

Different To Make A Difference

Worship Wholeheartedly – Part 2

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WORSHIP WHOLEHEARTEDLY – PART 2

Acts 5:1-11

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to turn to the Book of Acts. We are going to look at what I believe is one of the most difficult passages in the book of Acts, if not the most difficult passage in the book of Acts. It is a humbling text to study and a humbling text to preach. It seems out of place in its context. In Acts 2-4 we are seeing the height of biblical community, a picture of the early church, a people who cared about each other and loved each other and sacrificed for each other...a picture of unity. Everything is coming together. Everything is going right. And people are coming to know Christ day in and day out. We are seeing the height of that. Then we come to Acts 5. With that context, just listen to this story.

Acts 5:1-11:

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 to men but to God.'

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the 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 agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! 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.

What is that about? Luke doesn't include every single story about the early church. Why did he choose to include this one? If there was any one that you were going to leave out, this would be the one not to include. Then preachers 2,000 years later wouldn't have to deal with it. Why would Luke include this? He's already shown struggles in the church, struggles from persecution outside the church, and he's shown how the victory has been given to the church in Acts 4. You actually come to the end of that and they've experienced persecution,

and they're having victory over that persecution, and at the triumphant moment, why do we come to Acts 5?

Here's why I think Luke included this passage: the greatest hindrance to the advancement of the gospel will never be opposition from outside the church. The greatest hindrance to the advancement of the gospel will always be sin inside the church. Luke highlights this story for us to show us why we must guard against the impurity of the world in the church. I think we need to look at Acts 5 because it's a warning and a caution to us to make sure that we don't let anything inside the church hinder the advancement of the gospel outside of the church.

Essential Questions For Wholehearted Worship ... Do I value my spiritual appearance more than I value my spiritual authenticity?

What I want us to do is dive into a picture of wholehearted worship in the early church and ask ourselves some questions. The thing is, many times we dive into the Word, and we talk about what we need to do. We talk about us. And I'm pretty intentional to try to use "we" and "us" in the way we look at the outline of different passages. But you're going to notice in this time we have together today that the emphasis is going to be on "me" and "I"; all these questions deal with "I" and "me".

The reason for that is because I want to challenge us all across this room to take an individual look at each of these questions that we are about to dive into based on Acts 5. The worst thing that can happen this morning is for anybody to walk away from this thinking, "Somebody else really needed to hear that sermon." Because how we answer these questions individually will have huge ramifications for what God does in and through us corporately. So I want us to ask some questions based on Acts 5 that will help us to examine our worship and our lives, and then lead us into a time of communion.

The first question that is essential for wholehearted worship is this: "Do I value my spiritual appearance more than I value my spiritual authenticity?" We've got to make sure we understand what's going on in this story. Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple, come together and Ananias brings this gift. Now we've talked about how there are many people in the early church that were selling their possessions and giving to the poor, sacrificing to meet each other's needs, but it wasn't something that was required. It wasn't Christian Communism; it was a voluntary thing. People could do this and it was the inner presence of the Spirit in their lives that was compelling them to say, "I'm going to sell these things so that I can help out my brothers and sisters who are in need." Ananias was not required when we sold whatever he sold to take all of that money and give it to the poor. He wasn't required to sell that property; he wasn't required to give any of it to the poor. He could do whatever he wanted to do.

But what he decided to do was to come before Peter and lay this at the Apostles' feet so that everyone else would think that he was giving all of this money. In fact, though, in verse 2 when it says, "*With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself*" (Acts 5:2), that word in the original language of the New Testament literally means what we would call "embezzling"—taking money that belonged to someone else and keeping it for yourself. He had committed that money to the church and he came forward and gave part of it but kept some of it for himself.

