

Episode #1130 Acts 5 Part 2-The Power of the Apostles

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. The believers were all in a great unity in Jerusalem. None of them counted his possessions as his own, but all shared and shared alike. Yet Ananias and Sapphira his wife hatched a scheme to sell a piece of property and claim they had given all the purchase price for it, when in fact they held some back. They wanted the glory for giving it all without having to make the sacrifice of giving it all. Yet the Holy Spirit, Who was working powerfully, struck Ananias dead for lying to God. His body was quickly carried out of the temple and buried, as their customs were in that day. Yet Sapphira has not heard of the fate of her husband, and she will be tested as well.

III. The Death of Sapphira and Reaction. Acts 5:7-11.

- A. Acts 5:7. It might seem strange that the apostles continued their labor without stopping after Ananias' death. Yet they were working for the Lord, and could permit no interruption. Not even the death of one of their number could disrupt their service to their Master. Some believe that the plan of this couple is that Sapphira would arrive later than her husband to receive a second round of commendation. But things are not as she imagined they would be when she arrived. Her husband is not there, and she probably sensed something wrong from the looks she now received.
- B. Verse 8. God speaks through Peter again, testing if she will go through with her deception. When in doubt she stuck with their story, as liars will often try to do when the possibility arises that they are caught.
- C. Verse 9. Peter's exclamation is as much a cry of grief as it is a condemnation. In the same way, our sins grieve the Lord Who loved us so much He died for us. Peter informs her of her husband's fate, and that she is about to join him in it.
- D. Verse 10. Her punishment is as instant as her husband's. The young men return just in time to find her dead as well! Thus God acted to preserve the great unity He had created among His followers in Jerusalem. The covetousness and dishonesty of these two would not be allowed to continue and spread, for God was maintaining the unity at that time. In the same way, He will maintain His perfect order in the kingdom to come.
- E. Verse 11. The *ekklesia* would have heard of this first, then all those in Jerusalem. They now understood it was no light thing to become a follower of Jesus Christ. There could be no mistake about the supernatural character of the deaths of this man and his wife. All who heard of the fate of these two were filled with awe and dread. In regard to this, A.T. Robertson says, "It was a dangerous thing to be a follower of Christ unless one was willing to walk straight." That is true, but it was only true in the Acts period. Today, in this dispensation of grace, one can become a professed follower of Christ and be in no danger at all. The fact that God is dealing only in grace protects them from physical punishments. This alone is enough to prove the new character of God's present administration. This whole event is not a matter of normal "church discipline," like might happen today. God was working in a different administration at that time. What happened to them was totally in line with what will happen in the kingdom of God. Psalm 101:7. Again, the Acts period is a picture of the kingdom.

IV. Great Signs and Wonders. Acts 5:12-16.

- A. Verse 12. This gives us the correct picture of the state of things in Jerusalem. All was now back as it should be, and many positive signs and wonders continued to be done by the apostles. Acts presents an unbroken record of miracles and wonders and signs. They were in Solomon's Porch, in the temple (John 10:23). They had not abandoned the temple God gave to His people of Israel.
- B. Verse 13. None dared join them. They were not willing to stand upon the truth if it meant such great accountability. This was wrong, but we can understand their fear. Yet this did not reduce the esteem of the apostles in the eyes of the people, for all this was godly and fair.
- C. Verse 14. This is odd, since we just read that none dared join them. Both of these ideas cannot be true, since one contradicts the other. Perhaps it means none dared join those who sold lands and brought the money to the apostles. Or else the idea is that while the number did not increase, it did not decrease. Those who believed were all the more added to the Lord by the events that took place. So I do not believe that there is any contradiction. At any rate, the gospel was not being rejected by these Israelites at Jerusalem. They were accepting it *en masse*! The power they were showing caused the people to magnify the apostles.
- D. Verse 15. The apostles were following the command of the Lord, Acts 6:4. The healing of the sick might seem like a most important task to us, and indeed it is, but compared to the study and the exposition of the Word of God, it is of much less importance. Since Peter's chief duty was to give himself continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, faithfulness would require him to refuse to go to the homes of the sick, and he would also need to forbid any being brought to his home or to the temple, lest his God-appointed work be interrupted. Yet they were not without compassion for those with ailments. Thus, this means of accomplishing the task of healing those in need of it was worked out. Peter did not even have to distract his thought from whatever word of God he might be considering, and his shadow would do the work of healing for him. There is no question but that this worked. What strange lack of faith it would be to say that Peter could heal with a touch, but not a shadow! Remember that God was the true power behind every healing. The medium that is used can make no difference, if it is God's will to heal. The apostles had prayed that God would stretch forth His hand to heal, and He answered them by doing so. Peter does not need to stretch forth his. His shadow is sufficient.
- E. Verse 16. Not just Jerusalemite came to be healed, but also those from surrounding cities. Not one needed to be carried back unhealed. They were healed every one, no matter how severe the case, no matter how impossible the case. If you have known anyone who was sick, you will know how desperate for healing such people can be. There was no need for the apostles to advertise or anything else. They did not need to call a "healing service," like some do today.

V. Arrest and Deliverance. Acts 5:17-25.

- A. Verse 17. The disciples have been disobeying the command of Acts 4:18, as they said they would in Acts 4:19-20. For some time the Sanhedrin had tolerated this bold disobedience. The people were with the apostles, not the Sanhedrin, and if this continues they will have to abdicate in favor of the apostles. Their jealousy increases, Greek *zelos* means envy or jealousy, not indignation. The priests were Sadducees,

- who did not believe in resurrection, so they were angered by the teaching of the Lord's resurrection.
- B. Verse 18. The apostles had the common people on their side, but the rulers had the government, the soldiers, and Rome backing them. To be thrown in prison was just as humiliating then as now, and prisons then were much less comfortable. They probably wanted to remind the apostles who was in charge. God's government would act to turn this around.
 - C. Verse 19. The Lord quickly reverses the situation. Luke writes almost matter-of-factly, as if it was a normal happening. That is what it was in the time when it occurred! It was just the fulfillment of a normal expectation in that time. When God's government is working, He will act to justify His rulers.
 - D. Verse 20. Instead of hiding, they were to act like nothing unusual had happened! This was not the behavior of criminals, and made those who had imprisoned them look foolish. They were to speak the words (Greek *rhema*, actual words spoken) of this life, probably the resurrection life that the Sadducees hated and did not want spoken.
- VII. Conclusion: Ananias and Sapphira died for lying to the Holy Spirit. This shows the character of the book of Acts and the governmental power God was displaying through His apostles. All were afraid to join them, but the believers were strengthened. Abundant miracles were done, to the point where they would have been too disturbing to the apostles to focus on them, so God allowed Peter to heal by merely his shadow passing over the sick! This shows the spectacular character of the Acts period, something that does not happen anywhere on earth today. The Sanhedrin is furious that the apostles are gaining more power than they have, and so they decide to act. Yet God immediately makes His Own counter-move. We will see the outcome of this in a future message.