, now we will see if an attempt from the inside will succeed. The enemy is at work and he's working with things that people love—money and fame.

II. Main Point

- a. Luke made the point very clear by repeating it twice at the end of each section, "And great fear came upon all who heard of it".
- b. I hope we will see that this fear wasn't destroying the church but forming it and keeping it.

III. Outline

- a. How we understand God matters
- b. Barnabus or Ananias?
- c. Lying to God Part 1 and Part 2
- d. What did this do to the church?

IV. Exposition

- a. I think we need to investigate what it is we believe about God. If we do not understand or we refuse to believe that God actively knows and acts as He pleases then we will misunderstand this text.
 - i. This scripture is often used to make the claim that the God of the OT is the same God of the NT. Indeed, that is true.
 - ii. Let me cut to the chase. When you read this, do you understand this to be divine judgment from God on Ananias and Sapphira?
 - iii. Do you believe God caused the flood in Noah's day?
 - iv. Are you clear on the fact that Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu were struck down by God for offering strange fire?
 - v. What about Uzzah when he touched the ark of the covenant?
 - vi. Do you believe God open the ground and swallowed up rebellious Israelite families?
 - vii. Do you believe God sent Israel into the Promised Land and slaughtered entire groups of people?
 - viii. What about this? (Isa. 45:5-7) ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

- ix. I could go on and on with the examples but I will end with this one. Who took everything Job had?
 - 1. (Job 1:21-22) ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.
 - 2. Everything he had was a gift from God and He can take it away anytime he chooses. In particular, the story of Job makes it clear that his suffering was not because he was living in sin. Indeed, the righteous do suffer.
 - 3. "How God governs all events in the universe without sinning, and without removing responsibility from man, and with compassionate outcomes is mysterious indeed!" -- Piper
- x. The question might come up, "Was God fair to Job? Was God fair to Ananias and Sapphira?"
 - 1. If you doubt God's fairness, then you will not understand this text.
 - 2. If he doesn't judge rightly, then who's to say he will judge any of us rightly on judgment day?
 - 3. On that day do you what God only to be fair? If so, in his justice only you and I will receive exactly what we deserve—eternal punishment.
 - 4. Job doesn't charge God with wrongdoing in taking everything he had. All that he had been given to him by God. The same is true of us.
- xi. God created the world and God can do whatever He pleases! In our text today, God is working in such a way to bring about the salvation of many! We will return to that theme at the end.
- b. Now, I believe Luke places the story of Barnabus and Ananias back-to-back so that we clearly see a contrast between them.
 - i. Look at verse one. It begins with "but" to indicate that's his intentions.
 - ii. Both sold a field and both brought money and laid it at the apostles' feet.
 - iii. We need both of these stories to see what faith looks like and what it doesn't look like.
 - 1. Faith brings freedom. Barnabus freely sold and freely gave. Great grace was upon him. God had been abundantly gracious to him and now Barnabus is gracious to others. He can let the field go out of freedom not out of being coerced. Out of love not out of seeking to be loved. Because he wanted to not because he had to.
 - 2. "That is what true faith means—an authentic change of where your heart is, so that your acts of love are free." (Piper)
 - iv. "Ananias and Sapphira stand for the exact opposite, namely, people who have not really been changed on the inside by being satisfied with all that God is for them in Christ, but who still want some place in the visible church. The reason they drop dead is not because this happens to all hypocrites. For example, it doesn't happen to Simon the Magician in Acts 8:20–24. The reason they drop dead is to give a stunning warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later." (Piper)
 - 1. You might disagree that Ananias and Sapphira were fake Christians. You would be right in saying...the text doesn't say that. Luke leaves that open for you to decide.
 - 2. You should pick up Dean Inerra's book, *The Unsaved Christian*. It is super helpful to think through this common problem in the church.
 - 3. And I'm sure Joshua helped you think through that last week from (Matt. 7:21) ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
 - v. And yet, we are given these two stories that are in contrast to help us see clearly. Barnabus was an example to be followed. Ananias and Sapphira was a warning to be heeded.

- c. This first section 1-11 is easily divided into two parts. The first, 1-7, is Ananias lying to God part one while the 8-11 is Sapphira lying to God part 2. There's no way to put a spin on this. It is a hard truth but it's not to be avoided.
- i. Where is Ananias' heart? Let's look for that. In V. 1 it says a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a field. And with her knowledge HE kept back for himself some of the sale price.
 1. Why is it important for us to know that Ananias did this with his wife's knowledge?
 - a. Let me ask it a different way. Would Sapphira be held responsible for what she did not know?
 - b. The answer is, absolutely not. In part two, the question is how much was the field sold for? Ananias could have told his wife he sold the field for such and such a price.
 - c. From this we are assured that God acted rightly.
 2. It's also important for us to know that Ananias kept back some and brought only part of the sale price the apostles.
 - a. The word for "kept back" is to misappropriate funds. That's how it is used in Titus 2:10. It means to embezzle.
 - b. Another striking use of this same word is used of Achan in Joshua 7:1 to which I alluded to in the introduction. It was discovered that something was wrong when Israel was so easily defeated at Ai.
 - i. His breach of faith is said to have been a breach of faith for all of Israel. (Jos. 7:1) But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan...took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.
 - ii. Achan kept back some the devoted things but the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel.
 - iii. To be a part of the covenant community, was to bear the responsibility together. This same thing happens in 1 Cor. 5.
 1. If my son busts out your window while in my care as his father, I am responsible to take care of that window. His actions and my response say something about our family. Our name is challenged. What we do will determine how we are viewed.
 2. The same is true in the church. We carry the name of Jesus. How we act or don't act will tell the world rightly about Jesus or we will lie about him with our actions.
 3. I asked the question, where is Ananias' heart? For now, we can say that he is one with his wife not with God or God's people.
 - ii. V. 3 further informs us of where his heart is.
 1. Notice how Peter responds to what Ananias laid at his feet. (Acts 5:3) "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?
 - a. Back up in (Acts 4:31) it says--And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.
 - i. However, Peter says that Satan has filled Ananias' heart. This is an echo of what happened with Judas.
 - ii. When your heart is filled with the father of lies, that's what comes out and defiles him.

