



# Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 5A

Chapters 4:21 - 5:6

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- In Chapter 4 last week, the Sanhedrin council has set a legal precedent
  - They declared that it was no longer acceptable for men to teach in the name of Jesus
    - Peter and John answered and said they couldn't agree to those terms
    - But nevertheless, the ruling council of Israel has made a determination that had the force of law in that society
      - It will become the basis for further action against believers in the city and Judea

**Acts 4:21** When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

**Acts 4:22** for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

- Luke implies that the leaders had a desire to take strong action but simply couldn't
  - Firstly, the apostles hadn't violated any clear rule or prohibition
    - On the other hand they had healed a man, which was praiseworthy
  - Secondly, the result of their miracle was a public outcry in praise of God
    - This was an outcome that the Sanhedrin should have found worthy of commendation, not condemnation
    - Plus, if they had decided to take action against Peter and John, they risked an uprising among the 5,000+ who were praising God for the work of these men
  - So, they admonished the men and then let them go
- Naturally, Peter and John return to the other Apostles, who have probably been worrying for them

**Acts 4:23** When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

**Acts 4:24** And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

**Acts 4:25** who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,

'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE,  
AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

**Acts 4:26** 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND,  
AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER  
AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

**Acts 4:27** "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

**Acts 4:28** to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

**Acts 4:29** “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,  
**Acts 4:30** while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”  
**Acts 4:31** And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

- The response of the believers in the city to the apostles’ release is to take their relief to the Lord in praise
  - They praise Him for His grace in releasing these two important leaders of the early church
    - And their prayer centers around Psalm 2
  - Reading the entire Psalm gives us a better sense of how this Psalm became such an important reason why these Christians were so happy at this outcome

**Psa. 2:1** Why are the nations in an uproar

And the peoples devising a vain thing?

**Psa. 2:2** The kings of the earth take their stand

And the rulers take counsel together

Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,

**Psa. 2:3** “Let us tear their fetters apart

And cast away their cords from us!”

**Psa. 2:4** He who sits in the heavens laughs,

The Lord scoffs at them.

**Psa. 2:5** Then He will speak to them in His anger

And terrify them in His fury, saying,

**Psa. 2:6** “But as for Me, I have installed My King

Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

**Psa. 2:7** “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:

He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

**Psa. 2:8** ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,

And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

**Psa. 2:9** ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,

You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”

**Psa. 2:10** Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;

Take warning, O judges of the earth.

**Psa. 2:11** Worship the LORD with reverence

And rejoice with trembling.

**Psa. 2:12** Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,

For His wrath may soon be kindled.

How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

- This psalm describes how the world will oppose the Messiah but He will triumph nonetheless
  - The Second Psalm is a description of the resistance that the Messiah will experience in the final days of Tribulation as He returns
  - And the psalm also makes clear that the Father is behind the scenes directing the whole affair
    - He will give the Son the nations for an inheritance
  - By application, these early believers correctly recognized that the Lord was at work in their circumstances fulfilling His word
    - Though Jewish leaders were dismissing and challenging the claims of Messiah just as they did to Jesus
      - The Lord will have the last laugh
    - And this situation was under God's control
- As they hear the apostles' report, it's clear that the believers put this together
  - They come to understand that this trial was a part of God's plan for the church
    - Keep in mind that the persecution of Peter and John was a crossroads for the early church
    - It probably shocked the conscience
    - The prospect of persecution was almost unthinkable
    - And the news that the apostles were under inquiry was probably a great worry
  - Then as the apostles were released, the Spirit connected the dots for the church and brought them to Psalm 2
    - The persecution that started with the Sanhedrin was a reflection of the hatred that Christ Himself experienced in His first coming
  - And the Church quotes this Psalm to emphasize that they understand that the world will resist the message of the Gospel
- But the Father is in control
  - In vs.27-28, the church states plainly that the events that led to Christ's death were predestined by God to occur
    - Specifically, the church declares that the conspiracy relied on Gentiles (Romans) and the people of Israel
      - Both Jews and Gentiles were culpable in the death of Christ
    - But in v.28 they say that God was ultimately the One bringing about these circumstances
  - And in v.29 they appeal to God to notice that the persecution David spoke of had come home to rest upon them
    - Specifically, they ask that the Lord "take note" which means to "look upon"
      - The implication is that the Lord will take revenge
    - Secondly, they grant boldness to continue speaking God's word
  - I find it fascinating that the prayer isn't for a removal of the persecution

