

Sunday Morning Message

June 16, 2024

Taking Back What Was Already Given to God

Text – Acts 5:1 - 11

Congregational Reading – Acts 5:1 - 11

Introduction

When we closed out chapter 4, we were introduced to a godly and giving man named Barnabas. We spent quite a bit of time speaking about this man of God, primarily concerning how he was a man that would be a good man to “have in your corner.” He was a man that was willing to be a friend to somebody that perhaps had nobody else on his team. We did not learn these things exclusively from Acts 4, but we studied many other passages in the Bible that refer to Barnabas. What we did learn about Barnabas in Acts 4, however, is that Barnabas had a piece of land, possibly in Cyprus where he was from, and sold it, and then gave the proceeds from the land to the church at Jerusalem. This man was certainly a very sacrificial man that was wholly surrendered to the Lord.

We also discovered in Acts 4, that this kind of sacrificial giving was common among the early church believers:

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." - (Acts 4:34-35)

When we get to Acts 5, we read of a husband and wife, named Ananias and Sapphira, which also had a piece of land and sold it, and then gave some of the money that they received from the land. However, God was not pleased with their offering at all. In fact, he first killed the husband, and a short time later, killed the wife. God was not displeased with these folks for merely not giving all the proceeds of the property to Him. He was upset with this couple because they had dedicated the whole price of the land to Him, and they then held back part of what they had already given to God; and they also lied about what they received for the land.

This was a very serious offense from God’s perspective. Think about it. How many individuals has God, Himself, killed in the Bible? Er and Onan; Hophni and Phineas; Uzza. I

am sure there are more, but not all that many.

Transition

What we do not realize, however, is that this sin is a sin that we commit all the time. We are continually committing ourselves to God in some way, but then we take back that which we have promised him.

Illustrate – Teen Camp – Kids giving their lives to the Lord. Wonderful – don't take it back.

At the conclusion of this message, we will consider some other examples of how we take back that which we have dedicated to God.

First, however, let us go through the text, verse by verse, and see what we can glean from it.

I. There Was a Commitment Made (v. 1)

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

"But" – this conjunction links this passage to concluding verses in chapter 4. The last discussion in chapter 4 was about the atmosphere of giving in the church at Jerusalem. People who had money or possessions that could be sold, gave to those who had need. Particularly, Barnabas, was commended by the Holy Spirit for selling a piece of land and giving the proceeds of its sale to meet some of the needs of others who lacked. It seemed to have been "the in thing" in this early local church to share what you had with others.

Perhaps this was the lure for Ananias and Sapphira. Maybe, they got caught up in the emotion of it all, seeing all these other people giving away their possessions, and being praised for it.

"A certain man" – it is interesting that this man, along with his wife, are both named by the Holy Spirit, recorded for everyone to see. We are often so concerned with confidentiality. We don't want anything revealed to others that would hurt our reputation, but God recorded their names. Perhaps God named them here because their sin involved their desire for recognition.

There is also another husband-and-wife team recorded in the Book of Acts – Aquila and Priscilla. This couple, however, is recorded in a favorable light.

How will you and I be recorded throughout eternity? What will the record books of our lives reveal?

There is not enough information given from the text to indicate whether these two were genuine believers. I have heard many preachers declare them to be lost. I am not sure. I do know that I have seen God's people do some wicked things. I have been guilty of some bad things myself and probably, so have you. I think the fact that God killed them may be a good indicator that they were really saved. God simply took them home to Him. But I can't be sure.

"sold a possession" – we know from verse 3 that the possession was land.

II. **There Was a Conspiracy Made to Break the Commitment (and an attempted Cover Up – vs. 2. - 10)**

"And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet." - (Acts 5:2)

We know a couple of things from what we see so far. Ananias and Saphira had land, they sold it, and they gave part of the price to the apostles and kept the rest for themselves. We will learn as we go through this that there was nothing wrong with holding back part of the price of the land for themselves, and there was no sin committed by giving only a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the land.