Ananias' sin was not the fact that he didn't give all his money. His sin was the fact that he was trying to deceive the Lord and trying to deceive the church by looking like he was doing something that he was not. That is the essence of spiritual inauthenticity. Spiritual inauthenticity appears to be one way, but proves to be something else. That was the danger that we see here in chapter 5. God hates spiritual inauthenticity. He doesn't value spiritual appearance over spiritual authenticity. And there is a word there for us and our culture.

Two options ...

We live in an area of the country known as the Bible belt. It is common to go to church on Sunday. It is routine to go to church on Sunday. There is a great temptation for us to come in here this morning dressed nicely to worship Christ and to go through routines that gives spiritual appearance but lack spiritual authenticity. That is a serious temptation for us in our culture, and I think there is a word for us here. I want you to see the two options in this passage, because there is a contrast here. I want you to see a contrast and two options.

In a situation like this, option number one is to simulate holiness. That is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira were trying to do. Back up a little bit to the end of chapter 4 in verse 36. The Bible says: "*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). You've got a contrast here. Barnabas, who sold a field, brought all the money and put it at the Apostle's feet. After Ananias and Sapphira see what Barnabas did, they say, "We want to look like Barnabas. We want to do what Barnabas did." So they sell some property, keep back some money for themselves, and say, "We're like Barnabas." They come and lay this down at the Apostle's feet. They simulate holiness. Somewhere along the way they believed that Christianity was about religious regulations, that it was about doing things on the outside and getting an appearance—a perception of others in the church about you.

That is not authentic Christianity. Simulated holiness misses the entire point of authentic Christianity. We somewhere along the way in the 21st century Bible belt of America have created an idea similar to this, that spiritual authenticity is summed up in going to church and observing religious regulations, doing the right things, saying the right things, and being known as nice, decent, church people, and that is what Christianity is about. And that's NOT what Christianity is about. That is spiritual appearance that lacks spiritual authenticity.

The contrast comes from Barnabas, because he's a guy who wasn't simulating spiritual holiness. Here's a guy who was sacrificing everything. You see it here, he "*sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet*" (Acts 4:37). We see Barnabas a few other times in the book of Acts. Let me show you a portrait of Barnabas to see the contrast:

Right after Saul, the persecutor of Christians, now Paul, has come to know faith in Christ, listen to what verse 26 says in Acts 9, "*When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple*" (Acts 9:26). You would be the same if he was going out trying to kill your friends and one day says, "Now I am a follower of Christ." You'd think, "Well, why don't you talk with someone else." Listen to what happens in verse 27, "*But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem*" (Acts 9:27-28). We see Barnabas risking to advocate for this new guy named Saul that nobody else liked.

Look in chapter 11 of Acts. The church begins to grow at Antioch. They are first called Christians in fact in Antioch. Listen to what happens. There are a bunch of new believers there. It says in verse 22, *"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord"* (Acts 11:22-24). Barnabas is the representative from the church of Jerusalem that goes to be a part of helping this church of Antioch get off the ground.

Later on, there's something going on at the church of Antioch. In the same chapter in verse 29 it says, *"The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea"* (Acts 11:29). They took up an offering for the poor. Verse 30 says, *"This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul"* (Acts 11:30). Barnabas was a guy they knew they could trust to take this gift to the poor.

When you get over to Acts 13, you see the church setting apart missionaries to go and proclaim the Gospel. It says in verse 2, *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'"* (Acts 13:2).

One more time in Acts 15 starting in verse 36,

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36-40).

Once again we see Barnabas the defender, giving this guy named John Mark a second chance.

You see a picture of spiritual authenticity there. This is a guy who sacrificed his possessions in Acts 4. He's a guy who sacrificed his pride. It's not about exalting Barnabas for him. He sacrificed his passions, his dreams, and his ambitions. He's going around proclaiming the Gospel. He's ready to take money to the poor to help them out. He's ready to go help new churches get started. He's ready to go back and encourage the churches that have already been started. We've got a picture of spiritual authenticity in Barnabas. The antithesis of that is Ananias and Sapphira who were simulating holiness and not sacrificing everything.

