

The Church in Action – Acts 5

Lesson 5 of the series – “The Beginning of an Unfinished Work“ (Acts 5)

**WE MUST
OBEY GOD**

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 5:42)



Introductory Remarks

- ✓ The portion of Scripture (Acts 5:1-10) that we are going to look at involves 3 individuals
 - **Ananias** – There is no other biblical or historical records that provide information about him other than what is recorded in Acts 5:1-10. He should not be confused with the Ananias of Acts 9 who lived in Damascus and aided Saul (later known as Paul) in the restoration of his sight. He should also not be confused with Ananias the High Priest in Acts 23.
 - **Sapphira** – She is the wife of Ananias and there is no other biblical or historical records that provide information about her other than what is recorded here
 - **Peter** – He has emerged as one of the primary leaders of the early church in Jerusalem until that role is later assumed by James (the brother of Jesus) in Acts 15. Peter will be responsible for confronting Ananias and Sapphira about their deception in claiming to donate all the funds from the sale of their property, but they hold back some of those funds for themselves.

Introductory Remarks

✓ The story about Ananias and Sapphira:

- Serves as a sober warning in the New Testament about lying, hypocrisy, and accountability to God.
- Contrasts the humility and the willing obedience of Barnabas and the other Christ followers in the church at Jerusalem with the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.” (Acts 4:32-25)

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet. (Acts 4:36-37)

“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge, **he kept back part of the money for himself** but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and **have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land**? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God. (Acts 5:1-4)

- ✓ Take note of the pretense of “being spiritual”. They (Ananias and Sapphira) sold their property as others (like Barnabas) did but secretly kept some of the money and therefore did not give it all as they pretended to do.
- ✓ It appears that Ananias and Sapphira were attempting to make a public display of their spirituality while inwardly scheming to control some of their assets under the pretense they had given everything just as Barnabas had done. Their motives seemed to be centered around deception and that is what Peter will openly expose by stating Satan had “filled their heart” and they ultimately were found lying to the Holy Spirit.

“When **Ananias heard this, he fell down and died**. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. **About three hours later his wife came in**, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.” Peter said to her, “**How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?** Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.” **At that moment she fell down at his feet and died**. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.**” (Acts 5:5-10)

- ✓ The fact that Ananias’ and Sapphira’s lives were taken by the Lord in this instance shows the importance that God places on His church to be pure and holy. (Ephesians 5:27, II Corinthians 11:2)
- ✓ Hypocrisy has no place in the church. Jesus condemned the religious leaders seven times in Matthew 23 (specifically verses 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29) for it!

“The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.” (Acts 5:12-13)

✓ Once again, we see a pattern where the Apostles were used by God to perform many signs, wonders and healings

➤ It helped to validate their message

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matthew 10:5-8)

➤ The people were not just "open" to signs and wonders. They were desperate for them! They (like the apostles) wanted to see/experience God at work in their lives

✓ Luke (although not an eyewitness) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wants us to see is this connection between the signs and wonders done by the apostles in verse 12 and the multitudes being added to the Lord in verse 14.

“The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.” (Acts 5:12-13)

- ✓ Signs and wonders, along with the preaching of the apostles **helped bring people to the Lord.** They helped bring people to saving faith which come through trusting and believing in Jesus.
- ✓ This is not an isolated incident for Jesus performed many miracles during his 3-year ministry on earth. In similar fashion, so did the apostles throughout the Book of Acts, and God continues to perform miracles to this very day.
- ✓ **Signs and wonders do not save, nor do they do transform the heart,** but they do point to the power of God for the purpose of bringing salvation to those who believe in Jesus.

“For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” II Corinthians 4:5-6)

“The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.” (Acts 5:12-13)

- ✓ The area inside the temple grounds, known as “Solomon’s Colonnade” remained as a common gathering place where the apostles performed these public miracles and gave instructions to these new Christ followers.
- ✓ While those who gathered (believers and non-believers) highly respected the apostles, they were also filled with awe and fear following the dramatic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, which probably served as a deterring to the casual, hypocritical, or superficial association with the early church.
- ✓ People witnessed the profound power of God working through the apostles and some may have kept their distance, viewing them as set apart and holy, rather than just another group. To believe and trust in Jesus (in a public fashion) required a genuine conversion and total commitment which for some was too great of a cost.

