



Two Examples Acts 4:32-5:16 (Lesson #8)

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OUTLINE of Acts Chapter 4:32-5:16

- 1) Luke describes the unity of the early church (4:32).
- 2) The apostles declared the resurrection of Jesus with great power (4:33).
- 3) As needed believers sold land and/or houses to supply for the needs of the early believers (4:35-35).
- 4) Luke gives us an example of a man named Barnabas who sold a piece of property and brought the proceeds to the apostles (4:36-37).
- 5) Luke gives an example of a couple named Ananias and Sapphira who pretended to do the same, but were really attempting to deceive (5:1-10).
- 6) What happened with Ananias and Sapphira caused great fear to come upon the whole church (5:11).
- 7) Luke tells us again that through the apostles God was working many mighty signs and wonders (5:12).
- 8) Many in the community feared to join the church, but they did hold the church in high esteem (5:13).
- 9) The Lord continued to add multitudes of believers to the church (5:14).
- 10) The people were seeing amazing miracles accomplished through the apostles and it was drawing people from the surrounding towns (5:15-16).

4:32 ¶ Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Vs 32 - The **full number** (KJV and NKJV “multitude”) (LSB “of those who believed”) (likely 10,000 or so) were of one heart and soul.

What a **beautiful testimony** of the early church, in spite of their rapid growth and increasing size, they were of one heart and one soul!

The first characteristic of the early church was a **oneness**, a **closeness**, a **common bond**, a **unity of spirit!**

This is a beautiful picture of the unity of spirit the New Testament church should possess (Joh 17:22-23; ICor 1:10; Phil 2:1-2; IPet 3:8).

At this point, **nothing negative has crept in to undermine this unity!**

Also, within the group there was a **profound sense of sharing**, so much so that Luke tells us that they had all things in common.

I will say this again in a minute, but this is descriptive and not prescriptive.

But do not miss the amazing unity!

Vs 33 - With great power, the Greek word is **δύναμις (dunamis) (doo'-nam-is)**, it means **power, might, strength**.

The Sanhedrin had asked Peter and John by what **power** they healed the lame man.

Here Luke records that the apostles gave witness to the resurrection with **great (megas), power (dunamis)** the apostles were giving their testimony (witness) to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have said it a number of times, but it seems the **focal point** of the early church is that **Jesus rose from the grave!**

But it was not just **great power**, we are also told that **great grace** was upon the apostles, we cannot help but wonder what that looked like.

God's unmerited favor, or as Luke records "great grace" was upon them all!

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Vs 34 - Here Luke is describing what it was like in the **early days** of the New Testament church. In review we should see a number of things:

- 1) It was a time of **great, obvious, and undeniable miracles**.

Following the events of Pentecost, Luke tells us: *"And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."* (Ac 2:43 ESV)

Following the initial persecution when Peter and John went back and shared what had happened, if you remember the church prayed: *"29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* (Ac 4:29-30 ESV)

Later today we will read: *"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico."* (Ac 5:12 ESV)

This transitory time of the early church was a time marked by **many miracles** that were being performed by the apostles and their immediate associates. I will say **more when we get to 5:12**.

- 2) It was a time **when many who had come for the Feast of Weeks had stayed in Jerusalem after placing faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth**.

These people did not have jobs in Jerusalem, yet they wanted to stay and learn the **apostles' doctrines**. To learn about Jesus Christ. Can you imagine what these teaching sessions were like as the apostles shared all that Jesus did and said, and took the Old Testament and brought it to life!

- 3) It was a time of **great learning** as the church devoted themselves to the **teaching of the apostles**: *"41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 ¶ And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."* (Ac 2:41-43 ESV)

- 4) It was a time of **great unity** and incredible **oneness of Spirit** in this new and rapidly growing community! If you remember following the events of Pentecost we were told of the believers:

Here we see points 2 and 4 colliding and coming to life: *"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold."*

This was a **unique transitional time**. Again, Luke is being **descriptive**; we would need to look in other places in the Bible to see if this is prescriptive.

They cared for one another; they were concerned for one another. They are selling property when funds were needed and bringing the proceeds, as you will see, to the apostles to care for the needs of other believers.

This is not communism. They are doing this by choice, even in this **descriptive language** you will see each person is **making their own free choice**, as to if and when they sell things and how much proceeds they give to the church.

But, this is an amazing time of community.

