

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Acts 4:36-6:7

Key Verse 5:20

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

In chapters 3 and 4 Luke recorded how Peter and John emerged as victors, and how the believers made a giant leap in number and grew stronger in the grace of Jesus, despite the threats of the Jewish rulers. But the church of Jesus had to grow more, until it could fill the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today's passage deals with a couple who had no fear of God in their hearts. Most importantly, in today's passage we learn the apostles' uncompromising spirit while teaching the word of God.

I. "You have lied to the Holy Spirit" (4:36-5:11)

The early Christians were filled with the grace and spirit of Jesus. They were free indeed in Jesus. Where the spirit of Jesus was, there was true freedom (2Co 3:17). No one was stingy. Everyone was generous. Everyone was filled with joy. There was a man named Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning Son of Encouragement. He sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (4:36). They say that money is the testing stone of one's faith. In light of this saying, Barnabas was a true man of faith. There was another man named Ananias. In contrast to Barnabas, he was a fake Christian; he was a man of discouragement to all who were in the early work and history of God.

The story about the couple Ananias and Sapphira is so serious that many Bible scholars skip over their story, being afraid to comment on it. From a human point of view, it was indeed a baffling event. But the apostles were very clear about how to deal with this event. Here we learn two things.

First, Peter's uncompromising spirit (1-4). These days many people make use of the name of the Holy Spirit in order to justify their evil doings. They act indiscreetly with the illusion that no one can see the Holy Spirit with their eyes. Ananias is the first example in the New Testament in committing such a sin. Ananias sold a piece of property

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and kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and lied to Peter that he had brought all of it. Probably he said to himself, "I want recognition! It'll be okay if I hide some for my kids and give the rest to the apostles as though I gave all of it." Ananias and Sapphira brought a big amount of money to support the newly growing movement. Because of their contribution, the church leaders could have said, "Thank you, thank you!" It is hard for any church leader not to compliment rich people like Ananias and Sapphira.

What did Peter do with them? Peter rebuked Ananias. Look at verse 3. "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.'" Ananias was smart. But in the spiritual world, his act of self-deception could not be tolerated. The money was at his disposal before and after he sold the land. Even if he had not contributed any of it, it would not have mattered. What mattered was his self-deception. In self-deception he lied to God's servants. But it was lying to himself, as well as to the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but also he opened the gate of the fortress of the early church of Jesus for Satan to come in. This is the reason Peter rebuked him severely. What Ananias did was not even to be considered in the church of Jesus. So Peter said to him in verse 4b, "What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." Humanly speaking, Peter could not rebuke him. But he rebuked him, anyway. Thus he did not compromise with a rich man.

Second, the fear of God (5-11). Look at verse 5. "When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened." Again, verse 11 says, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." In these verses, the word "fear" means the fear of God. By the coming of the Holy Spirit, the fear of God came upon them. The fear of God is the best medicine for fearful people. Let's experiment on ourselves with this truth. Now, please say, "I fear God." Then you can experience the peace of God, because when you have the fear of God in your heart, the Holy Spirit comes upon you. On the other hand, if you say, "I don't fear God. I can sin freely," you will experience indomitable fear within you, because when you have no fear of God, evil spirits come upon you (Ro.8:15). When Adam feared God, he was happy all the time. But when he did not fear God, being influenced by Satan's lie, he became fearful--so

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fearful that to him, his beautiful wife looked burdensome. These days many people have no fear of God; they commit sin freely. As a result, they are paralyzed by fear and don't know what to do with their fear problem. They must learn how to fear God, for, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge..." (Pr 9:10).

Peter also rebuked Ananias' wife Sapphira because she had tested the Holy Spirit. When Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" she said, "Yes, that is the price." She should have helped her husband not to lie. But she did not fulfill her mission as a suitable helper. Peter rebuked her, saying, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" (9a) At the moment Peter rebuked her, the feet of the men who buried her husband were at the door to carry her out, also (9b). Lying to God is not a light matter. Those who have a habit of lying to God will finally experience the tragic end Ananias and Sapphira experienced.

II. The apostles' Bible teaching (12-42)

Were the apostles discouraged by the event of Ananias and Sapphira? No! Rather, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. These early Christians had no church building. So they met together to hear the word and pray in the spacious open place surrounding Solomon's Colonnade. When they prayed and listened to the word of life, there was a great work of God. Firstly, many people in high positions were eager to join, despite peer pressure (13). And a great number of ordinary people believed in the Lord and were added to their number (14). In this way, the word of God gained power and began to spread to the whole world. Secondly, there was a great healing work. Of course, healing the sick is not a monopoly of the church of Jesus: it has been done by many people of other religions. However, in verses 12-16, Luke says that where there was earnest prayer and Bible study, there was a powerful healing ministry. And many bad people were changed into good people.