We've got to be careful in the church today not to create an idea that holiness and spiritual authenticity consist in going to church and worshipping, having nice regulations that we follow, and things that we do. That is not holiness. It's not avoiding all of these major sins that we despise in the church and we don't do those things, and therefore we're holy. Holy is a gambling, a risking of our entire lives for the sake of the glory of Christ and His Church. That's what holiness is, and that's what spiritual authenticity is. Therefore we don't sing without putting feet to our songs. That affects the way we worship.

What we have gathered together for this morning is not spiritual appearance. If it is, then we dishonor our God in worship. What we have gathered together for this morning is spiritual authenticity. How many times—I won't ask for a show of hands—have you looked

to the church and said, "There's a lot more appearance there than there is authenticity." God help us to show the world more than just spiritual appearance. Do I value spiritual appearance more than spiritual authenticity? God help us not to like the thought of being holy more than we like the sacrifice of being holy.

Do I have a genuine fear before God?

The second question is this: "Do I have a genuine fear before God?" I want you to see the repetition of two words in this passage, mentioned twice after Ananias and Sapphira bring this gift and both of them fall over dead. Look at what happens in verse 5, "*When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened*" (Acts 5:5). And then verse 10, "*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 5:10-11).

This is the same word that we see back in Acts 2:43, "*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*" This is the same word, "phobos", from which we get our word "phobia", which means "fear." This is a real, genuine fear that was going on. And we can understand that. Can you imagine that kind of thing happening today? How many of you are glad that God is not still usually in the business of striking down hypocrites? You'd be scared, too! What is this fear all about? Is fear a mark of the church? Great fear, not only in the church, but outside the church? You don't increase attendance at your third worship service by doing these kinds of things. What is this fear all about?

Well it's a word that's used in a variety of places in the New Testament and Old Testament for reverence, respect, and awe, but I want us to dive deeper into that—because it's more than just respect like we think of respect. When I travel around the world and I meet folks of different religions—Hindus or Buddhists or Muslims... Or even talk with an atheist and talk about their beliefs I obviously disagree with their beliefs, but I respect them. I disagree with them but I respect them. That is not the kind of respect that we have for God. You don't disagree with God. This is deeper than just respect between two equals.

We have a tendency to bring God down to our level and we have a respect for Him. That is not what fear is. Fear is a deep reverence, a holy terror, before God. I know that's a strong word, but I think that's what the New Testament is teaching us here—a genuine fear before God.

And that is exactly what we see in the Gospels when we see Jesus interacting with His disciples and He raises His hand and calms the storm. What does the Bible say? The disciples were afraid. They weren't afraid because of the storm. They were afraid because this guy could raise His hands and all of a sudden the storm stopped, and they realized that this guy was not their equal. You don't mess with this dude. When you see Him heal a paralytic, the Bible says that they feared Jesus. When He heals people and when He raises people from the dead, the reaction in Mathew, Mark, and Luke which we see over and over again is fear. Fear is the reaction to seeing the worth of Christ and the power of Christ and the might of Christ.

That is why we see all throughout Scripture that the "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Fear of the Lord is always connected with devotion to God and trust in God and

wholehearted surrender to God. They go together, but this is foreign to us. We don't think about the fear of the Lord or what it means to have a genuine fear before God. What does that mean? I want to help us put some handles on this.

Fear deception.

First of all, I think part of it is a fear of deception. We fear deception. In verse 3, when Peter confronts Ananias, he says, "*Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 5:3). "You've lied to the Holy Spirit and you've tried to deceive the Holy Spirit." Then at the end of verse 4 he says, "*You have not lied to men but to God*" (Acts 5:4). Notice that this is one of those passages—and this is just a side note—where we see the Holy Spirit equated with God. We don't see the word "trinity" in Scripture, but we know that the Holy Spirit is God because Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, and so he lied to God. The Holy Spirit is God.

