

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-16

LESSON 284 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death" (Proverbs 21:6).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 4:32-37 ³² And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

³³ And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

³⁴ Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

³⁵ And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

³⁶ And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus,

³⁷ Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:1-16 ¹ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

² And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

³ But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land?

⁴ Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Early Church

1. The multitude of believers were of one heart and of one soul, Acts 4:32;

Romans 15:5-6 ⁵ Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

⁶ That ye may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:27 ²⁷ Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Philippians 2:2 ² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

1 Peter 3:8 ⁸ Finally, *be ye* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be* pitiful, *be* courteous:

2. With great power they gave witness of Christ's resurrection, Acts 4:33;

Acts 1:8 ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1:22 ²² Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

3. Houses and lands were sold and a distribution was made, Acts 4:34-37;

Acts 2:45 ⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.

II The Hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira

1. Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and kept back part of the price, Acts 5:1, 2.

2. Peter rebuked Ananias and God sent judgment upon him, Acts 5:3-6;

Numbers 30:2 ² If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.

3. Sapphira also lied and received the same judgment, Acts 5:7-11.

4. The signs that follow believers were present, showing God's approval of the Church, Acts 5:12-16;

Mark 16:17 ¹⁷ And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

Mark 16:18 ¹⁸ They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

NOTES:

Unity

The three and a half years of the ministry of Jesus, followed by

in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

⁵ And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

⁶ And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

⁷ And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

⁸ And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

⁹ Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out.

¹⁰ Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband.

¹¹ And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

¹² And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

¹³ And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

¹⁴ And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

¹⁵ Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

¹⁶ There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto

His death and resurrection, together with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, had made a marvellous change in the hearts and lives of the disciples. They realized that they were no longer their own, for they had been bought with a price – the precious Blood of Jesus. They had been called from different walks of life to discipleship with the lowly Nazarene. They had heard Him speak of the coming Kingdom and had had different reactions and aspirations concerning the setting up and the administration of that Kingdom. They had seen Him heal the sick, comfort the sorrowing, feed the multitudes, raise the dead, and denounce the evildoers. They had heard Him cry out against the hypocrites of their day and commend the widow who gave her all. They had been with their Master at that Last Supper and had seen Him betrayed into the hands of His enemies, when before they had seen Him delivered from the hands of those who had sought to kill Him. They had heard their Lord pray for them that they might be sanctified, that they might have that unity which is made possible only through the Blood of sanctification. And they had been sanctified.

Probably never has such unity prevailed in the Church as existed at that time. They were all of one heart and of one soul. Every taint of selfish gain and greed had been banished from their lives. They were members of a truly "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; . . . holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). They were members of, and show us a picture of, the mystical body of believers that is known as the Bride of Christ, the Church of the Firstborn, the Full Overcomers. They were truly and entirely sanctified, had received this glorious experience prior to receiving the third wonderful experience – the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which they received on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1** ¹ **And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Hebrews 2:11** ¹¹ **For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, John 17:21** ²¹ **That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. John 17:23** ²³ **I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.**).

The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection hope of the Church was the theme of their testimony and of their preaching. It was this preaching of the resurrection that stirred the combined forces of hell and caused all the disciples of Satan to assert themselves against the Apostles and disciples. But they had found a new hope in God, the hope of the resurrection, and this hope was made a living hope because Christ was risen from the dead. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins," Paul the Apostle argued at a later date, thereby presenting to us the firm statement and stand as taken by the Apostles from the beginning.

Hearing the threatenings and realizing the persecutions that awaited them from the allied forces of evil, because of the disciples' preaching of this vital hope and life-giving doctrine of the Church, the disciples began to pray the more earnestly that God would give them boldness to preach the Word, and that signs and wonders would be done through the name of Jesus.

Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Joy and gladness filled their hearts; and such fervent love for the Lord and for one another was in their beings that it caused their already sanctified hearts to be all the more united as one. A philosopher was once asked the question: "What is a friend?" He answered: "One soul dwelling in two bodies." The Scripture tells us that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." They were bound together in a bond of Christian love and communion that the sanctified know – and that the world can never know.

They did not call their possessions their own, and there was none among them that lacked anything. They had all things in common. Those who had houses and lands sold them and brought the price to the Apostles for distribution to be made according to the needs of each one.