Now the New Testament does not give a single command that we are to work and pool our money together. It does, on the other hand, provide a number of commands about work. Let's review just a few (II Tes 3:10; I Tim 5:8; Pro 14:23).

The Bible teaches that we should work and work hard.

Please do not take this **transitional time** as promoting or even worse **prescribing socialism**.

As I have told you many times, we run into **descriptive verses**, and we run **into prescriptive verses**. Most of the time, these are easy to tell apart. But sometimes, we can forget to make sure what we are reading is prescribed in the Scriptures. As easy example is (II Sam 11:2-4).

I heard one pastor say it this way, **be careful not to take a practice and turn it into a pattern**, that the **Bible does not recommend or command**.

Vs 35 - Here we see another clear recognition of the authority of the apostles.

People of means, the people who **owned land** and/or **houses**, many would **sell a piece of property** or **sell a building**, and they would bring the money to the 12 (the apostles). They would bring the money and lay it at the **apostles feet**.

Not specifically stated, is that many of these wealthy landowners were selling property and buildings and bringing **all** of the proceeds to the apostles.

From there, we see that the apostles, the 12 would distribute the money as they saw needs.

Now we should begin to imagine that this is putting a large extra burden on the apostles beyond their teaching burden!

Fruchtenbaum in his commentary writes: *“The Greek tense allows for the translation to read, “Selling, they brought from time to time as it was occasioned by reason of need.””*

The picture seems to be, when necessary, due to needs within the community, wealthy people in the community would sell things and brings some or all of the proceeds to the apostles for distribution.

This was completely voluntary and was not any type of requirement.

This was charity being driven out of a heart of love for fellow believers.

Next Luke provides us with a **good example of charity** motivated by a **heart of love**.

Vs 36 - After providing a general account of what is happening with believers and their care for one another, Luke provides a specific example, Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cypress.

Joseph (Hebrew name) a man who the apostles called **Barnabas** (Aramaic title) that means **“son of exhortation”** or **“son of consolation”**, this man, was from the tribe of Levi, from the priestly tribe, a man who was a native of Cypress.

Here Luke introduces us to an amazing man, who will be with us for a bit here in the book of Acts. This man's name is Barnabus. In fact, he is mentioned 23 times in the book of Acts.

Barnabus was a native of Cyprus, but here he is now in Jerusalem.

Vs 37 - So Barnabus, this Hebrew, from the tribe of Levi, who was a native of Cypress sold a field. So Barnabus owned a piece of land, we are not told where, but he sold it and brought (seemingly) **all of the proceeds** and laid them at the apostles feet.

Thus, Luke first mentions him, because he served as an example of the charity Luke just wrote about.

We can imagine he sold it, it probably drew in a decent amount of money, and he, as it will appear in a moment brought all of the proceeds to the apostles.

Now, there is likely some backstory here, that Luke does not mention, but it might be **right to consider**. Although **Barnabus did not do this to draw attention to himself, it likely did**.

I can almost imagine many in the early church thanking him for what he had done. For his massive generosity in caring for the needs of others.

The apostles probably **sent out a text, shot out a tweet, launched a quick email**, letting the believers know what Barnabas had done, they made a **slide in their Sunday School class**, they placed Barnabas and his massive gift, in the **“In the Know”** broadcast on Sunday morning (thanking him and praising God). 😊

Now Luke provides a bad example of deception motivated by a desire for self-promotion:

5:1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. 3 But Peter said, “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?”

5:1 - All this is happening with Barnabas, then we have the conjunction **but...** But there was a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira and we are now told what they did.

Much different and for much different reasons:

Ananias’ name means: "whom Yahweh has graciously given"

Sapphira’s name means: "a sapphire"

This couple sold a piece of property. No big deal, it is their property, they have the freedom to keep it or sell it, and they chose to sell it.

Vs 2 - Then Ananias, **with his wife’s knowledge** kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostle’s feet.

So, they conspired together and said we will say we sold the property for X and here is all the money, when they really sold it for Y and lied about the amount.

The sin is not in holding back money. It was their property and their money. They were not required to give any. **The sin was in the lie that had as its chief aim self-promotion.**

They conspired together to sell a piece of property, and bring the money to the apostles, but they decided to lie about the money they sold the property for.

Why would they lie about the amount of money they made?

