

GO, TELL THE FULL MESSAGE

Acts 5:1-42

Key verse: 5:20

“Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

The fellowship of believers is not perfect. Along with the truth, there are lies and deceit. Along with the new life there is death. Along with unselfish giving there is greed. The fellowship of believers, the church, experienced the attack of Satan. He found a way into the church in the greed and pride of one couple.

1. Ananias and Sapphira (1-11)

When Joseph Barnabas sold a field and brought the proceeds to lay at the apostles’ feet, the whole church was moved. He had not done this for human praise. When Jesus came into his heart, the love of God filled him. He wanted to share with needy people. His giving spirit would later manifest itself in the Antioch church. But among the believers there was a couple who became jealous of the praise and acclamation which Joseph received for this unselfish act. So they decided to do something that would gain the recognition and praise of the church. They also sold a piece of property. They had intended to give all the proceeds to the church, but when they saw the money the demon of greed came into their hearts. Perhaps their property brought more money than Barnabas’ field had produced. So they agreed together to hold back a little of the money for personal use. They brought the rest and, pretending that this was all, they put it at the apostles’ feet.

Peter rebuked Ananias. He said, “How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept part of the money for yourself?” When Peter told him clearly that he had not lied to men but to God, he fell down dead. About 3 hours later his wife Sapphira came in. She didn’t know what had happened to her husband. When Peter asked her about the price of the land, she also lied. Peter said to her, “How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?” She, too, fell at Peter’s feet and died. Their sin was not keeping back some of the money. It was lying. The punishment seems to be too drastic. But this was not done by Peter. It was done by God. God considered lying to the Holy Spirit a very serious sin. The devil is a liar and a murderer. Jesus is a man of truth. These days people don’t take lying seriously. Books are plagiarized; fraudulent documents are used; résumés are forged. It seems that everyone lies. But in our court system, if a person lies under oath he is guilty of committing a felony and can go to jail. So lying is actually recognized as a serious crime. What is worse, this couple lied to God. How could they think that God wouldn’t know? It was as though they didn’t believe that God was a living God. They were acting like practical atheists. They were giving before men. The living God knows everything.

No one sued Peter because of the deaths of these two people. Once, a man named Korah had rebelled against Moses. When the ground opened and swallowed him and his

family, the people rioted against Moses. God put a stop to that. Great fear of God seized the whole church. The people of Jerusalem feared God so much that everyone was afraid to join the believers, but still numbers increased because the Lord added to their number. The apostles put this tragedy behind them and became busy ministering to the sick and needy. Crowds of sick and demon-possessed people came for help. And all of them were healed. Then, another problem arose.

2. Persecution by religious leaders (17-33)

The apostles were preaching Jesus' resurrection vigorously. The high priest and all the politically-minded Sadducees were filled with jealousy. So they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. They intended to bring them to trial the next morning. But that night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and told them, "Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life." At daybreak they went to the temple and taught the people. The message was a message of forgiveness. It was good news. The apostles not only preached it, they also lived the new life. The new life was a life of faith and courage. It was a life without fear of men, but only fear of God. It was a life worth risking everything to live.

Of course, they were arrested again. But this time, gently. They were brought before the Sanhedrin and questioned by the high priest. His question reveals how God had been working. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Praise God. Jerusalem was filled with gospel teaching. And the high priest is indeed guilty of the blood of Jesus. If he would only acknowledge it and repent a way of forgiveness and life could be opened for him.

Peter was not intimidated. His message became even more clear. "We must obey God not men." Furthermore, "The God of our fathers raised from the dead Jesus, whom you killed." "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel." What good news! Peter and the apostles know what they are talking about because they are eyewitnesses. The Holy Spirit is also a witness, and God will give the Holy Spirit to anyone who obeys him.

The members of the Sanhedrin were furious. They wanted to put the apostles to death. Later on, they would do so. But for now, Peter's preaching was a surprise attack. They didn't know what to do. God used a wise teacher named Gamaliel to save them from death. Gamaliel gave two illustrations from their recent history. In each case, the leader of the rebellion was caught and killed and his followers disbursed. In this case also, the leader has been caught and crucified. If his movement is not from God, then like the previous rebellions, it will come to nothing and the adherents will soon disburse. But if this Jesus movement is by chance, from God, then the Sanhedrin would find itself fighting God. So Gamaliel's advice was, "Let's wait and see." And the Sanhedrin bought it. They called in the apostles, had them flogged and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus. Then they let them go. The apostles' zeal did not abate. They left rejoicing that

they were counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus. And they kept on teaching in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. The devil's attack could not stop them.