

# Are You a Baranabas or Ananias

by Danny Bond

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*The sermon highlights the importance of true giving and love in the early church, leading to great blessings and power.*

**Duration:** 52:44

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:33-35, Acts 4:37 - 5:11

**Topics:** "Ananias"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker examines the account of Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira in Acts 4 and 5. The speaker highlights the contrast between Barnabas, who genuinely gives, and Ananias and Sapphira, who pretend to give without truly living a giving life. The multitude of believers in the early church are described as being of one heart and one soul, demonstrating their unity and sacrificial giving. However, Ananias and Sapphira's hypocrisy and deceit are exposed, leading to their tragic deaths as a warning against dishonesty and insincere giving in the church.

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## Transcript

Father, as we come to the book of Acts this morning, we are coming to you. We thank you, Lord, that we're not here just to do a study like sitting in a library to do a book report. We are here with you, with open hearts and open Bibles, and thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are the resident truth teacher in each one of our hearts.

And we do pray, Lord, that now, by your Spirit, you would lead us, each one individually and all of us together, through this passage and minister to us, that all of it, Lord, would teach us, and some of it, Lord, those special parts would penetrate us deeply and meet that need that we have today before you. So, Lord, use your word now to bless us and bring us into deeper worship with you, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I have given this passage a title, and the title is Barnabas or Ananias, which one are you? Barnabas or Ananias, which one are you? In the passage before us, we're going to pick up in Acts 4, 32, then we'll cross over into chapter 5 and go down to verse 11. It's worth pointing out that man put in the chapter divisions in your Bible. When Luke wrote the book of Acts, he didn't have chapter divisions and verses.

He just simply wrote it as a hysterical narrative, a historical narrative. It's exciting. It's not that hysterical, but it is exciting, and there's never a dull moment.

But the chapter division between chapter four and chapter five was put in by editors, and I have to point out it's an unfortunate division because it breaks the flow of thought. So take the chapter division out and we'll be ready to roll here. For years, I wondered why the Holy Spirit would give so much space to this account.

There's a good bit of detail about Barnabas, but there's a lot of space and detail about Ananias and Sapphira, and I wondered about that for years. It becomes very clear on close examination just exactly why there's so much detail here. In the end, what you discover is this.

It is a study in contrast, a study in contrast. Barnabas is brought into the forefront and then Ananias is brought into the forefront, and it's a study in contrast of a true giving individual and an individual who wants to be known as giving without living a giving life. So there's much here for us.

There is a great blessing on this truly giving body of believers, and then there is the great tragedy of hypocrisy and missed blessing all taking place in the same church. And this was a good church. So in Acts 4:32, now the multitude of those who believed, I like that now the multitude of those who believe they have been persecuted, they've been forbidden to preach the word, but they've gone on to do it anyway, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And now there's a multitude because they wouldn't back down. 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.

Here is this wonderful group of believers of one heart and one soul. Why? Because don't miss this persecution. Persecution had driven them closer to God and then closer to each other.

So this thing that none of us want so often works such a great work when it happens. Persecution drew them closer to God and closer to one another. And in verse 33, and with great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all.

Nor was there any 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. And they laid them at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated son of encouragement.

Notice a Levite of the country of Cyprus, which is actually an island in the Mediterranean sea. He wasn't native to Jerusalem. He had land and he sold it.

Verse 37, he brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Wonderful man, wonderful gift. Then chapter five, verse one, but a certain man named Ananias with his wife, Sapphira, sold the possession and 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. And 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 while it remained? Was it not your own 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. Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last.

So great fear came upon those who heard these things, and the young men in the midst arose and wrapped him up and carried him out. Look at this and buried him on the spot. He dies.

The young men get up, they go over, they wrap him up, they take him out, they bury him right away. Verse seven, that was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what happened, which may be in fact exactly why she came in. It's very possible she wasn't planning on coming at all.