"His wife also being privy to it" – notice she was in it, and she was held accountable for it. Wives – the Scripture plainly teaches that you should submit to your husbands, but you are to submit to God first. If your husband is trying to get you to do something that is wrong, or even hold something back that you have already given to God, then you must not yield to him. You must obey God. Later in this chapter, Peter states to the religious leaders who were commanding him to no longer preach about Jesus: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" - (Acts 5:3)

Now we begin to get a clearer picture as to what really happened. They lied about the price they received for the land. They committed to sell their land and give all of the proceeds to the church, but when the sale was actually made, they decided to lie about how much they really received and kept part of the money for themselves.

"Satan filled thine heart" - filled – Greek πληρώω - plā-ro'-ō – same word used in Ephesians regarding being filled with the Spirit.

All we have seen from this early church up until this point is that they were filled with the Spirit, but now we see that Satan has made some headway in this early church and was able to influence at least some of the members.

Note – We do not believe that Satan can possess (or indwell) a believer because a believer is indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, but Satan can influence a believer.

Why did they do it?

- Did they originally intend to deceive the rest of the congregation?
- Or did they really intend to give the money originally, but after some thought (and the influence of Satan), decided against it.

Illustration – I have had a couple of people through the years who have told me that they would build us a building if they were to hit the lottery. I am not so sure. If they were to receive some sort of windfall, they probably would eventually think of other things that they could do with the money. Ananias and Saphira should have carefully thought through what they were going to do before they made this commitment.

Note – Be careful – don't open your mouth unless you are ready to back it up.

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." - (Luke 9:62)

Jesus said that we should "count the cost"

The Old Testament made clear that you were to perform all your oaths.

"Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." - (Acts 5:4)

Notice – This was a free will offering. This was not something that God commanded. Ananias didn't have to give anything to the Lord, save perhaps a tithe of his income, and that is even debatable as being a requirement for New Testament believers. He could have done whatever he wanted to do with the land. He didn't have to sell it. He didn't have to promise the proceeds to the church. He could have promised a small portion of the proceeds. His hypocrisy was the sin here. He wanted to look good in front of the brethren, without worrying about what God thought. He was not concerned with what God thought; he was only concerned about the congregation thought.

The choice to give was Ananias' to make.

The choice to lie was also his.

“Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart” – Satan was involved, but the idea was originally conceived in the flesh (the mind, the heart) of Ananias. All Satan had to do was to encourage him to do what his flesh already wanted him to do.

Illustrate – some people stayed home from church today because they just didn't feel like coming. Satan did not introduce that idea into their mind. It is what their flesh wanted in the first place. All he had to do was nudge them along.

“Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” – here we see an important verse for our study of pneumatology (The Study of the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit is God. Ananias lied to the Holy Ghost (v. 3), and v. 4 tells us that the Holy Spirit that he lied to is God.

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

This was not church discipline – this was an act of God. God wanted to keep this early church pure. He made an example out of this man and as we will see, his wife also. Why – so that others would fear – **“great fear came on all them that heard these things”**

"And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much." - (Acts 5:6 - 8)

It amazes me that it took three hours for this woman to find out about what happened to her husband. Just like it is today, bad news usually travels very fast.

Peter gives this woman a chance to come clean, but she clings to the story that she and her husband conspired to tell.

"Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband." - (Acts 5:9 - 10)

So, we see:

III. There Were Very Grave Consequences (v. 11)

Ananias and Sapphira were both put to death at the hand of God.

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

(Acts 5:11)

Another consequence was that there was a great fear upon all the believers.

That is something that we lack in our culture today. We simply do not fear God as we should, and that is why we can so flippantly make promises to God and people, and then later break them when it is no longer convenient or comfortable to keep them.

We do not consider ourselves to be like Ananias or Sapphira, but I bet that many of us have broken promises to God.

Did you promise God:

- 1 that you were going to give Him your life – Have you taken it back?
- 2 that you were going to be a soulwinner – Have you reneged on that promise?
- 3 Did you promise God that you were going to give a faith promise offering to missions, or to the building, or to the bus ministry, or whatever. – Is God still waiting for the gift that you promised?
- 4 Have you surrendered to live a holy separated life – Are you?

What have you promised to give God, but since have taken it back?

Illustrate – We have had people through the years who got mad at me or somebody else in the church and left, and then wanted the church to give back their offerings.

Conclusion

- 1 Give Him back what you have already promised Him.
- 2 Don't make future promises that you cannot keep.
- 3 Don't let others talk you into a promise or out of a promise.