1. (Matt. 15:18-20) what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person.
2. How did Peter know?
 - a. It reminds me of the story of Elisha and his servant Gehazi. Elisha had healed Naaman of leprosy. He offered Elisha lots of things but he refused them all. But his servant Gehazi tracked Naaman down on his way back home and lied to him and took two talents of silver and two changes of clothes from him. When he returned, he asked Gehazi about it even though he had not been there. The leprosy of Naaman fell to Gehazi and his family forever because of this.
 - b. Peter acted as one of the prophets of old filled with the Holy Spirit.
- iii. V. 4 makes clear why they are responsible and why the judgment was so severe
 1. This verse is very important. The field was Ananias' to do with as he pleased. He did not have to sell it. It seems he longed for the praise of men or a room named after him with a plaque on it.
 2. Furthermore, when he sold it, it was at his disposal. He could have said that I will sell it for, let's say \$2000 and pledged \$1000 of the sale price.
 3. But what is the problem? He lied. Just like we already saw, the amount he gave was only part of the sale price. Which would have been fine but the amount he gave was said to be the whole amount.
 4. In other words...or numbers...let's say he sold it for \$2000 and gave \$1000 but he made everyone think he only sold it for \$1000.
 - a. (Heb. 4:13) ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- iv. V. 5 is the consequence of lying to God.
 1. He fell dead.
 - a. Medically...was it a heart attack or shock? I've read where some try to pin this on one of those two options in order to distance God from this.
 - b. I don't think you could have convinced those who saw it or heard about it that God didn't do it.
 2. Great fear gripped them all.
 - a. Fear is not the response I have when I hear about a heart attack.
 3. Great fear should grip us too. Why? Because God is holy. Because God cares about His Name. I mean, He sent His only Son to die for sin! If the cross isn't proof enough that sin matters to God and eternal death in hell then I'm not sure how more clear of a picture God needs to draw for someone.
 - a. In God's justice, He will punish all sin...all of it. For those who are believing in Christ, our sins have been punished on Jesus. for those who are not believing in Christ, you will bear the punishment of your sins forever.
- v. V. 6 the young men wrap him up and carry him out and bury him.
 1. This was the end of Ananias. No mourning. No ceremony. Nothing. Dig a hole and cover him up.
 2. They do not even contact his wife.
- vi. Part 2 the lying continues.
 1. 7-11 is a repeat. His wife Sapphira lies to God. Dies and is buried by the same young men 3 hours after her husband.

2. In the home, God has given responsibility to the husband to lead the family. He is to lead in righteousness. If he asks his wife to lie about something, she is to say no, I will obey God rather than you. Similar to a few weeks ago when the governing authorities told Peter and John to stop teaching about Jesus and the resurrection.
 - a. The Bible teaches us to obey the governing authorities but we are no to obey them if they tell us to do or don't do something God commands otherwise.
 - b. Sapphira should have said no. Her husband disobeyed God and abused his authority. This is hard. It says I fear my husband more than God.
 3. Again, great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.
 - a. The risen Lord Jesus acts to bring this about. He acts to keep the church...to save the church. Sin within will destroy it.
- d. My final point is this very thing. We need to see the result of this action by God. What did this great fear do to the church? Destroy it or keep it alive?
- i. Quickly look at verses 12-16...in particular these two things stand out.
 1. In v. 12 it says that (Acts 5:12) ¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.
 - a. In other words, Christ continued to make himself known through the apostles.
 2. And secondly, notice what it says in (Acts 5:14) ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women
 - ii. Doing what God says doesn't destroy the church. Doing what God says does not stop the advancement of the Kingdom, it keeps it and protects it.
 1. Last Sunday a report was issued from a group that investigated the SBC executive committee and how it has handled sexual abuse. The findings are devastating. You can go read the 288-page report for yourself. Indeed, you should. It has made national news. The convention is next month and there should be a reckoning for what has been made known.
 2. In that report, the EC justifies not taking action for the sake of evangelism. Now, that's only one among many but that was used as a reason for not doing the right thing.
 - a. In a hushed voice..."If this gets out it will make it difficult to share the gospel with our neighbors."
 - b. Well, our text this morning makes clear that when the right thing is done, evangelism isn't stopped, in fact, it increases.
 3. I can't imagine Ananias selling a piece of property without several witnesses involved. How do you reach Jerusalem when it is discovered that one of your own lied about the sale of his field and the church did nothing about it? And yes, the witnesses of the sale knew more than the church did. I think that's why God acted so severely.

V. Response

- a. What should our response be? Fear the Lord. Repent. May the fear of the Lord shape us and form us all into what Christ wants us to be!