But as the time is going by and the clock is ticking off and Ananias isn't coming home, she goes down to the church to find out what happened to him. Where is he? I think that's exactly the case. And so she comes not knowing where is Ananias? What's happened? And as she comes, the Holy Spirit gives her a chance to repent of this sin and she doesn't.

So she shows up and Peter says to her, verse eight, Peter said to her or answered her, tell me whether you sold the land for so much. This is her chance to come clean with the truth. God always gives you a chance to repent before he brings judgment.

Always. He's gracious. Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.

She said yes, for so much. 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. And immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last and the young men came in.

They don't get up this time. They come in. They've been out burying the body of Ananias.

So they're now just finishing and they're getting done. They're coming. Whoa, this is a heavy day at church.

They come back in and just as they come back in, boom, another one falls and they take her out and they bury her by her husband who was already buried. Verse 11. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

What a fascinating passage. Definitely not cliché, is it or typical? And thank God that he's not working exactly the same way in the offering today. Or a lot of us would go down, I think by now none of us would be left and we'll talk about what really happened there.

Do you think Ananias and Sapphira went to heaven? You ever thought about it? You should think about it. We'll hit that before we're done. Let's talk about, first of all, the good going on here, the blessing on the true giving body, the blessing on the true giving individual Barnabas.

And then we'll come to the blessing missed by hypocrisy to begin with the blessing on the true giving body. This is a great church, the early church. And there is great love here in their midst.

In Acts 4:32, now is the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. They were a one heart and one soul. What a great state to be in.

And it was the adoration of Jesus Christ that brought them together like that. They were all of one heart and one soul on Jesus Christ. How far so many are from that today? This is a worshiping church, an adoring church, and it is a united church as a result.

The centrality of Jesus Christ is at the center of this church. I'm reminded of what the psalmist said in Psalm 57, verse 7. He said, my heart is fixed. Oh, God, my heart is fixed.

I will sing and give praise, a fixed heart. They had hearts fixed on the Lord, and that's why they were of one heart and one soul. In Psalm 108, verse one, David writes and he says, oh, God, my heart is fixed.

Time goes by. The psalmist writes again in Psalm 112, verse seven, he shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

If ever there was a group of believers who all had their hearts fixed on the same thing and on the same Christ, it was here in the early church. This is a pure church. This is a real church.

This is the way every church should be. Christ adoring, Christ honoring and filled with his love. As a result, because they love the Lord so much, they saw everything they owned as belonging to God.

Each individual saw what he had as belonging to God. So in Acts 4, 32, second half of the sentence, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own. But they had all things in common.

As a result, everything they had belonged to the Lord. I love the words of Alexander McLaren here. He said there is nothing of modern communism in all this.

But there is a lesson to the modern church as to the obligations of wealth and the claims of brotherhood, which is all but universally disregarded. In quote, great words. This has been used to substantiate communism and it's not talking about that.

McLaren is very, very precise when he says this is a lesson to the modern church as to the obligations of wealth and the claims of brotherhood, because it's all but universally disregarded. In other words, most Christians don't live like this. They don't have such a passion for the Lord and such a love for the brethren, and they don't have a sensitivity to their wealth and what they have to be able to meet the needs of the people around them.

They're too busy just working on their own life. McLaren is good at bringing it out to the light and making it very clear and yet simple. So here is a group of people that the Lord is free to work through them because their hearts are fixed on him and they deeply, deeply love the Lord and love one another.

When you live like that and everything you have belongs to God, he can do anything he wants to do with you. In fact, he can then give or take away as he pleases. He can use you any way he wants.

Can you hold your place there and turn to Philippians chapter 4 verse 12 in your Bible? Philippians chapter 4 verse 12. Paul here is writing to the Philippians. Paul had been a very wealthy man.

Then he came to know Jesus Christ. He lost a lot of what he had. Different times he had a lot, at different times he had nothing.

Writing to the Philippians in chapter 4 verse 12, he said, I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. If you could stop right there, the church we're looking at in the book of Acts knows how to abound. There are people in there that have been blessed by God and they know how to abound.