We are told that Joses, who was named Barnabas by the Apostles, had land and that he sold it and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet. We are not told that the Lord required that of him, but he put everything he had wholeheartedly into the Lord's hands. We do not know how much the land was worth. It might have been a large sum, or it could have been just a small amount. But whatever it was, it was all given for Christ's cause and work.

Failure to Pay the Price

But we see that even from this state of grace it is possible to fall. Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price for themselves. This is typical of many professed Christians who are withholding from the Lord that which is rightfully His. Some withhold their time; they have no time at all for the Lord's work. These have time for pleasure and time for business, but the worship of God is often neglected by them. They will easily stay home from God's House if it is not convenient for them to go there; or if they are a little upset physically, or if a piece of work needs to be done, they will make an excuse for not giving God the love, time, and service that belong to Him.

Others withhold their talents. Instead of using their talents for the Lord, they fully withhold them or give just such portions as they desire, paying only a part of the price.

Lying

What might be said to be the worst part of the story of Ananias and Sapphira is not that they kept back part of the price, but that they lied about what they did. They wanted the Apostles to think they were giving all; therefore, deceit and hypocrisy was their motive. Ananias and Sapphira had talked the matter over and reasoned among themselves and no doubt had decided they had better keep part of the money as security for their old age. They might have reasoned that there could come a time when Providence would fail them, and they would need some extra money to fall back upon. But they wanted to sail on the crest of the tide of popularity and not lose any of the earthly credit that might come to them if they gave all, so they decided to keep back part of the price and yet act as if it were the whole. Ananias and Sapphira never stopped to consider that they were reckoning with

God and not with men. They forgot that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Peter did not say, "Ananias you have lied to **me**." He said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? . . . thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." When Ananias heard these words he fell down dead and was immediately carried out by some young men and buried.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing anything about what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her if they had sold the land for so much. Her answer was, "Yea, for so much." Peter rebuked her and said, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" She immediately fell dead at the feet of Peter; and the young men who were just returning from the burial of her husband, carried her out and buried her.

Judgment

In this case the judgment of God followed swiftly and suddenly. Their sin was of no small magnitude and the Lord visited it with severe punishment. Judgment may not always come as swiftly as in this and in other cases of this kind, or where any other form of sin is committed, but judgment will come, nevertheless. One may suffer in this life, to a certain degree, for his sins, but that does not mean that his judgment in the next world will be any less severe. All who are guilty of unrepented sin will be cast into hell forever.

At this time the Church was in its infancy, and for the benefit of that Church the Lord showed His displeasure at deceit, fraud, and hypocrisy. Had the guilty pair been permitted to live, others would have followed in their footsteps, thinking that the long-suffering of God would let mercy be extended to them. God knew that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). God made the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira an example of His justice and judgment.

Wonderful Miracles

Great fear came upon the Church and upon all the people that heard about the workings of God among His people. This exhibition of judgment answered the end for which it was sent, for deep piety gripped every heart; and if there were any other traces of hypocrisy and deception present such were immediately banished from their midst. The people felt the force and power of the Apostles' doctrine, and, to attest to the truth of that doctrine, the Lord wrought special miracles by the hands of the Apostles.

The news of all this spread not only throughout Jerusalem, but to the surrounding cities as well. People came bringing their sick from everywhere. There were so many they could not get near Peter so some laid their sick ones on beds and couches in the street, that the shadow of Peter passing by might fall upon them. The Bible states that "they were healed every one." Such was the faith of the simplehearted folk, and such was the power of the early Church. It was the humility of the Apostles that made

possible the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through their ministry. They did not claim to possess any power or holiness of their own that did the miracles. It was through the name of Jesus and through faith in that name that the healing was performed. Let us "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

QUESTIONS

1. What was the spiritual condition of the Church at this time?
2. What did Joses do about some land he owned?
3. What did Ananias and Sapphira do about some possessions they had?
4. How did God look on what Ananias and Sapphira did?
5. What effect did the whole tragedy have on the Church and on the people in general?
6. What happens to us when we lie or deceive today?
7. To what extent was the Lord performing miracles by the prayers of the Apostles?
8. When they could not get near the Apostles, what did some do with their sick?