- Rather, it's merely for the courage to keep speaking in the face of opposition
  - Perhaps John has told them of Jesus' words concerning persecution

**John 15:20** “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- Finally, they ask for wonders and powers to accompany the proclamation of the name of Jesus
  - They are seeking to see God manifest His power to confirm their testimony
  - Plus, powerful signs will help overcome the fear that persecution will produce
  - The result of the prayer was an answer in the affirmative from God
    - God gave manifestations to the group, filling them with the Holy Spirit
    - And they spoke in boldness
- So through the first four chapters of Acts, Luke has planted the seeds for the rest of the book
  - He has shown a new institution established among Jews
    - Accompanied by signs and wonders to propel the Gospel forward in the face of opposition
  - Led by men of remarkable powers
    - But rejected by the Jewish leaders
  - Called to preach God's word in the face of opposition
    - Expecting the Lord's return at any time

**Acts 4:32** And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

**Acts 4:33** And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

**Acts 4:34** For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales **Acts 4:35** and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

**Acts 4:36** Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),

**Acts 4:37** and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- At the end of Chapter 4 comes this interesting story of how the early church was combining property
  - Luke sets the scene here in Chapter 4, but the real impact is recorded in Chapter 5

- There are a fair number of things going on here we must examine
- First, in Jerusalem there was a congregation of believers
  - They apparently worshipped together and shared in their property to help support one another
  - Remember that the church in Jerusalem was relatively poor but numerous
    - Over 8,000 believers at this point
    - Within such a large group this kind of sharing would have been very helpful to maintaining a common standard of living among the believers
  - Historical records tell us that this time was difficult economically for the city
    - The ranks of the needy were growing
  - But Luke says there wasn't a needy person among the church because of their sharing
- What prompted the shared love and self-sacrifice?
  - They were of one heart and one soul
    - These were the early innocent times
    - The early blush of faith was still the driving force in the body and the power of the Spirit was holding the body together
  - Amongst all this unity, the Apostles are giving great witness to the resurrection of Jesus through their own miraculous powers
    - Here again is proof that the Apostles were the only ones to show these miraculous powers
  - Luke connects these two points in v.35
    - The people immediately recognized that the apostles were appointed as leaders by Jesus
      - And the powers these men held were proof that God had vested them with His authority
      - They could declare things in the name of Jesus
      - They held the keys to the kingdom

**Matt. 16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”**

- The Apostles were uniquely anointed by the Holy Spirit to make determinations on Earth concerning spiritual matters as Christ's representative
  - These men were necessary to the survival and growth of the early church
  - And they held authority and power to accomplish a difficult task
    - And they will be expected to serve as examples in everything they do, including in the ways they died
  - So as someone in the congregation had a need, others would respond by selling property and bringing the proceeds to the Apostles' feet

- In Greek, the phrase suggests that not all the proceeds were necessarily brought to the Apostles, but only what was required to cover the need
  - And the acts of bringing it to the feet of the Apostles reflects their view that the Apostles were Christ's representatives on Earth
  - Another way to see it was these were gifts given to God as represented by the Apostles
- The chapter ends with an example of one man who follows this practice
  - The man identified at the end is Joseph of Cyprus, whom the Apostles called Barnabas
    - Barnabas becomes an example of one who follows this practice faithfully
  - We didn't really need Barnabas' example since the general practice had already been described
    - But Luke chooses to highlight Barnabas' obedience because he will become a central character in the book
  - Barnabas is the cousin of Mark author of the Gospel
    - He was one of the 500 who were said to have met with the resurrected Jesus
      - And as a result he has the gift of Apostleship as well (Acts 14)
    - He will become a traveling companion to Paul for a time
      - He is instrumental in establishing the early church with Paul
      - But he is also one who was carried away by hypocrisy in practicing legalism according Galatians 2
  - Here we see Barnabas early in Jerusalem leading by example, responding to the needs of the body and submitting to the Lord through the leadership of the apostles