They know what to do with what they have when they do abound. And Paul has been there and he's also been very poor. He says, I know how to be abased.

I know how to abound. And he says everywhere then in all things I have, he says, learned. It's a process of learning.

I have learned both to be full and I've learned to be hungry. I've learned to abound and I've learned to suffer needs so that whether I'm abounding or whether I'm poor at the moment, I've learned verse 13, this, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. My sufficiency is Christ.

And so I can be poor or I can be abounding. Either way, I know how to operate as a Christian, loving God and loving my brethren. And so it was in his life.

He lived like these people here. Now, turn back to the book of Acts. When you live like that, you're not tied to anything except Jesus and his will for your life.

And he can use you as a result because they saw everything as they owned as being God's. They very naturally met each other's needs. So that here's what happened.

The personal things of their lives became secondary to the cause of Christ after they came to know Jesus Christ. See, I think that what we see with all this giving and this great love in this body is something that came about fairly suddenly. Don't forget that the bulk of this church was birthed out of the group that came up to Passover and stayed for Pentecost so that many of them stayed and didn't go back home.

That's why there are those with needs that have no money, and then there are those that have land. Many of them had come up to Pentecost in obedience to the word. They heard the word preached by Peter on Pentecost, and they stayed and lived in Jerusalem.

And as a result, they didn't have jobs. They didn't have money. So there was great need.

But the others that lived there had enough to meet their need, and as a result, their needs were taken care of. When you come to know Jesus Christ, things change. And one of the greatest things that happens to you is he makes you a giver, a giver.

You learn that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The personal things of your life become secondary to the cause of Christ. So verse 34, Nor was there any 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, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and they distributed to each one as they had need. Now, that doesn't mean they sold the houses they lived in, because as you go on in the book of Acts, you find people have houses, extra houses, extra land. Again, Alexander McLaren said, Thus, they possessed as though they possessed not.

And each held his property as a trust from God for his brethren. Lord, my life is yours. What I have is yours.

And whatever you want to use for your work, you just tell me. So the personal things of their lives became secondary to the cause of Christ. And as a result, the whole church got into giving and the offering to make it very practical.

Why? Because they had a sense that they as individuals were the church, that they as individuals were the church. They were mindful of that. You are the church.

The church is never a building. It is the people. And they had a sense.

We are the church. So we take care of each other. And as a result, great grace was upon them.

They came in verse 35 and they laid at the apostles' feet whatever they had. The apostles then distributed to each as anyone had need. This is not communism, share and share alike.

This is as each has need. And in this practical demonstration of love, you know that there had to be a powerful witness that went out around Jerusalem because Jesus said, They will know you are my disciples by your love one to another. So here they are.

Now, one thing that's interesting to me is that selling houses and land is far more sacrificial than just giving a portion of your income because selling houses and land is liquidating assets that could be irreplaceable. Thus, follow this reducing one's personal security. Reducing one's personal security, they were placing their security more and more in the Lord and less and less in things and bank accounts.

Verse 35 and they laid them at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need. You know why they did this? Because God was just simply working in their hearts. In First Thessalonians 4 9, it says, But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write you, Paul says, for you yourselves are taught by who? By God to love one another.

Here they are with this great love because God's great love was flowing through them as they sought him above all things. And then they had great power. Acts 4 33 says with great power they gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and they had great grace, great love, great power and great grace were the earmarks of this church simply because Christ was the center of everything, not man.

And they were anointed with the blessing of God. When I read that phrase in verse 33, great grace was upon them, I think of simply this. They were under the smile of God, under the smile of God.

God's touch was on their lives. So as they sought him, Lord, what do we do? Where do we go? How do we give? How should we worship? The blessing of God was upon them as they witnessed, as they worshipped, as they fellowship together. They were under the smile of God.

So here's the blessing on this true giving body. But in this church, there's an individual and there is a blessing on this true giving individual. This church cultivated great individual givers.