Where there was the work of the Holy Spirit, there was also the work of Satan. Out of their jealousy, the Jewish rulers arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. The apostles were helpless to do anything. But God was with them; God brought them out of the jail through his angel and said in verse 20, "Go, stand in the temple

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courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life." This verse tells us that the ultimate mission of the church of Jesus is to teach the word of God.

Meanwhile, police officers were sent by the Sanhedrin council to bring the apostles from the jail to their courtroom. On arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they came back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside" (23).

What were the apostles doing after the angel brought them out of the jail? Look at verse 21. "At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people." Also, look at verse 25. "Then someone came and said, 'Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.'" It is amazing to see that they did not go to get some sleep or to eat breakfast, even though they had suffered overnight in the jail. It is amazing to see that they were teaching the word in the temple courts where, of all places, their enemies could see them. They did not worry about what might well happen to them at any moment. In this event, we can see in them a clear picture of a man of mission. They were fearless. They were filled with strength (25), and they gave the word of life to all people, as they had been commissioned.

Again, the apostles were brought to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. He said, "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." At this moment when their hearts quailed, what could the apostles say? They said, "We must obey God rather than men!" They feared God. So they did not fear the threats of the interrogators.

It is amazing to see that the apostles began to witness Jesus to the Jewish rulers in the courtroom. Read verses 30-32. "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Their witness to Jesus was the same, but now they stressed repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. The

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apostles invited them to repent.

When the Jewish rulers heard this message, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, spoke up. He quoted the examples of Theudas and Judas and said, "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; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (35-39). His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go (40). Obviously, the apostles had been badly beaten up and threatened. But they were happy about their sufferings and never stopped teaching. We learn two things from them.

First, the apostles had a right attitude toward suffering. In history, many people suffered and died, not knowing why they suffered so much. Peter also hated suffering; he wanted an easy and glorious life without suffering, by virtue of Jesus (Mk 9:5). Later he came to know that there are two kinds of suffering: the suffering that comes after committing sin, and suffering for doing good (1Pe 2:20). God gave man suffering as the means to grow in God. This is God's truth. So we must accept this truth about suffering. Otherwise, we become like animals.

It is amazing to see that the apostles had learned the true meaning of suffering through the crucifixion of Jesus. Finally they rejoiced to suffer for his name's sake. Read verse 41. "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." Beating, threats and disgrace because of Jesus' name did not make them bitter. Rather, they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering for his name. The early apostles were truly great men of God, and their attitude toward suffering was glorious. Later Peter said to the early Christians who were under fiery persecutions, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1Pe 4:13). To our surprise, the desire to participate in the suffering of Jesus our Lord is nothing but the beginning point of Christian life.

Second, they suffered endlessly to teach the word of God. Look at verse 42. "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the

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Christ." At that time, it was illegal to teach people in Jesus' name. And they were under immense pressure from the Jewish rulers. But they did not stop teaching the Word.

At this time, we must think about why God commands them to teach the word (20). It is because the word of God is the word of life. Jesus taught the word of God to the people in season and out of season. During the time of his ministry on earth, Jesus taught the word of God to all kinds of people, who wanted something else more than the word of life (Jn 6:60). Jesus taught the word even during the Passover week, bracing himself for his upcoming crucifixion (Lk 22:47, Mk 14:43). It was to give them the word of life. Paul realized this importance and said, "Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season" (2Ti 4:2a). Peter realized this importance also and said, "For 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever'" (1Pe 1:24,25).

III. The decision to do no more business (6:1-7)

As the church grew, business also grew bigger. As business grew, the number of complaints among the people also grew. Among the early Christians there were two kinds of people--native Jews who spoke Aramaic, and Greek-speaking Jews. Greek-speaking Jewish women complained that they had received an unfair distribution of food compared with the native Jews. It was a golden chance for the apostles to make a big success. But to our surprise, they decided to hand the business over to other people so that they might give more attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. What impractical people they were! But one thing was very clear. They made a clear decision of faith to remain as evangelists, giving up the chance for big business. What a great decision it was! They were men of faith and of uncompromising spirit. They did not want to neglect the ministry of the word of God because of business. So they chose seven men to take over their business of food (5).

We are living in a democratic society. Democracy seems to be an ideology to get mutual benefits by means of compromise. But in this passage we learn the apostles' uncompromising spirit while teaching the Word. They didn't compromise with a rich man. They didn't compromise

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with worldly rulers. They didn't compromise with the chance to make a big business. They were heroic. They were true leaders of the world. They were true men of God who obeyed the Lord's command when he said, "Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life."