

Acts 5 – “Seriously Church”
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Imagine you own a house and decide to sell it. You sell it for \$600,000. Then you're convicted of the need in God's church and you come to me and hand me a cheque for \$500,000 and say, "Bruce, I've just sold my house, here's all the money I got for it! Use it to meet the needs of God's church".

Now, I happen to have been keeping my eye on the housing market, and I saw your house up for sale. And I KNOW you sold it for \$600,000.

Now I could say: "Thank you very much! That's very generous of you!" And I could just ignore the fact that you lied about it.

Or, I could say: "Liar! I know you kept \$100,000! We don't want your lies or your money! Get out!" I honestly can't imagine saying that. Could you? But that's what happened in Acts 5.

Ananias and Sapphira sell a property and bring **some** of the money to the apostles. But they tell them it's the **whole** amount. But Peter knows. And Peter says to Ananias: "How can you do this?!" How can you lie like this! And Ananias drops dead. Ananias' wife turns up not knowing what's happened. Peter quizzes her about the money. She lies as well. She drops dead.

Is what they did really that serious that they deserve to die? They lied about how much money they got from the property. So what?! They kept some for themselves. What's the big deal? Why does God deliver such a severe judgement on them? Why is God so harsh? Because Ananias and Sapphira are the first termites of the Church of Jesus.

They're termites because of what they're doing. Termites eat a house from the inside out. They eat through wooden support beams, floors, electrical wiring. And because they hate the light, they keep just below the surface so no-one can see them until it's too late. They eat and eat and eat, until one day... it all collapses. Liars like Ananias and Sapphira destroy a church from the inside.

And there's an Ananias and Sapphira in every church. I have been Ananias. You have been Ananias. That simple desire to make ourselves look good. We lie. We deceive. We take credit that we don't deserve. We make grand gestures only when people are around to see. None of us can be self righteous when we look at this story. Commitments made to God that we have not honoured. Promises made that we have not kept. Our motives are **not** always pure. Our giving is **not** always selfless. Our generosity is **not** always self-sacrificial.

And it's a scary thing to think we could be like Ananias and Sapphira, because God strikes them down dead! And why does he do that? Why such drastic action for such a seemingly small thing? Because it's not just a small thing. Termites have big consequences. Termites destroy whole houses. Ananias and Sapphira lie to God. They test the Spirit of the Lord. And they've started eating away at the church. They simply do not take the church of Jesus seriously.

Here's our question for today: How seriously do **you** take being a part of the community of Jesus?

So far in Acts we've heard incredible stories about the growth of the church and how thousands were being converted. And people were looking after one another, giving all their possessions up to care for the needs of all the people.

Yet there were others, like Ananias and Sapphira (and I'm imagining that they perhaps weren't the only dishonest people in this church community of a few thousand!), who feel that it's OK to lie a bit. Who cares? No-one gets hurt. The church gets a stack of money. People are looked after. No harm done. And then God strikes them down. You see, God reminds them that this is HIS church. That this is a community that is DIFFERENT to the rest of the world.

At the end of this chapter, if I can just jump forward a bit, the apostles are on trial by the Sanhedrin, and a Pharisee named Gamaliel says: “Just let them go. Don’t worry about them. If they’re not from God, they’ll disappear, just like Theudas and Judas the Galilean.

Now that’s important information for us here. Remember the time of this church. The apostles were the beginning of the church of Jesus. And to many in that society, they looked like a socialist reform group. But there were many groups like this that came and went in those days. Theudas had 400 followers. Judas started a revolution. Is Christianity just another social reform? Is it just another revolution or political movement?

God strikes down Ananias and Sapphira. God says “No, Christianity is not just some other social reform.” God says: “This is my church. This is the church of the Spirit of God. This is no place for lying. This is no place for grandstanding. This is no place to try and make a name for yourself. If you lie here, you’re lying to God, not men.”

And it’s NO DIFFERENT today. How many people in our world see the church as a social institution? How many people see the church as a political power? In Acts 5 God makes the statement that the church is HIS. This is the church of Jesus. The church filled with HIS Holy Spirit. This is the church that proclaims Jesus as the one and only true King and preaches resurrection and eternal life. And as members of God’s church, God’s Spirit is in us! When we lie, we lie to God! When we deceive, we act against God!