It cultivated great individual givers. Acts 4 36 and Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it and he brought the money and he laid it at the apostles feet. Now, Barnabas, there are others doing this, but Barnabas is taken and brought to the forefront and singled out by Luke as an example.

And Luke gives us a good deal of detail about him. It's rarely the case that you find the tribe of a disciple. Name.

Think about that. Very rarely do you find the tribe of a disciple named. Here is Joseph, verse 36, also named Barnabas by the apostles, a Levite of the country of Cyprus.

Why did Luke put that in there? I thank God for the detail from Luke. Luke put that in there because we read previously that not a few of the priests believe, but that there were a number of the priests turning to the Lord as well here by this point in time. All the persecution that's gone on right before this has come from the priests.

So Luke is careful to say there was a Levite who was named Barnabas by the brethren and he was a great giver. So he's there in their midst. The Levites were those that were the tribe set aside by God, out from which came the priests.

The priests came from the tribe of Levi. Now, by this time, the priests are the greatest opposing factor to Christ and Christianity. So here's the deal.

There are some very grand who believer believers who came from the ranks of those who were opposing Christ and the Christians the most out from those who were opposing the Lord, the most came some of the greatest Christians during this time. Isn't that great? I love that because we tend to look at those that persecute the church and those that disdain what we do as being a lost cause out from their ranks came Barnabas and he rises to the surface as a great believer in Jesus Christ and a great example to us. So the tribe of Levi, he wasn't from Jerusalem.

He was from Cyprus in the Mediterranean. He is this is worth noting. He is related to John Mark Colossians 4:10.

He is related to John Mark. He's effectively his uncle. So we read that his sister's house was the meeting place of the Jerusalem church in Acts 12:12.

So Mark in the Bible and Barnabas are related. He is his uncle. And Luke describes him as a good man and acts 11:24 and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

This man is a great example. His example is so powerful, they changed his name. Have you ever given anyone a nickname? Come on now.

We all give people nicknames. Come on, be honest. Don't look at me like that.

We all give people nicknames. Now, what does it take to get one? What makes you eligible for the group to give you one? We do it as groups. You have to have a very dominant character trait that really sticks out there so that the group agrees that that.

Yeah, it's like a caricature of reality. So those in our midst sometimes that talk a lot, they get little nicknames and they don't know it. Those that never talk get nicknames, too, and they don't know it.

We tend to give nicknames. Sometimes they're good. Sometimes they're not so good, but it takes a very strong, consistent trait in a person over a period of time to gain a permanent nickname.

So then this man who is nicknamed in Acts 4:36, he is named by the apostles the son of encouragement. Can you imagine how encouraging then he must have been? And he got that nickname during the midst of heavy persecution. So when other people are like knuckling under.

Oh, man, I can't take it. The devil's been really banging on me. Barnabas comes along and says, come on, get up.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. You have the Holy Spirit filling your brother. Let's go.

We can do this. He was there to encourage the brethren. He was such an effect on the brethren that they gave him the name Mr. Encouragement, Mr. Encouragement.

So when he came walking down the street, you go, hey, here comes Mr. Encouragement. You see him sparkling and beaming as he's coming down the pathway. What an example.

I pray that God makes me like this man, Mr. Encourager. And I pray that God makes each one of you like him in good measure, Mr. or Mrs. Encourager. What a great nickname.

What a great example. So Barnabas set forth as an example. And Barnabas is really used mightily in the early church.

Now you know why. Luke sets him forth here, I think, as a forecast of how much God is going to use him. And he gives us the secret of why he is such a kind, encouraging man.

You know, when you have an individual like this, you have the kind of man or woman God can truly work through and God does work through. You can't be real encouraging unless you are others minded. Others minded.

Otherly minded. Barnabas is known for being that way. You know, he is mentioned 24 times in the book of Acts alone, 24 times.

And here he is. He sells his land and he gives it and he encourages the brethren, does all of these things. Now you might think, well, I don't have any land to sell.