It is likely, they want to fanfare of giving **all this money**, but they did **not want to give all the money**. **So they chose to lie, to pretend** they were giving it all when they were not.

Fruchetenbaum in his commentary writes: “*In the Greek text, the word Luke used for “to keep back” is νοσφιζομαι nosphizomai. The same word is used in the Septuagint version of Joshua 7:1 where Achan held on to something he was not supposed to have.*”

What Achan was to Joshua, Ananias and Sapphira were to the early church.

Last week we saw the first external challenge, persecution. Today, we see the first internal challenge, sin in the congregation.

Barnabas operated out of a love for his fellow believers. Ananias and Saphira, it seems, only desired the fanfare. **But what they did is clear...**

Vs 3 - So you can picture this, Ananias comes in to where Peter and possibly the other apostles are and says, hey Sapphira and I sold a piece of property on Old Nassauville Road, for \$20,000 when they had we actually sold it for \$40,000.

Having given the money to Peter, Peter knows (and we do not know how, we are probably right to assume that the Lord revealed it to him or it came through the gift of discernment) that Ananias is lying and Peter says to him: ***why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?***

We can only guess what went through Ananias' mind when Peter asked this:

- 1) Why has Satan filled your heart?
- 2) To lie (the sin)
- 3) To the Holy Spirit

Few things here:

First, this is the first use of **Satan's name** is used in the book of Acts.

Second, notice the question that Luke records that Peter said: Why has Satan filled your heart. The Greek word is: **πληρώω (pleroo)**, it means to be controlled by, to be under the influence of, to fill to the brim.

We have talked about this **root word** a couple of times. Let me show you the verses (Act 2:2-4; Acts 4:31).

We have seen those who were filled with the Spirit, here we are seeing one who Satan has filled his heart to lie.

Third, we should imagine that Ananias and his wife were controlled by Satan, they were Satanized and thus under Satan's control.

Fourth, Peter asks why Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. This reminds us that the **Holy Spirit is a person**. He is **not an impersonal power**, but rather the third person of the Godhead!

He can be lied to (Acts 5:3) quenched (I Thes 5:19) and grieved (Eph 4:30).

4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

Vs 4 - Peter goes further, **prior to selling the property** it was **yours** to do with as **you pleased**, no one made you put it up for sell. While it was **unsold it was yours**.

After it was sold, the proceeds, the money that came in was at your disposal. You could have kept all the money, you could have given some of the money. It was at your disposal.

APPLICATION: This is true for us today. God owns everything, but He has put us in charge to manage what He gives us, and to prayerfully determine how much to give, how generous we are to be.

Their sin was not that they held back some. The sin was **deception** that likely had at its **core a desire for self-promotion**.

Then we come to Peter's real question and his conclusion. First his question: **Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?**

Why **have you laid out**, why have you **hatched such a plan in your heart**, why would you lie about this.

His conclusion: You have not lied to men, but to God! Again, reminding us that the third person of the Trinity is God.

Vs 5 - When Ananias heard what Peter said, he died instantly. He heard Peter's words and he fell down dead!

People might ask, do you believe in people being slain in the Spirit? I can tell you this, Ananias was slain by the Spirit!

And great fear came upon all who heard it! **As we might imagine** this resulted in great fear coming upon all who heard the report about what happened with Ananias.

Vs 6 - The young men those who appeared to be present when this happened, got up, wrapped up his body and carried him out and buried him!

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

Vs 7 - Then Luke tells us that **approximately 3 hours elapsed** and Sapphira came in. It is interesting to me to see **Luke's interest with details**. It was not some amount of time; it was **about three hours**.

She had no idea what had happened to Ananias.

Vs 8 - Peter strikes up a conversation with Sapphira. He asks her: *"Tell me whether you sold the land for so much."*

This was her chance to come clean. Peter does not allow her to initiate the conversation, but instead he does. He asks her a point blank question. **This is her chance**.

Then she responds, again she has no idea what has occurred here, but she responds: *"Yes, for so much."*

So she corroborates her husband's story, thus we see Satan had also filled her heart!

Vs 9 - Then Peter asks her words that we imagine chilled her to the bone: Notice the question, how is it that **you two agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?**

The Greek word is to tempt, to try, to test. How under God's heaven have you two colluded together, to test the Spirit of God?

The ones who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.

10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Vs 10 - Then **Sapphira fell down at his feet and breathed her last**. Then the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her next to her husband.