“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.” (Acts 5:14-16)

- ✓ The church was growing by significant numbers (men and women), and the people were serious about their faith in not just an internal way, but they did so outwardly by confessing their belief boldly and drawing others to heed the words of the apostles and do the same.
- ✓ There was mounting persecution from religious leaders and others, such as the “Synagogue of the Freedmen” (Acts 6), who reject the message of the gospel and will attempt to silence the apostles and punish the followers of Jesus (Acts 8). But the fear of persecution will not stop them and as we will see it will only cause the church to grow faster and expand farther into the vast regions of the known world of that time. Those joining were not just fans, but true "believers" added to the Lord.

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- ✓ Peter’s reputation grew and the miraculous healing by the Holy Spirit through Peter caused people to bring the sick into the streets, hoping that even his shadow might fall on them to bring healing. This highlights a high level of faith in God's power acting through the apostles.
- ✓ Peter’s shadow did not have any inherent magical power; rather, it was a focal point for people’s faith in the power of Jesus working through him. It illustrates that God works through his servants to accomplish his purposes.
- ✓ People from towns all around Jerusalem flocked to the apostles, bringing the sick and even those oppressed by unclean spirits, resulting in everyone being healed.

“Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.” (Acts 5:17-20)

- ✓ These religious leaders (Caiphas the High Priest, possibly Annas his father-in-law, other members of the religious sect known as the Sadducees) became jealous and were probably angry over these public healings taking place in the temple courts as well as in Jerusalem and several neighboring towns.
- ✓ They had no answer for these miracles and had already been schooled by these two fishermen from Galilee (Peter and John) when they summoned them before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 where Peter and John performed the miracle where the man who had been crippled since birth was healed and able to walk.
- ✓ Since the Sadducee’s (who made up the bulk of the Sanhedrin) did not believe in the resurrection they objected to this teaching by the apostles and put them in jail.

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- ✓ An angel of the Lord visited the apostles (probably a combination of Peter, John and others) while they were in the jail and subsequently opens the door to let them out.
 - This was a heavenly messenger/angel sent by God and not a physical manifestation of Jesus – otherwise Luke (under the inspiration of the holy Spirit) would have said it was Jesus who visited them.
 - It is a bit ironic that the Sadducee’s didn’t believe in angels (Angels 23:8)
- ✓ They were to go out and teach about this “new life” which is best understood to mean the transformative, resurrected life made possible through Jesus Christ. It encompasses the entire Gospel message: salvation, forgiveness of sins, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life, rather than just some form of a moral code to live by.

“At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and **began to teach the people.** When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So, they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” (Acts 5:21-23)

- ✓ The plan of the Sadducees backfired; for the jail they put them in could not hold them, just as the grave could not hold Jesus.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us** through wordless groans. **And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit,** because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**” (Romans 8:26-28)

- ✓ In the Book of Acts this is the first of three miraculous releases from jail. The other two are Peter’s release – Acts 12:6-10 and Paul and Silas’ release – Acts 16:26-27
- ✓ Notice that the Apostles obeyed what the angel instructed them to do and they entered the temple and began to teach the same things they taught before.

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- ✓ It is somewhat ironic that the guards were keeping watch over empty jail cells and weren't even aware their prisoners had left and the religious leaders were gathered to discuss the fate of prisoners who were no longer in their custody.
- ✓ You would think that these religious leaders, who for centuries prior were the keepers of the scriptures, guarded the sacred things of the temple, performed the temple sacrifices, diligently studied the scriptures and purported themselves as the ones through whom God spoke, led or guided, should have recognized this to be the working of God in their midst but most of them didn't.
- ✓ They didn't mention how the Apostles escaped and failed to acknowledge the miracle

“On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to. Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.” (Acts 5:24-26)