I don't have anything. How can I be an encourager? How can I be a giver like Barnabas if I don't have anything? That question is worth answering, especially if Paul said, I've learned what it's like to abound and I've learned what it's like to be a base. How do I give if I'm a base? I want to show you.

Hold your place here. Turn to Luke 21, Luke 21, verse one. Jesus is with the disciples here.

He's teaching them and they are right by the treasury of the temple. And at that time, the the receptacles for the offerings were made of gold. They're very conspicuous.

And a lot of the religious leaders made a lot of fanfare when they would go up to give. Some of them would stop before they gave flash their offering in the sun and have someone announce it, then drop it in and everybody be whole. Wow.

What an offering. Thank you very much. Same time, same place next week.

I'll be here. Thank you very much. You're all dismissed.

And, you know, Jesus said of people like that, they have their reward. That's it. They got their reward.

The praise of men. Now, in the middle of this, Jesus is there with his disciples, whatever it is he's teaching them. He stops and he says, stop everybody.

Look, there's a little poor woman who's a widow and she's about to give her offering. Luke 21, verse one. He looked up and he saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, as I've just described.

And he also saw a certain poor widow putting in two mites, two very small copper coins. You know what they added up to? One eighth of a penny. One eighth of a penny.

And Jesus stops and he points her out to all the disciples in verse three. So he said, truly, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all for out for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God. But she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood she had.

So you say, how can I be a giver if I'm being a base? You just give what you can and God will notice. And when it comes from a heart like that, he takes notice. And what she was saying, Mark tells us she put in all her livelihood.

Luke tells us she put in all her livelihood. In other words, she didn't have anything left. She she kind of snuck around these religious leaders making their big fanfare.

She quietly dropped in her two pennies and she said, Lord, that's it. That's all I have. I don't have any more.

And you're my provider. Seek first the kingdom of heaven. Everything else will follow.

Lord, I trust you. I love you. I just want to give what I could.

And the Lord was a provider. The Lord noticed, you know, he blessed her. So you give what you can and God will bless it.

You don't have to necessarily have a lot to give. What you really need is simply this, a giving heart. That's what the Lord looks at, a giving heart.

So Barnabas is the kind of man or woman God can work through that kind of individual. God works through them. Now, go back to Acts as we're looking at Barnabas.

I want to remind you of something. I want to remind you of who he disciplined. Who did God use this man with this wonderful example? Well, for one thing, he disciplined the apostle Paul in Acts, chapter nine, verse twenty six.

It says when Saul had come to Jerusalem. He tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, I guess so he's been killing them, putting them in prison, having them tortured. Suddenly he is converted on the Damascus Road and then he comes around the Christians.

Jesus converts him out there personally. Then he comes to Jerusalem later and he wants to join up with the church and they're afraid of him. They think he's just coming, pretending to be a Christian, and then he's going to bust loose with his persecution.

So they won't let him in the church. We read Acts nine, twenty seven. But Barnabas took him.

Great words. Barnabas took him and he brought him to the apostles and he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that he had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. In other words, Barnabas took him, said, Come on, I'll take care of you.

He disciplined Paul. He brought him in. He got him into the church.

Barnabas was so credible in the church that the brethren then were willing to take in. Saul, who became known as Paul, Barnabas influence went into Paul in a great way. And what happens is you find Paul discipling people like Barnabas.

For example, he taught the church at Ephesus when he founded it in such a way that they came to know it is more blessed to give than receive. And when Paul was on the ship on the way past Ephesus going toward Rome and he met with the elders from the Ephesian church, they came all the way out to the ocean, about nine miles, and they met with Paul on the beach and they wept and they cried because this man was such a source of God's love to them. And they were told by Paul that they wouldn't see him again.

And it was a very sad time because so much of the love of God had been revealed to them and brought into their lives by Paul to these people in Ephesus. My point is this. He was disciplined by Barnabas, and he went on to be one who disciplined others to become like Barnabas, great givers, great lovers.