Peter confronts Ananias and says, "You are trying to deceive the very Spirit of God. You are lying to God." Fear and tremble at the thought of trying to lie to God. That is definitely something we should fear. Fear trying to deceive God with spiritual appearance when there is a hollow soul at the core of our being. Fear trying to deceive God in that way. Tremble at the thought of living a lie before God. That is something to fear.

Fear distrust.

Don't just fear deception, but also fear distrust. When we get to Sapphira, Peter confronts her in verse 9 and says to her, "*How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord*" (Acts 5:9)? "How could you agree to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" At the core of this idea of testing God or of tempting God is an idea of distrust in God. We see it all throughout Scripture. When Jesus is tempted by the Devil, He says, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God," quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. Don't test God. Don't ask Him to try to prove His goodness to you and His grace to you and His mercy to you. Don't ask Him to prove His judgment to you and His wrath to you. You don't ask God to prove His character. He has proved His character over and over again, and to ask Him to do that is to distrust Him.

Turn back to the left, go to Psalm 78, I want you to see how testing is equated with distrusting. I want you to see how this biblical picture of testing God is equated with distrusting God—a lack of trust in God. Psalm 78 is a recounting of Israel's history and how over and over and over again they didn't trust God and they tested Him. Look in verse 17. There are three times that they test God in this chapter: "*But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, 'Can God spread a table in the desert? When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly...'*" (Ps. 78:17-20). God had provided water for them in Exodus 17. "*But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?' When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance"* (Ps. 78:20-22).

Look over in verse 40, "*How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan*" (Ps. 78:40-43). It goes on with all the incredible things God did, and it comes to verse 56, "*But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes. Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow*" (Ps. 78:56-57). Over and over again God provided, and over and over again they tried to put God to the test. They were thinking, "Let's see if God is real."

You see, Ananias and Sapphira, I don't think, had ever reckoned with the reality of the Holy Spirit. They thought it was a game. They thought it was something you do, that it was the norm. They thought that you "do a Barnabas"—that you come down and you put this down, and everything goes on, and people look at you as "good," because you played the game well. They never reckoned with the fact that the Holy Spirit knows their thoughts and that the Holy Spirit sees their hearts. The Holy Spirit will always prove the character of God.

See the word there for us? This is not just a game that we do. The Holy Spirit knows our thoughts, and He sees all of our hearts. We need not test Him by not reckoning with His reality and not coming face to face with Him, and thus go on like this is a game. They tested Him. They distrusted Him. Fear living in a way that we show that our trust is not in God. Fear living in a way that we show the world that our trust is in money instead of God. Tremble at the thought of living in that way. Men, fear living in such a way that you show that your pleasure is in pornography instead of in God. Fear living like that. Fear living in a way that we show any of our pleasures come from the world as opposed to satisfaction in God. Fear living that way. Tremble at the thought of it.

Fear disobedience.

Fear deception, fear distrust, and fear disobedience. One in every four times we see the "fear of the Lord" mentioned in all of Scripture it is equated with obedience. The fear of the Lord and obedience go together. When you fear God, you don't want to deceive Him or show a lack of trust in Him, and you fear living in any way that would disobey Him. When you fear living in a way that you show that He is not worthy of all your life, that is the fear of the Lord.

Fear of God is evident in our love for God.

What I want us to see is that fear of God is so fundamental, that fear of God is evidence of our love for God. That makes no sense to most of us. How does fear go with love? How do you put those two together? But that is exactly what we are seeing here in Scripture. In Psalm 130:3-4 the psalmist talks about how thankful he is that the Lord does not recount his sins against him. He says, "*But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared*" (Ps. 130:4). Because He forgives us and because He pours out grace on us, He is feared. He is revered.

How does that work together? When you are forgiven by the blood of Christ, how does fear come in? Don't miss the connection here: when you are forgiven by the blood of Christ then you fear living in any way or approaching worship at all in such a way that you show that the blood of Christ is not precious to you. You fear living in any way that you show that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is not important to you. Fear living like that.