- ✓ The religious leaders were stumped and later discovered that the apostles (whom they had locked up in prison) were now out in the temple courts teaching the same things they were teaching before.
- ✓ There is no discussion (at least Luke doesn't provide any detail) about how the apostles broke out of jail for **the cell they had placed them in was locked** when the guards they had sent to retrieve the apostles to bring them before the Sanhedrin had no prisoners. **The apostles were not in the locked jail cell, and they had no answers as to why!**
- ✓ The apostles had the answers and captain of the temple guard along with his officers brought (but not by force) the apostles before the Sanhedrin. Take note of the fact that they feared the people, many who probably believed the message of the apostles.

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” (Acts 5:27-28)

- ✓ The apostles were questioned by the same high priest (either Caiphas, Annas or both) who presided over the trial of Jesus where they considered Jesus’ words and actions blasphemous and they along with other religious leaders conspired with Pilate to have Jesus crucified.
- ✓ The sham trial that ultimately led to the death of Jesus on the cross was still fresh in everyone’s minds as it happened only 3-6 months earlier. Perhaps many members of the Sanhedrin still felt guilty and wanted to maintain a separation from the event and not be continually reminded of their willing participation in it.
- ✓ Their rejection of Jesus forced them to see his blood as a curse and not a blessing! To acknowledge his shed blood as a “sinless sacrifice” that also applied to them, would force them to conclude Jesus was their Savior too and they were unwilling to do so.

“Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:29-32)

- ✓ This portion of Acts 5, **“We must obey God rather than human beings”** is at the root of the conflict between the “religious leaders” and the apostles teaching.
 - This is a clear declaration by the apostles that the teachings of the Jewish religious leaders was in complete error for there was no middle ground and no provision for them both to be right.
 - They (The Sanhedrin) were in complete opposition to God, and although they could deny the existence of miracles, deny the resurrection of Christ, and deny the claims of the Apostles all they wanted – the fact remains that what the Apostles claimed was true. To deny their claims doesn’t make them any less true!

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- ✓ Peter will speak on behalf of the Apostles and spell out one more time the truth of the Gospel and defend the charges against them by boldly declaring that Jesus was raised from the dead and it is through Him that our sins are forgiven
 - **First**, he cites the resurrection of Jesus which the Sadducees themselves deny and this no doubt infuriated them
 - **Second**, he laid the charge of putting Jesus to death on the Sanhedrin indicating it was by their own hands that it took place. Although the Sanhedrin clearly denied this claim, it yet remained a complete embarrassment to them
- ✓ Being confused by the facts or ignoring or denying truth doesn't make it any less true

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- ✓ This **third** declaration by Peter in which he declares Jesus to be God was **probably the most significant of the 4 claims that he makes** and one that would be most troubling to the Sanhedrin for it proves they missed the signs of Jesus’ coming and got it wrong.
- He claims that **Jesus is exalted** which means to be **lifted up** and elevated to His rightful place. This is a clear claim of the Deity of Christ

“Therefore, **God exalted him to the highest place** and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue **acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God, the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

(Hebrews 12:1-3)

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- ✓ This **third** declaration by Peter in which he declares Jesus to be God was **probably the most significant of the 4 claims that he makes** and one that would be most troubling to the Sanhedrin for it proves they missed the signs of Jesus’ coming and got it wrong.
 - He uses two significant names; **Prince** and **Savior** which clearly convey Christ as the source of eternal life. (1 John 5:11-12)
 - **He acknowledges the authority of Jesus to grant repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins.** Ironically one of the claims of the Pharisees that Jesus was a blasphemer centered around Jesus’ forgiving people sin – something they said only God could do (Mark 2:7, Luke 5:21). I doubt this was no accident that Peter would insert this into his argument, given their claim they were innocent of the charges against them.