So if he disciplined Paul, you could say, couldn't you, that he disciplined a winner, right? That's easy. So Barnabas was used by God to disciple winners. But here's an interesting thing.

Barnabas was also used by God to disciple losers. In other words, he wasn't just one who said, I only work with the elite. Give me the erudite, the smart, the strong, the gifted, the luminaries, the shooting stars.

I'll work with them. No, he was willing to work also with losers. Let me give you an example of that.

Acts 15:36. Can you turn in your Bible? This is that well-known account where Barnabas and Paul finally split up. Acts 15:36.

Then after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, let's go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they're doing. Verse 37. Now, Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

Now, Barnabas insisted they should not. Paul insisted they should not take him with them because he had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone up to the work. In other words, on their last trip, Mark bailed out.

When you're on a missionary journey and someone who is a key player on the team bails out, it makes everybody else on the team have to pick up the slack, causes everyone else on the team to have to pick up the slack and do double duty. So Paul, now going for his second missionary journey, he says, listen, on the last one, Mark bailed out. He left us hanging.

We're going on a very important journey now. We're not taking any people that are going to bail out again. So he's not going.

And Barnabas is very adamant about it. But Paul knows what is ahead of them and he knows he'll never make it. And by the way, it was a very difficult journey and he wouldn't have.

Now, verse 39, the contention became so sharp they parted from one another. And we read an interesting thing in Acts 15:39. So Barnabas took Mark and he sailed to Cyprus.

Now you know why he sailed to Cyprus, because he came from Cyprus. That was his home in the Mediterranean. He took him back to where his native home was.

He was, in fact, his uncle. And we read in Acts 15:40, but then Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And everybody agreed, you know, Paul, that was a really good move.

Good decision. Barnabas takes Mark and he disappears. And the wonderful thing is he takes this loser.

I call him a loser because at that point in time he is. But the thing about it is in the kingdom of God, you can be a loser, but you don't have to stay that way. God will bring people alongside of you to work with you so you can become a winner in the kingdom of God.

And he worked with John Mark. And when Paul was writing his last letter, Second Timothy, chapter four, verse 11, he writes and he says, Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you.

I love this, for he is useful to me for ministry. Isn't that great? Years earlier, he says he's not coming. He's useless now at the end of his life when it's very critical who is around him.

He says, bring Mark. I want him with me. He's so useful.

Who made him that way? Jesus? Yes. But who did God use? Barnabas. When you're willing to work with winners and losers in the kingdom of God.

Then you have become Christ like because the kingdom is made up of a lot of winners and a lot of losers. And the great thing is that Jesus Christ can take a loser and turn them into a very productive, useful individual. So Barnabas, what an example.

What an example. No wonder he was blessed. No wonder this church was blessed.

It's no wonder. But I'll tell you what, it is a big wonder to me why Anna and I are so blessed to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God. But Barnabas, Annias and Sapphira are not blessed like everybody else.

By that I mean it's an amazement to me. We have seen so far the blessing on this true giving body and the blessing on the true giving individual. Now we come to the last thing.

The blessing missed by hypocrisy. This is a great church. No need to be a hypocrite.

But the quality of the church doesn't always determine whether people are hypocrites or not. Would you agree to that? That's an individual choice. And that's what we find here.

Acts 5:1, a certain man named Ananias with his wife, Sapphira, sold a possession. Do you remember the story of Achan in the Old Testament, in the book of Joshua? Joshua went into the promised land. They took Jericho by a great miracle of God.

Huge fortress. Archaeologists have discovered stones there that they say are part of the oldest known fortress on earth. Huge fortress.

Great victory. We know the account of taking Jericho. Then they went on to Ai and they lost the battle and it was a little tiny place and they lost because of a man named Achan.

The Lord said, don't touch any of the wealth of these ungodly people. Don't take any of their idols. And Achan, who loved money, he went in during the battle at Jericho and he got a bunch of their stuff and he hid it under his tent.