That's exactly what Romans 5:8-9 is saying: "*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). That's how we know He loves us. And what does he say in verse 9? "*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him*" (Rom. 5:9). We don't fear condemnation before God, because of Christ. Apart from Christ we've got a lot of reasons to fear the judgment of God. But because of Christ we don't fear condemnation; we fear living in such a way that we show that His forgiveness was not real, true, and genuine. The fear of God now becomes equated with love for God.

Now I know this is not something that we talk about a lot, and that's why Acts 5 is such a foreign passage in the American Church. We struggle with the picture of God that we're seeing here, but if we want to worship truly we can't put some doctrines in the Bible aside. We've got to embrace Scripture. We've got to embrace what Scripture is teaching us, and it's going to deepen our worship. See how this deepens our worship. The fear of God—the

fear of deceiving Him or distrusting Him or disobeying Him—see how the result becomes authentic Christianity and authentic worship? Our worship is deeper. We don't trivialize worship. We don't come in here just to joke around and have a good time. Although there is joy, it is deeper joy when we see it coupled with the fear of God. How do the fear of God and the love of God go together? Here's an illustration:

Yesterday would have been my father's 61st birthday. I had the privilege of growing up with a father who loved me deeply and cared for me deeply and encouraged me and sacrificed in countless ways for me. He loved me deeply, and I loved him deeply. I would fear deceiving him or trying to deceive him. I'd be afraid of the thought. I remember the first speeding ticket...late at night I was heading over to a friend's house and got pulled over, scared to death, shaking—not at the police officer, but at the thought of dad. I couldn't continue over to my friend's house. I had to go back home right away, and wake up Mom so she could tell dad in the morning. There's a fear of deceiving dad. There's a fear of distrusting dad. Dad had way of knowing what was best for me.

The first time he ever saw Heather when we were in high school, we weren't dating at that point or anything. He said, "One of my sons needs to marry that girl." So I had to trust him. You fear disobeying. You don't have dinner with dad every week of your senior year, where you talk about everything under the sun, and he gives you advice, and you listen to him and enjoy his presence. You don't have that kind of dinner and then walk away and disobey him and do things that dishonor him. You don't do that. You fear that. You fear doing anything that dishonors him. The only thing that hurts when you become pastor of a large church is the ache of wanting to see His face honored in what God is doing. That's the only thing that has hurt in this whole few months. I feared those things, because my Dad meant so much to me. How much more should we fear God! Do you have a genuine fear of God?

Is the justice of God compelling me to accomplish the mission of God?

The justice of God ...

The third question: "Is the justice of God compelling me to accomplish the mission of God?" Obviously, Acts 5 is a portrait of the judgment of God. Again, this is one of those doctrines, one of those parts of God, that we don't talk about very much—his judgment. But that's exactly what we're seeing here. I want you to think about what it means for God to be just, for Him to be a judge. There are three characteristics that are part of a biblical picture of the justice of God.

First of all, He is omnibenevolent, which basically means that He is all good. Everything in God is good. Everything in God is right. That's a characteristic. You can think about some of these things in relation to an earthly judge. You want an earthly judge who is good, a judge who cares about how right triumphs over wrong or how good triumphs over evil. If you have a judge who doesn't care about good over evil, then he's not a good judge. It would not be good if God sat back and let sin go on rampant and didn't care about removing sin from the church.

So we're beginning to see how the goodness of God is actually encapsulated in Acts 5. The worst thing would be if God were to sit back and let the church continue on in sin and continue on in hypocrisy. That would be the worst thing, and in fact that's what we see in Scripture. There are times—Romans 1 is a perfect picture—where God basically lets people

come over to the desires of their heart. He gave them over to sinful desires. He gave them over to all kinds of immorality and pleasures of the world. He gave them over to those things. We don't want God to do that. We want God to bring right over wrong and good over evil. So He is all good.

