

## TUESDAY 21 June 2022 "Deceit Death" (Acts 5:1-11)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*As you consider the most significant challenges facing your community I wonder if 'deceitfulness' is among the top issues that are undermining the quality of life where you live? Have you grown skeptical about the promises of almost every voice you hear who is not a close friend? Have you found the one thing that breaks your heart and strains a relationship faster than anything else is **deceit, especially outright lies?***

Yesterday I left you considering a utopian time in Jerusalem where this one phrase describes an honesty and generosity that was almost beyond belief: **"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... there were no needy persons among them."** (Acts 4:32,33) We were introduced, yesterday, to a remarkably encouraging and generous man named Barnabas who actually sold a field he owned and brought the money to the Apostles to help anyone they knew in need. We can imagine when such outrageous generosity occurred people would celebrate! *Sadly, jealousy rose up in the hearts of a married couple and the utopia was shattered by deceit.*

Acts 5:1 says this: **"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 to the apostles..."** Finances are an important part of any family, any marriage relationship, right? Husbands and wives need to trust each other with the family finances if the marriage is going to work well, have you found that to be true? Can you imagine the discussions Ananias and Sapphira must have had? First, they had to agree about selling their property and the price they were willing to accept for it. But second, it seems clear they agreed they would NOT bring the full sale price to the Apostles but would keep back some for themselves. Now that's not necessarily a problem is it? *The problem, of course, was their deceitfulness.*

Can you imagine Ananias as he handed the sack of money over to the apostles evidently saying that he and his wife, like Barnabas, had sold a piece of land and they too wanted to bless the needy. I imagine Ananias was fully expecting accolades of celebration and maybe even a big bear hug of appreciation from the apostles. But Peter responded not with thanks and praise but by saying: **"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!"** (Acts 5:3,4) How did Peter know? *The only explanation is that the Holy Spirit warned Peter that this great deception could destroy the trust and financial integrity of this new "Jesus movement".*

Peter's words were intended to be a great warning for anyone who might try to bring deceitfulness into the purity of what the Holy Spirit was doing in Jerusalem. Warning words are one thing but what happened next sent shock waves across the city of Jerusalem!

The record says: ***"When Ananias heard this, he fell down and DIED! And a great fear seized all who heard what had happened."*** (Acts 5:5) Now let's remember friends that the book of Acts is written by a physician named Dr. Luke. He traveled with Paul as his physician on two of his missionary journeys. Luke was not an eyewitness to this event so can you imagine the number of interviews Luke did with Peter and others who were present that day, to be sure he recorded it accurately? What did Ananias die of? A brain aneurysm, a heart attack, a blood clot? Luke doesn't tell us, they didn't do autopsies in those days. *What we do know is that God dealt a severe and immediate blow to this scheme of Satan to bring deceitfulness and jealousy into this spiritual great awakening which was sweeping Jerusalem.* I wonder if you've ever seen God do something similar in your world when God steps in to protect the integrity of His Word or His reputation which is being maligned?

Look, there come some young guys into the room, carrying a sheet. I wonder what that's for? Oh, now I see... Luke explains: ***"Then the young men came forward, wrapped Ananias' body, and carried him out and buried him."*** Now that seems to suggest no one went home to tell his wife Sapphira what had happened! Why not? Well, it appears the Holy Spirit was guiding every step of this remarkable experience, for Dr. Luke next writes: ***"About three hours later Sapphira came in, not knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her, 'Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?'"*** (Acts 5:7,8) Look around the room. We can presume several of the other apostles are there and maybe even Barnabas and perhaps others. *All eyes are fixed on Sapphira.* She squirms a bit, looks around the room, clears her throat and speaks: ***"Yes, that is the price."***

Now all eyes turn to Peter. What will he say? What is that look on Peter's face... frustration, sadness, disappointment, compassion, bold courage? Like a doctor about to tell a person they are terminally ill, I wonder what thoughts and emotions flood Peter's mind and heart. I suspect he paused long enough to ask the Holy Spirit to guide his words, and then Peter says something no one will ever forget: ***"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!"*** (Acts 5:9) I wonder if Sapphira turned and saw the young men starting to walk toward her with a sheet? Did she try to run, or did she simply collapse right where she stood? Dr. Luke again records this astonishing truth: ***"At that moment Sapphira fell down and DIED. Then the young men came in and finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband."***

Now look around the room, what do you see on the faces of all who are present? What does it mean?

These were Jewish men, they knew the Old Testament history very well. I wonder if the story of the 12 spies, including Joshua and Caleb, who were sent in to explore the promised land, came to their minds? Remember? Joshua and Caleb were confident and urged Moses to lead the people into the new land that God would certainly give to them. But 10 spies were fearful and deceitful and spread a bad report and all the people rose up in opposition to Moses, Aaron and God. God's response was immediate and definitive: **"...these men responsible for spreading the bad report were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly."** (Numbers 14:37-39) My friends, *have you learned that it is a dreadful thing to face God's holy judgment?*

Luke summarizes the impact of the judgment of God upon Ananias and Sapphira with these words: **"Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."** (Acts 5:11) We understand, don't we? It was a terrifying event that showed God's disdain for deceit among His people! I'm not mistaken, this is the first time the word "**church**" is used by Luke in describing what was taking place in Jerusalem after Jesus died, rose again and ascended back to heaven. You remember Jesus had promised: **"I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."** (Matt. 16:18)

**"Church"** is the English translation for a very significant word which Luke had used when he wrote Acts in his language, the language of the Roman Empire, Greek. Luke used the word "**Ekklesia**". It comes from two words with very specific meaning: EK, meaning "out from and to" and KALEO meaning 'to call'. *So, you see "ekklesia", as Luke used it, is the people in Jerusalem who had been called, by Jesus, out from the darkness of their sin and to God in a life transforming relationship.* These Jews would understand it clearly for that is exactly what God did in rescuing their ancestors out from hopeless Egyptian slavery and bringing them TO God Himself. Moses recorded that God had said: **"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations, you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** (Exodus 19:4-6)

This same Peter, holding the sack of money right now, watching the young men carry Sapphira's body out, wrote it this way: **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of HIM who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God..."** (1 Peter 2:9) Ekklesia, a people called out of the darkness of sin, to deliverance in Jesus Christ for salvation! *Jesus' Ekklesia Church... now worldwide nearly 1 Billion people.*

*Do we understand today my friends how important it is to God that God's people are a pure people with NO deceit? Why? Because deceit breaks trust and spreads like a terminal cancer in any relationship. Deceit invites the devil into our lives, our families, into every relationship. Deceit destroys integrity.* Let's pause, right here and consider the importance of holy integrity with God's people! How's your heart today my friend?

Here's a song of deep personal reflection, I invite you to worship... right now... what does the Holy Spirit want to show you... about you?

**Today's Scripture is Acts 5:1-11.**