WHY WOULD GOD DO SUCH A DRASTIC THING?

G. Camble Morgan wrote: *"The church pure is the church powerful."*

We will never be sinless in this life, but we should be desiring to sin less!

By the way, is this text descriptive or prescriptive? It describes something that happened in the early church that was not repeated in the New Testament.

But we should not miss the message: *“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” (2Co 7:1 ESV)*

Vs 11 - GREAT fear, **μέγας (megas) φόβος (phobos)** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard about these things.

Can you imagine if God did something like this today?

We can be certain, that this created great fear that came upon all who heard about what had happened in fact we are have been told this twice (5:5 and 5:11). .

God moved upon Luke’s heart to write this story to remind us of who our Father is, **He is the Holy One**. Our God is HOLY!

When we come to Christ **God cleanses us**, He sanctifies us. Paul said it like this in (II Cor 5:21).

But Paul will go on to say things like these (Gal 5:16; Eph 2:10; Eph 5:2; Col 4:5).

MAYBE HERE IS THE POINT, our God is a loving Father, yet He is a consuming fire (it is this balance of His nature) that is meant to help us walk in the shadow of our loving Father and in the Fear of the Lord! Consider (Deut 10:10-13).

12 ¶ Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.

Vs 12 - Here we are told this once again, many signs and wonders were being regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.

This was a time in the church when God was working many miracles.

This is **not normative**, there are times in the Bible when, for various reasons, **God was doing many signs and miracles**, this is one of those times.

God was doing many signs and wonders, among the people, by the hands of the apostles.

NOW, having said what I just said does not mean that God does not still do miracles today. He does. What it means is that these massive number of miracles only happen occasionally throughout the history of the world.

Here these miracles are happening surrounding the apostles to validate their message about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, it appears the early church continued to meet often at the temple mount and more specifically at Solomon’s porch.

As we might guess, this is capturing the attention of the Sanhedrin who clearly told Peter and John to stop preaching and teaching about Jesus.

Vs 13 - Now obviously people continued to give their life to Jesus and be saved, but Luke wants us to see that the judgement of God on sin, in the early church, caused those who had not been changed to avoid “joining onboard” with this new and exciting movement.

As we might guess, as the church rapidly grew it likely pulled in people who wanted to be a part of something like this, but who had not been saved.

This **temporal judgment** of God had a “colling effect” on those who were not truly saved, and thus Luke would write, the rest dared not join them.

But the people did hold the new church of **Jesus Christ in high esteem.**

14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”

Vs 14 - While it had a cooling effect on those who have not been transformed by the gospel, real believers, those who had placed faith in Jesus Christ, were added to the Lord. Then Luke tells us plainly that it was **multitudes of both men and women!**

This is now the fifth progress report to Theophilus:

- 1) Following the death of Jesus the band of believers was on life support, only 120 remained.
- 2) Then Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) AD 33 and 3,000 souls are saved.
- 3) The following Pentecost the Lord is adding daily to the church rolls such as should be saved.
- 4) Many who heard what Peter proclaimed there in Solomon’s Portico believed, and the number of men alone was ABOUT 5,000.
- 5) Here Luke tells Theophilus that multitudes of both men and women are coming to Jesus by faith (even after the events of Ananias and Sapphira).

What would Theophilus make of the gospel of Jesus now?

Vs 15 - The miracles were so normal and so prevalent that people began to carry the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, so that as Peter came by, at least the shadow of Peter might fall on them.

By way of implication, although Luke will say it clearly in the next verse, God was miraculously healing these people.

You need to see that during this transitional time, God was doing many amazing, undeniable powerful works and many people were being healed, as I said a moment ago to validate the message of Jesus, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave!

Vs 16 - The word of what God is spreading beyond Jerusalem **people are coming from surrounding towns** and bringing with them, the sick, those afflicted with various ailments, the Greek word literally means weak, infirm, or feeble and those afflicted with unclean spirits, those, who were vexed or troubled by unclean spirits.

They were ALL HEALED!

This is an amazing time, the church is growing rapidly, God is healing people in a way that seems similar to how He healed people during Jesus’ ministry. These were exciting times for the infant church!

But do not miss the larger point, the church was walking in the **fear of the Lord!**

But there is a problem brewing! The Sanhedrin are observing all this and they are not pleased. They will become the focus next week!