As God strikes down Ananias and Sapphira, and then heals hundreds of sick and demon possessed people through the apostles, great fear seizes people all around. People take God seriously! People are astounded. They’re in shock and awe at what is happening. They’re not seeing just another social movement in Jerusalem. They’re seeing the power and strength of God’s church.

And then the persecution starts. First we’ve seen the termites from the inside. Now we see the fire from the outside. The Sadducees are “filled with jealousy” (verse 17). They arrest the apostles and put them in jail. And that night, once again, God shows whose church it is. He sends an angel to open the jail doors. The angel sets the apostles free and instructs them to “*Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life.*” (verse 20)

Then the apostles are called to the Sanhedrin. They’re accused of disobeying orders not to speak about Jesus. The apostles of course respond with the same thing they said in chapter 4: “We must obey **God** rather than men.” And that’s what this church is about! It’s about listening to **God**, not men. It’s about obeying **God**, following **God**, working for **God**, giving for **God**, not men.

The Sadducees were furious. They wanted the apostles killed. But they didn’t kill them, because a Pharisee, a well respected man named Gamaliel, sent the apostles out of the room and spoke to the Sadducees. Gamaliel says: “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.”

And they were persuaded, at least this time, to let the apostles go. They had the apostles flogged, ordered them not to speak of Jesus and then let them go. And what did the apostles do? They went out rejoicing and day after day taught in the temple courts and from house to house about ... Jesus.

You see, the apostles are listening to God. They’re told to speak about Jesus and they do. They take God seriously.

Now, let’s get to the heart of this chapter. From verse 11:
READ 11-14

People both inside and outside this community of believers recognised that something was DIFFERENT! This was not a social movement or a political movement. People dropping dead on the

spot. Sickness healed. Demons cast out. Angels setting people free from prison. And as people saw all these things happening, there are two reactions: In verses 13 and 14:

Reaction 1: verse 13: “No one else dared join them.”

Reaction 2: verse 14: “More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

So response one: People see the church of Jesus and think “I wouldn’t dare to join them. They’re a serious group. I fear their incredible life.”

The other response: “I can’t wait to join them! I want the life that they’re living out! They are clearly committed to something that’s important – something that has meaning!

And these are both great responses for a church to hear. Because both responses say: “There is a church who takes God seriously and does not muck around.”

III – Imagine you decide to join a football team. (Or a bowls team, or a craft group...) And you go down to see one team, and they’re sitting around, drinking, laughing, having fun. No-one seriously trains. Everyone just relaxes and does what they like. Lots of fun.

Then you visit another team. They’re serious. They’re doing exercise, running hard, working hard. If someone slacks off, they’re dealt with seriously. If someone doesn’t turn up to practice, they’re disciplined. They’re serious about what they do.

Now, which team are you going to join? If you want to laze around and have a bit of fun, join the first team. But if you want to play serious sport, join the second team!

People looked at the church of Acts and they saw the church of God, focussed on Jesus, empowered by the Spirit of God. A church that listened to God, and not men. They saw people who were serious about God. People willing to face death to serve Jesus. People willing to share all they had. People willing to stand up to threats. It wasn’t a social movement or a political movement, or a religion. This was God’s church.

What do people see in us? Here. Today. Do they see the church of Jesus? Do they see people who are seriously committed to following God? Do they see people committed to God’s mission? People committed to each other? People willing to stand against opposition?

There are two other responses – which we don’t want to hear as the church of Jesus:

- “I want to join them because that church looks like fun. Not too serious. I think I’ll join. No massive commitment. People just do whatever they can. Laid back. Looks good!”

Or the other dreaded response:

- “I don’t want to join them – they’re no different to me! What’s the point? They act the same. They speak the same. They just go somewhere for a meeting every week and do stuff! I can get that from any club!”

Acts 5 gives us a look at a church that is serious about following Jesus. Everything they do causes the people around them to say “Wow! These guys are involved in something extraordinary. Look at their commitment. Look at their purpose. Look at their God!”

Committing to Jesus cannot be half hearted. Because we’re not a social club or a political movement. We don’t want people joining us because our faith looks fun and easy and gives them something to do for a few hours a week. We want people to see that we are seriously committed to a seriously life changing Lord and Saviour.

The question we each need to ask, as part of God’s church, is simply this: “When people look at me, ...and my life, ...and my commitment, do they see someone who takes God seriously?”