



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 5B

Chapters 5:7 - 40

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- Following the death of Ananias, we jump back in to the moment, watching as his wife returns to the camp of the believers in Jerusalem

Acts 5:7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Acts 5:8 And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.”

Acts 5:9 Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”

Acts 5:10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Acts 5:11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

- An hour later, his wife arrives without knowledge of her husband’s predicament
 - By this point we can imagine many things have transpired
 - Word about Ananias must have spread quickly in the church community
 - Somehow Sapphira didn’t hear, probably because everyone was too afraid to speak to her about it
 - And perhaps because they didn’t know what to tell her
 - Also, there’s probably no reason to warn her, because no one would have assumed that she had anything to do with Ananias’ deception
 - Men ran the finances and women had little to say about them
 - In this case, she had known of her husband’s decision
 - Notice the text doesn’t say she agreed to it or even condoned it
 - She just knew about it
 - So now she comes to Peter and he asks her if she sold her property for the amount that Ananias proposed
 - This is her opportunity for repentance and confession
 - She might have suspected something was amiss at this point
 - And her conscience probably convicted her
 - Nevertheless, she decides to sin as her husband did
 - She says that was all they received, which was a lie
 - She decided to give her loyalty to her husband in sinning with him rather than to God and in truthfulness
 - Remember, she didn’t know her husband was dead
 - So when Peter named the price, she must have known that her husband had already told Peter the lie
 - Rather than admit her husband had lied, she agreed with the statement,

perhaps to protect her husband

- Honoring her husband comes second to honoring the Lord
- Peter's question suggests he had made no predetermination concerning her guilt
 - He wasn't sure if she had been involved in the decision
 - So Peter gives her the chance to vindicate herself
 - Instead when she answered, she incriminated herself
 - Based on her answer, she was convicted just as was her husband
 - In fact, she is buried "toward" him or face-to-face, as the Greek word for beside indicates
 - Ananias showed loyalty to money over God and Sapphira showed loyalty to her husband over the Lord
 - Both sins resulted in death
- This situation achieved the desired result: great fear among the people
 - Now consider how this event impacts the early church
 - There was great fear within the church among all who heard of the events
 - This is the first mention of the word "church" in the book of Acts, and it emphasizes how God was at work in this event forming a cohesive whole
 - There is a parallel between how this dispensation of God begins and how previous dispensations began
 - In the dispensation of innocence in the Garden, Adam's sin was met with a very serious and unique punishment from God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of conscience after the Fall, Cain's murder was met with a serious and unique response by God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of civil government, the sin of the Tower of Babel was met with a very serious and unique response from God to make a point
 - In the dispensation of patriarchal rule, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was met with a very serious and unique punishment to make a point
 - In the dispensation of Law, the early failure of the Jews in worshipping the calf was met with a very serious and unique punishment to make a point
 - Etc...
 - Each major dispensation of God's grace includes an early failure by men
 - And in response to that sin, God merits a serious and unique punishment that addresses the sin while making a point
 - And the effect of that response is to warn others and cause obedience within the group
 - In that sense, God's stern response is a form of grace itself, since it motivates others to respect God's decrees, at least initially and to some extent
 - Here we see a sin occurring early in the Church Age, and God responds through Peter with a unique and stern response
 - And it had its intended consequence, that is to dissuade others from

following in their footsteps

- And it demonstrated the seriousness of the New Covenant
- Finally, it reminded the church that judgment will begin at the house of God, as Peter himself wrote in 1 Peter 4:17

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

- ○ ■ I assume that when Peter wrote these words, Ananias and Sapphira were on his mind and on the minds of his first century readers
- Based on the combination of strong leadership, stern response to sin and the supernatural displays of the Holy Spirit, the early church flourished

Acts 5:12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

Acts 5:13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

Acts 5:14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

Acts 5:15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

Acts 5:16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

- Notice again, that the signs and wonders of the early church were coming "at the hands of the Apostles" and not by everyone
 - And the people were of one accord (or one mind)
 - This implies that they had a single-mindedness about their purpose and their doctrines, or understanding of God's truth in the church
 - Luke seems to contrast the miracles and the common mind of the early church with the disobedience of Ananias and Sapphira
 - And they were meeting in Solomon's Portico
 - This was the name given to a covered part of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple
 - By some estimates, the church had grown to around 10,000 believers
 - The previous meeting locations were no longer sufficient
 - They needed the largest venues in the city
 - In v.13 Luke mentions that the "rest of them" dared not associate with the early

church

- “Them” refers to the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem
 - They probably feared the Pharisees
 - And they may have also feared the power of the Apostles as displayed in the death of Ananias and Sapphira
- But then Luke adds that they held the early Christians in high esteem
- The early church modeled nearly perfectly the Biblical principle that the church must be salt and light in the world
 - The church stood out and remained separate from the rest of Jewish society
 - And yet the way they stood apart brought respect and appreciation and ultimately glory to God
 - At least until widespread persecution began, the church wasn’t perceived as negative or disruptive or strident
- They fulfilled the expectations Paul gave in his letter to the Corinthians

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2Cor. 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

**2Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,
“I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

2Cor. 6:17 “Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord.