And as a result, when they went up to fight at Ai, they had defeat instead of victory because he brought sin into their midst. Achan in the book of Joshua is much like Ananias in the book of Acts, just as they were early going in the promised land as God's people, and God was very jealous to guard their purity, that's why he judged Achan so severely.

Here is the early church and God is very jealous over the purity of the early church, and that's why he judges Ananias so severely. See, Satan has failed to stop them by persecution. So what's his new strategy? Pollute them, corrupt them from within.

That is why God acts in the way that he does here so severely. You have to see that. So in Acts 5, 1, Ananias and Sapphira, they sold the possession and they kept back part of the proceeds.

Verse two, and they brought it. They laid it at the apostles feet and verse three, Peter said. Ananias, don't miss this.

Ananias, why? Ananias, why? Ananias, why? You have to hear the pathos. You have to hear the redemptive tone in Peter's voice. You just read the black and white words.

You don't hear any tone. But think about for a minute, who is Peter? Who is the man that failed Christ when he was sifted by Satan? Peter, who is the man that was walking down the road with Jesus and he said, I have to go up to Jerusalem and I have to go to the cross and I have to die and was taken by Peter and rebuked. You're not going to the cross.

And Jesus responded, saying, the Lord rebuke you, Peter. No, the Lord rebuke you, Satan. Peter is a man so well acquainted with Satan's working in the human heart.

It's no wonder to me God has Peter standing there at this moment. Peter knew very well what it's like to be human. He knew very well what it's like to have good intentions.

And he knew very well what it's like to have Satan cut you off right in the middle of it. And you have to make a choice to do right or do wrong. And he knew what it was like to do wrong.

So you understand that and you're going to read that different. I used to read it like Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart with the light of the Holy Spirit and keep back the price of land? You're going to die. Boom.

And he turns everybody he did. We know he did. And his wife's coming.

She's going to die, too. I just saw it as judgment on a hypocrite. I don't see it that way anymore.

I see a man, Peter, who was well acquainted with this type of thing. And he is reaching out. Ananias, why? All Ananias had to do was say, stop.

I'll tell you why. I'm in sin. Peter, pray with me.

I want to repent right now. I've done a terrible thing. I'm about to do a terrible thing.

Peter, pray for me. And then Peter could have said, oh, God bless you. I know what it's like, man.

Let's pray. And he could have gone home. He could have said, you know what, Peter, I kept back part of the money.

In fact, I'm going to keep it all because I can't give it with a right heart. God bless you. Take your money.

The Lord loves a cheerful giver. Go home, Ananias. But instead, he didn't heed the love of God to give him a chance to turn from his sin.

And in verse four, Peter said, 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. It's very important to see verse three and verse four. In verse three, Peter says, why has Satan filled their heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? In verse four, he puts the responsibility on Peter.

Why have you conceived in your heart to do this? We can't just go say the devil made me do it. We have a will and we have to exercise it for right or for wrong. Yes, Satan was involved.

Definitely. But Ananias consented to Satan's involvement rather than saying no. You know how Jesus says in the book of Revelation to the one church, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Well, in a very real sense, you could look at Satan that way. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. He wants to get into your life.

He will come in if you let him. He can't come in unless you let him. Christ lives in you.

If you say no, he can't come in. But if you let him, he's going to lead you into all kinds of weird things. And that's what happened here.

Why Ananias? And then verse five, Ananias hearing these words fell down and breathed his last. And so great fear came on all those who heard these things. The young men arose, wrapped him up, carried him out.

In the end, he got caught right in the middle. He was about to give that money away. And he thought, you know what? I don't want to give it all.

Just give a little tiny bit. Oh, I want to be known as a great giver in the church, like Barnabas. So I'll go and I'll lie.

And God saw it all. God saw it all and dealt with him heavily because God loved this church and he didn't want the early church right up front to be a bunch of hypocrites telling lies to each other, acting like they were giving when they weren't giving, acting like they were loving when they weren't loving. And so he sets him out as an example.