Second, He is all-knowing. In order for a judge to be a good judge He has got to know everything. He has got to know all of the facts in order to make a judgment. Thankfully, God is omniscient. He knows everything, and therefore He is a perfect judge. Nothing is hidden from Him, so nothing can deceive Him.

He is all-good, He is all-knowing, and third, He is all-powerful. A good judge has the authority to carry out his judgments. If someone commits a heinous crime and they go before a judge, and that judge is good and knows all the facts but can do nothing about it, that's not a good judge. That's not a good picture. God has all power. He is sovereign. All authority belongs to God. Therefore, He has power to execute and carry out His judgments.

Now don't get this picture, when we're talking about the justice of God, of some wild, irrational, unpredictable thing. You don't have to worry about God coming in like a tornado. The picture, though, is of a God who is completely good, whose character is completely set against evil. He has the power to carry out that. He is all good, He is all knowing, and He is all powerful.

Now, we are equating—"Is the justice of God compelling me to accomplish the mission of God? "Why do you put it that way?" Here is what we've got to grasp in this passage; don't miss this. It is the justice of God—His goodness, His omniscience, His omnipotence—that is propelling the church into a deeper and greater mission. In fact, this is something we see at different points throughout Scripture. Whenever God is doing mighty or great things among His people, it is often accompanied by great severity from God, a highlight of the judgment of God.

Let me show you two instances. Go back to the book of Leviticus. Look at chapter 10. The tabernacle, which is a place of worship, is erected for the people of God to worship in. God's presence is "tabernacling," or dwelling, among His people. It is a high time among the people of God at that point. For the people of Israel, things were going very well. There were priests who had just started their work in the tabernacle. Listen to this,

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu"—both of them priests—"took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."' Aaron remained silent" (Lev. 10:1-3).

Does that sound familiar? That looks really similar to Acts 5. At the height of the church, that happens to Ananias and Sapphira. At the height of the people of God, at the tabernacle, He shows His justice on those who treat His goodness and His worship lightly. He shows His justice on those who disobey Him and don't fear distrust, deception, and disobedience.

Let me show you one more. Look at Joshua 7:1. The people of God are at the height of things. They have just entered into the Promised Land. They have taken out Jericho. They've played some music, the walls fell down, and they won a battle. It was a good day for the people of Israel. Everything was going right. They had all the momentum in the

battle. Look at what chapter 7:1 says. They had been commanded when they went into Jericho to take out all of the devoted things.

"But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel" (Josh. 7:1)—because Achan had disobeyed God.

"Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, 'Go up and spy out the region.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, 'Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.' So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water" (Josh. 7:2-5).

What happened?

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name' (Josh. 7:6-9)?

So God speaks up, and He says, *"Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions"* (Josh. 7:10-11). Does that sound familiar? *"That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction"* (Josh. 7:12). What happens is the same fate that happened to Nadab and Abihu, the same fate that happened to Ananias and Sapphira. And in the rest of the chapter this happens to Achan. He dies.

I want us to see how the justice of God is coupled with the mission of God. He's all good, all knowing, and all powerful. Therefore He must by nature of His character judge sin seriously in the church. But what happens to the mission of the church if sin in the church is not dealt with seriously? What happens to the mission of God?

Think about it. If we don't deal with the severity of sin in our lives, the world will look at the church and not see the severity of sin. Sin will become a casual complacent thing that really doesn't matter. At that point, the world is completely stripped of seeing her need for a Savior. The mission of God is dependent on seriousness about sin, because it's when we're serious about sin that grace comes in and shows itself as mighty and wonderful. However, if we minimize the severity of sin in the church, if we're complacent with sin in this room, if we play around with sin, and if it's not a big deal to us, then the world looks inside the church and says, "Sin really doesn't matter in their lives. Sin really doesn't matter in my

life.” Then you go out and try to share the gospel, and there’s no need for a Savior that they see. See how the justice of God is coupled with the mission of God.