**“AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;
And I will welcome you.**

- Paul goes further in Romans 12-13 exhorting the church to be good citizens and respectable persons in their community and in the church
 - Honoring one another and obeying the civil authorities
 - And at the same time Paul commands the church in Romans 12:2 not to be conformed to the world
 - Here we see what that kind of life can produce
 - The church of one accord, clearly not conforming to the world and yet still giving a good witness
 - And all the while God continues to grow the early church within the city of Jerusalem
 - Despite the fear among the Jews of the city, the Lord kept adding to the church
 - Here’s a powerful lesson on how to grow the church

- Notice that the people are flocking to the faith in Jerusalem despite their fear of this new movement
 - They may have respected the movement, but they weren't attracted to it in the traditional sense
 - It wasn't attractive...it was scary and different
- And yet the church swelled in size
 - This pattern defies the "church growth" teaching of the recent decade that suggests churches grow only by pandering to the wants and needs of a community
 - On the contrary, the church grows when the Lord adds to its numbers
 - And growth from any other source is false growth
 - And yes, it's possible to "grow" a church without relying on the Lord
 - The growth can be numeric (i.e., more bodies) but not spiritual (i.e., not true Christians)
- Now to properly understand v.15, we need to take note of a parenthetical statement Luke is making in his passage
 - Look back at v.12
 - Luke starts by saying that many signs and wonders were happening at the hands of the apostles
 - Then in the second half of that verse, Luke mentions how they were gathered in the Temple
 - To understand the narrative, we need to insert an open parenthesis before the statement about being of one accord

Acts 5:12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

- That parenthetical statement continues until the end of v.14
 - It is an aside describing the way the church was perceived in Jerusalem in this day
 - They were set apart and feared, yet respected
 - And they still attracted great numbers
 - And then the parentheses end
 - Now in v.15, Luke returns to his main thought
 - So place the first half of v.12 together with v.15, and the narrative makes more sense
 - The apostles were performing many miracles, to such an extent that the people of Jerusalem began to bring their sick to Peter for healing
 - Just his shadow would cause healing
 - And according to v.16, they were all being healed
 - Their behavior wasn't superstition

- It was a rational response to the power Peter was demonstrating in the city
- Clearly, God was using Peter in his role as the early leader of the church to manifest supernatural power
 - And the manifestation brought God and His Church glory
- It probably doesn't surprise you to hear that false teachers have turned to this passage and used it to defend the prosperity gospel
 - The fact that "all" were healed in this instance is used as proof that God was to heal everyone
- This is simply bad exegesis of Scripture
 - Luke is describing an event, not prescribing something for every Christian
- As we might imagine, it also brought a lot of negative attention among God's enemies

Acts 5:17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

Acts 5:18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.

Acts 5:19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

Acts 5:21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

Acts 5:22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back,

Acts 5:23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

Acts 5:24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

Acts 5:25 But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

Acts 5:26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

- What a curious and even humorous series of events
 - First, it begins with jealousy among the Sadducees
 - They're jealous of the apostles' fame and success in leading the people
 - The Sadducees (and the Pharisees like them) were desperate for the same kind of following among the people

- And here comes these untrained men to challenge their authority and popularity among the people
 - So they're insanely jealous
 - The Greek language implies they were controlled by their jealousy
- So they lay hands upon Peter and the other apostles and put them in jail
 - This would have to be the same jail as before, since the Jews didn't operate a jail apart from the Temple itself
 - Peter and John are getting accustomed to this rough treatment, but now the rest of the apostles are caught up in the situation
- That very night, though, the Lord sets the apostles free by means of an angel
 - This is the first of three times in Acts that an angel sets someone free from jail
 - In each case there is an audience for the release
 - In the first case, the audience are the Jewish authorities
 - In the second case, it's the Roman authorities
 - In the third case, it's the Greek population of Philippi
 - But their release comes with a command
 - The apostles were to proceed immediately back to the Temple, where they were arrested initially
 - And they were to begin preaching at daybreak
 - And they were to preach "the whole message of life"
 - This phrase means the Gospel, but it also carries a specific Hebrew sense implying resurrection
 - In other words, the apostles were to preach the whole message of salvation including the coming resurrection
 - Obviously, a message of resurrection was intended to antagonize the Sadducees, who rejected the possibility of bodily resurrection
- God is clearly teaching the apostles to respond boldly to persecution
 - Without fear and without hesitation
 - Their response to freedom isn't to run and hide and protect themselves
 - The response is to face the threat and continue preaching
 - The only way they bring themselves to do something like that is by recognizing that God is in control of their life and death
 - God is also teaching the leadership that these men have His power behind their work
 - Finally, He's teaching the people that the Church's message of salvation won't be bent to fit the desires of the authorities
- The story then gets very humorous
 - The Sanhedrin council meets to conduct another inquiry
 - They call for the prisoners but the guards return to report the prisoners are missing without a trace

- The council is perplexed and worried about what will come of this
 - The sense here is that the leadership is worried how it will reflect on their leadership
 - Or perhaps they assumed these men pulled the same disappearing trick that Jesus Himself did in the tomb
 - And if Jesus' disappearance led to a movement of thousands, what will happen after 12 men disappear?
- Fortunately for these confused men, they learn the whereabouts of the apostles
 - They're right back where they found them...in the temple teaching
 - So this time the officers and the captain go retrieve them without violence
 - They lead them carefully and without aggression so that the crowd wouldn't be aroused against them
 - And the apostles probably agreed to go in keeping with the way their own Master agreed to His own arrest
 - Also, they must have had great assurance that God was working to take care of them in the midst of these circumstances

Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,

Acts 5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Acts 5:33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.