And God does that occasionally. Then verse seven, it was about three hours later. So Peter's standing there thinking about this for three hours.

And then comes his wife not knowing what had happened. So you can hear again in his voice the same thing. You know what, Sapphira? You can get out of this.

I'm going to ask you a question and I'm going to ask it in such a way you have an opportunity to repent. How much did you sell the land for? You know what, Peter? I don't know what's going on here, but I have to tell you, my husband, I did a terrible thing. Oh, let me pray with you.

Oh, please do. I want to turn from this. But no, the decision was firm.

And so Peter said to her, how is it? Verse nine, you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord. Look, the feet of those whose feet have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out. And immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.

And the young man came in and found her dead and carried her out and buried her by her husband. So great fear came on all the church and upon all who heard these things. Great fear is a healthy fear.

You know what it was? Jesus is in our midst. God is real and God is holy and God wants his church holy. And God saw everything in private that we didn't see about Ananias and Sapphira.

Peter's just standing there in church. He's not thinking things about Ananias and Sapphira. When Ananias comes in, he's not at all.

Here comes Ananias. You know, that guy's shifty. He's got a weird look in his eye.

He's not acting like that. He's just in church. He's he doesn't have any idea of this.

And suddenly the Holy Spirit gives him the whole panorama and he understands and he is responsible with what the Holy Spirit shows him. And these two are judged. These two are judged.

Alexander McLaren put it this way concerning Sapphira. He said she had a hard choice to make, which we have to make sometimes, and that is to be true to some sinful bargain or to be true to God. And she chose the worst part.

We need to be careful of that, to be true to some sinful bargain or to stop and respond to God when he gives us that chance. Now, here are these people. They did this thing and they die for it.

The reason it's so severe is because God was so serious about keeping his church pure. The question that comes up then is, were they true believers or not? Did they go to heaven or did they go to hell? I believe they were true believers. I'll tell you why.

I'll give you several reasons, five of them. First of all, they were included in the congregation of those who believe the multitude of those who believed Acts 4:32. Second, they were involved with the Holy Spirit, indicating a relationship.

Third, if they were not Christians, what lesson about sin did this give to teach all the rest who were in the church, all the believers? There weren't Christians. What's the lesson of sin to each other? Believers for Satan can become personally involved with believers. So that's not unusual.

And that is why on the way I pointed out Peter and reminded you of that fifth. And this is pretty heavy, but it's true. Death can be divine chastening for a believer.

And you'll find that on first Corinthians 11, when Paul says you're coming drunk to the Lord's table and for this cause, many among you are sick and some have even died. They sleep. They have died.

And first, John 5 16 speaks of a sin that is under death. Sometimes God takes a believer out because their example in their witness is so bad. He'll take them out and in mercy, take them to heaven.

Thank God. Huh? Thank God. You see, in the end, he's a merciful God.

He was merciful. Don't miss this. He was merciful to Ananias and Sapphira by taking them out to heaven.

And he was merciful to the church by taking their sinful influence out of their midst. And so the church got really sharp at that point, and they had the fear of the Lord in their hearts because they knew the Lord was in their midst. So you understand, then, that here is a great church.

Here is the love of God. Here are great opportunities. And here is an account of people that are all in heaven now.

And we're here. We're the church. We're here to worship Jesus.

We're here to witness. We're here to bring the loss to the Lord. May God make us, each one of us, great givers, like Barnabas, like these other brethren, great lovers, loving God and loving one another, sensitive to each other's needs.

But most of all, sensitive to him, Jesus Christ. Let's pray, shall we? Lord, thank you for this highly instructive passage. Thank you, Lord, especially that you're still working in hearts by your Holy Spirit.

You're still filling people with your love, and you're still blessing people with great grace and your power by your Holy Spirit. Bless us, Lord, with these things, and bless us with giving, loving hearts. And we will give you all the glory as you work in us, but we cannot work up ourselves.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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