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- ✓ The **fourth declaration** by Peter is a rather compelling argument in favor of the resurrection and deity of Christ
 - There is no record of the Sanhedrin disputing the claims by the apostles that Jesus rose from the dead
 - Had the Sanhedrin been able to produce Jesus’ body it would have destroyed the statements by the Apostles that Jesus rose from the dead. The time for them to have done that would have been then but they had no proof to dispute the apostles' claims.
 - Another significant point that Peter makes is; **“the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him”**thus Peter puts saving faith (trusting in Christ) on equal footing as obedience. The Sanhedrin failed miserably on both accounts!

“When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.”
(Acts 5:33-34)

- ✓ Notice the immediate response of anger/hostility which seems to be the prevailing opinion of most of the Sadducees. Perhaps the hostility of the Sadducees was driven by the fact they were losing their grip or hold over the people since many were heeding the words of the apostles and choosing to follow Jesus.
- ✓ We are introduced to a new person named Gamaliel
 - He was a respected teacher of the Law and a well-known Pharisee from a prominent Jewish family. A Pharisee (unlike a Sadducee) accepted the sovereignty of God and they did not deny miracles coming from God.
 - He was Saul of Tarsus’ (the Apostle Paul) tutor and mentor (Acts 22:3)
- ✓ He orders the apostles out of the room so they could deliberate without them

“Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: **“Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody,** and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and **it all came to nothing**” (Acts 5:35-36)

- ✓ Gamaliel’s addresses the Sanhedrin and cautions them on their plans for these apostles.
- ✓ He cites a well-known story of an earlier rebellion (Sometime just prior to 6 AD) by a man named Theudas who claimed to be a prophet or a messiah.
 - Theudas claimed he had the power to part the waters of the Jordan river (like what Joshua did when the Israelites crossed the Jordan and attacked Jericho) and his assertions caused about 400 men to follow him in his rebellion.
 - His movement never amounted to much and proved his claims to be false
- ✓ Gamaliel’s warnings to the Sanhedrin showed his wisdom and allowed for the possibility that these apostles might have a legitimate message worth heeding.

“After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” (Acts 5:37-39)

- ✓ Gamaliel cites another rebellion led by Judas the Galilean
 - This rebellion took place in 6 AD, and the rebellion was over the required census and taxation by the Romans
 - Judas the Galilean’s followers became known as the “Zealots” (The apostle known as Simon the Zealot belonged to this sect before he gave it all up to follow Jesus) who were a “secret” society of Jews who continuously revolted against Roman occupation and rule.
- ✓ The Zealots would remain a constant thorn in the side of the Roman government but as far as the followers of Judas the Galilean goes – they will scatter after he is killed.

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- ✓ Gamaliel’s advice was simple:
 - Let these men be for if their actions are of human origin they will eventually fail – just like the movements of Theudas and Judas.
 - If their actions are of God, you won’t be able to stop them for it would be a “fight against God”. **Actions that are ordained by God cannot be stopped!**
- ✓ Some early church traditions claim that Gamaliel may have become a follower of Jesus (perhaps in secret) and later baptized by Peter but there is no “biblical” record of this happening.

“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” (Acts 5:40-41)

- ✓ After hearing and accepting the advice of Gamaliel not to execute the apostles, they had the Apostles flogged (an extremely serious form of punishment - 40 lashes less one) and ordered them to stop their preaching.
 - The flogging was a form of Jewish synagogue discipline, designed to cause physical pain and public humiliation. It was intended to be a deterrent and a strong warning to halt their ministry.
 - Under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin had the authority to punish religious offenders, but not usually to carry out capital punishment
- ✓ The apostles did not see the punishment as legitimate, but rather as being counted worthy of suffering disgrace in the Name of Jesus.

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” (Acts 5:42)

✓ Instead of being embittered they rejoiced

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” (I Peter 4:12-14)

✓ Although Israel as a nation/people group) continued down the path of rejecting Jesus as Messiah.....the followers of Christ (considering themselves worthy to suffer for His name) kept right on proclaiming Jesus as Messiah.

✓ This shows the early apostles' unwavering commitment to evangelism. Despite persecution and threats, they continued teaching in both public (temple) and private (homes) settings, focusing on Jesus as the promised Messiah