- Here's the second time a court in Israel has addressed the issue of teaching in the Temple
 - The high priest, Annas, is present
 - And he begins the proceeding by noting the council's previous judgment
 - The apostles were commanded not to teach "in this name"
 - Notice the chief priest refuses to name the Name of Jesus
 - The priest adds that the apostles were trying to bring the blood of Jesus upon the council
 - He is suggesting that the apostles were slandering the council by accusing

them of unlawfully killing Jesus

- In truth, that is exactly what they did
- They had even told Pilate that the blood of Jesus should be upon them and their children in Matthew 27:25
- But now they deny such a thing and hold it against the apostles
- And in a powerful moment, the apostles give a sharply worded and bold testimony of the Gospel to this evil men
 - Peter appears to do the talking, but Luke makes clear he either spoke for the apostles or the other apostles also said things at times
 - Peter reiterates that they must obey God
 - As Christians, we must obey God and earthly authorities unless they conflict
 - Then we must obey God while willingly submitting to the punishment that comes our way for disobeying earthly authorities
 - This is what Peter and the apostles are willing to suffer here if necessary
 - Then Peter reiterates that Jesus was raised (resurrected)
 - After He was put to death by the Jewish leaders
 - Even worse, they hung Him on a tree, which was a particularly dishonoring way to die according to Scripture
 - They did this to the Prince of Israel, the Messiah
 - Finally, they are witnesses and the Holy Spirit confirms this truth among those who believe
 - Naturally, the leaders are angered to the point of wishing to put these men to death
 - Unfortunately, disobeying a command of the council didn't carry the death penalty in Israel
 - So the council may have wanted to kill these men, but they lacked the grounds to carry it out
 - Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed

Acts 5:34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.

Acts 5:35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

Acts 5:36 “For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

Acts 5:37 “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

Acts 5:38 “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let

them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;
Acts 5:39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”

Acts 5:40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

- The famous Gamaliel, Paul’s instructor, speaks up
 - He was an elder statesman in that day

Gamaliel was a disciple of Rabbi Hillel, and at this time, he was the head of the School of Hillel. In Jewish sources, he was known as Rabban Gamaliel. Most rabbis were simply called Rav or Ravi, which means “teacher” or “my teacher” respectively, but Gamaliel was given a title of “Rabban.” This is a title above rabbi, which means “our teacher” and was a special title of the leader of the School of Hillel. Gamaliel was the first of seven rabbis to have this title. This was the same Gamaliel who was Paul’s teacher according to Acts 22:3. He had so much influence in his own time that the Jewish Mishnah states: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.”

The point is that Rabban Gamaliel was able to hold a moral force that others followed, simply because of the strength of his own moral character.

The verse also states that he was a doctor of the law, which refers to his position of knowledge in the Law of Moses; he had authority to interpret the Law in accordance with the Jewish traditions. Other doctors of the Law are mentioned by Luke in Luke 2:46 and 5:17. As to his reputation, he was: had in honor of all the people; everybody held him in some degree of honor, including Sadducees, as this context will show. One of his more famous sayings was, “Procure yourself a teacher; avoid being in doubt; do not accustom yourself to give tithes by guess.” This was Rabban Gamaliel. -

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- - And he sent the apostles out of the room, to confer with the other council members
 - He says be careful with these men
 - Don’t overstep your bounds and make a foolish move
 - In a sense, Gamaliel made a case for these situations working themselves out
 - He uses two historical examples from Israel’s recent past where men revolted against Rome and were eventually executed
 - When they died, their followers dispersed
 - The implication is clear

- If these guys are just revolutionaries intent on fighting a cause, they will eventually butt heads with Rome, and Rome will win
 - And their admirers will just fade away
 - In that case, the Jewish authorities didn't need to get involved
- On the other hand, if this is a movement of God, nothing will stop it anyway
 - They would be fighting God
- The concern for Gamaliel was the possibility the council acted rashly and brought Roman authorities down upon them
 - And while his advice makes sense, it's not necessarily a Biblical principle or truth that movements of men always die out
 - It was merely his viewpoint
- The council agrees and releases the apostles with a flogging
 - This would have been 39 lashes as called for in Deuteronomy 25
 - Severe punishment
 - This is the first time believers are physically persecuted for their faith
 - Their crime was disobeying the previous council order not to teach in the name of Jesus