We think, “Well, if we focus on sin and the judgment of God how are we ever going to preach grace?” That’s when we preach grace the most! It’s when we confess our sin honestly before God, before each other, and before the world—when we confess our sin and fall on our knees in repentance—that’s when the grace of God comes in. That’s when the grace of God covers us and cleanses us from all our sin. That’s when He makes us righteous and He gets glory in the world through the church. It doesn’t happen until the church stops playing games and giving themselves to spiritual appearance and good worship devoid of honesty before God. The justice of God is coupled with the mission of God.

The reality of God’s character compels us to risk everything for God’s cause.

The reality of God’s character—His justice and His judgment—actually compels us to risk everything for God’s cause. If we don’t focus on our sin and the judgment of God, then we strip the Gospel of its power, and our worship becomes mere entertainment for us on Sunday mornings. But when we see God and we see His goodness, power, and omniscience, then and we see the world around us and know that apart from Christ we come under the judgment of God. And apart from Christ our friends and family and the people we work with and the people who mean the most to us, and the billion people who haven’t heard the name of Jesus in other nations, we know that the judgment of God is real and it compels us. We’re not just going to sing. We can’t just sing. We’ve got to get up and tell people about the grace and mercy that can cover sins and can bring life and newness and change.

You see how they go together? However we’ve become casual with sin in the church, and therefore we don’t see the gravity of sin around us. We go throughout our Christian lives coasting without ever proclaiming the grace and mercy of Christ, because we just don’t see the need to do it. The reality of God’s character compels us to give ourselves to God’s cause.

The Bottom Line ...

The bottom line is this: when you come back to Acts 5 after this whole thing listen to what happens in verse 12, *“The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade”* (Acts 5:12). Now listen to these two verses, *“No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people”* (Acts 5:13). So people were like, “What’s going on in the church?” But then listen to verse 14, *“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number”* (Acts 5:14). Do you see the justice of God and the mission of God?

The world looks at the church and sees holy fear before God, a fear that is motivated by the love of God. It is rooted in the grace of God, and they see that grace covers our sins and that we’re not playing games. We’re honest with God. The world sees that and says, “There’s something different.” Part of them says, “I don’t know, but there’s something that the Spirit does when the justice and the mercy of God are displayed in the church and He begins to draw people to Himself.” Holiness and godly fear are a great way to grow a church.

We see great power in verse 15. It talks about all of these people being healed. There are crowds gathering around bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were being healed. We’re seeing great power in Acts 5:12. But it’s coming on the heels of great purity in the first 11 verses. Don’t miss it. Great purity precedes great power.

If we want to see great power in the church, we've got to realize the power of Holy Spirit in our witness is always accompanied by the purity of the Holy Spirit in our worship.

We sang last week, "Send your power of your spirit down." We had a good time singing it, as well we should. We want to see His power in our lives, but let's not expect great power apart from great purity. We'll make the same mistake that the people of God made throughout the Old Testament by expecting great power and participating in great religious rituals in worship while ignoring the need for great purity.

So here's the challenge before us. We're about to have Communion. We talked last week about what Communion represents. It's about reflecting the memory, renewing ourselves, and rejoicing in Christ. I want to invite you to ask yourself these three questions. I want to invite you not to try to deceive God, and not to try to test Him or be content in disobedience, but to turn from sin and turn to Christ and see His grace. His grace is real. It's what communion is about...the blood of Christ and the body of Christ shed for our sins. It's what sets us free, free to fear God.

If you are not a Christian, if you are not a Christ follower, I invite you to see a picture of God's love and grace in what we do in the Lord's Supper. And if you're a believer, we're going to have some time of reflection. You can pray or you sing. You do whatever you need to do during this time to come face to face and reckon with the reality of God in this room. We are just going to celebrate together the grace and the judgment of God in our lives. We are going to come before Him in wholehearted worship.

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