**Acts 5:1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,**

**Acts 5:2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.**

**Acts 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"**

**Acts 5:4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."**

**Acts 5:5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.**

**Acts 5:6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.**

- Luke's account of Ananias and Sapphira represents the first serious sin in the early church
  - There are two contrasts between Chapters 4 and 5

- First there is the contrast between the honest Barnabas and the dishonest Ananias and Sapphira
  - Secondly, there is a contrast between the external threats to the church from the authorities
    - And the internal threats to the church from the sin of the congregation
  - And the Lord will protect His Church from both threats
- At first the story proceeds in keeping with Barnabas'
  - They sell a property
  - But then a conspiracy ensues
    - They conspire to hold back some of the proceeds of the sale
    - They place only some of the money before the Apostles but they claim to have brought it all
  - The language in v.2 is reminiscent of the story of Achan in Joshua
    - As the nation of Israel entered the land and began to push back the enemies in the land, Achan held back some of the spoils of Jericho which Joshua declared belonged to the Lord's temple
      - Like Achan, Ananias has held back something that should have been designated for the Lord's use
    - Joshua was Achan's "apostle" in his day, and he suffered death for his deceit
  - When Ananias chose to lie to the Apostle, Peter says he was lying to God
    - He was professing love for the Body of Christ when in fact he had little regard for anything other than his own reputation and image
      - So his intent was to say he gave all when he only gave some
    - The issue was hypocrisy, so that their image before the brethren was enhanced without the need for real sacrifice
- Peter instantly discerned the deception, another spiritual component of apostolic power
  - First, he says Satan has instigated this desire to lie to the Holy Spirit
    - But Ananias is the one who chose to act in sin
  - Here we see the enemy's power to undermine the Church, and his obvious interest in doing so
    - He seeks weak members of the body and entices them to act against the unity and love of the saints
    - Satan does not need to do anything to create unbelievers...he just uses them
      - And he has no power over believers except through external means like temptation, fear, deception, etc.
  - A believer's defense to the schemes of the enemy are prayer and firm knowledge of God's word
    - Paul says in 2 Corinthians



**2Cor. 2:11** so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

- ○ Later he says:

**Eph. 6:11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

**Eph. 6:12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

**Eph. 6:13** Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- Considering what Peter tells Ananias, it seems he would have been safe had he simply decided to keep some money and make clear his choice
  - The sin wasn't holding back the money, but lying
    - Still, to hold back the money would have reflected a selfishness
  - Ananias understands this, but rather than address his selfishness, he looks for a way to cover it up
- So as Peter was speaking, Ananias falls dead
  - Did Peter act to take Ananias' life?
    - There is nothing in the text to clearly connect Peter to the death
      - Perhaps Peter was surprised too
    - But Peter ends by saying you lied to God
      - Which sounds like a judge declaring a verdict
      - And then came the penalty
    - Based on the next account of Sapphira, it seems that Peter had a hand in the process
      - If so, then God was allowing Peter this latitude as a part of the authority given to the Apostles
  - Why was this sin worthy of such an extreme response?
    - Firstly, all sin is worthy of death (Romans 6:23)
      - And many times our sins do result in death, whether immediate or delayed
    - Secondly this was likely the first major issue of sin in the young church
      - As such, many would naturally watch to see what the effect of such behavior would be
        - Would the Apostles have authority over such things?
        - Do they take you to the courts or to the Pharisees?
        - Unlikely, since they weren't allies
    - If this sin were left unchecked in the early church, imagine how long before all

respect for authority was gone

- The strong response to Ananias' sin was necessary to make clear the seriousness and legitimacy of the Apostle's authority