

Acts 5:1-11

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[0 : 00] Father, we just want to say thank you. Thank you for all that you did the all-conquering, victorious God who loves his creation, who loves us and gave his son for us.

We just want to say we're blown away by your love, Lord. We're blown away by your grace, by your mercy. We offer ourselves to you. We just want to say we love you, Lord.

We want to delight ourselves in you and you alone, Lord God. As we come into your word, help us to continue to do just that, to delight ourselves in your word, to delight ourselves in all that reveals of you, the enormity of who you are, that we get caught up more and more in you and less and less in ourselves.

In Jesus' most precious name, please, Lord. Amen. Amen. Please grab a seat. Thank you so much.

That was a wonderful time of worship. Why don't you just turn to the person next to you and tell them God is good and then let them do the same to you.

Amen. And having said God is good, then tell them God is great.

[2 : 04] And having done that, he loves you. Yeah. There's truth here. Truth we need to grab hold of. Wonderful.

Can we have PowerPoint up, please, Emmanuel? That would be great. Thank you. We're continuing our preaching series in Acts chapter 5. And this isn't a mistake, this slide coming up. It was deliberate and intentional. I wonder how many of you watched The Traitors? Quick

confession time. Ooh, okay. Yeah, fair old number. I have to admit, I didn't.

That wasn't because I didn't want to. I just couldn't make it work in terms of business and everything else. I hear it made excellent TV. It got some phenomenal reviews. But I wonder if you've ever thought about the common belief it portrays.

The lie it portrays. You may say, what lie? Well, fundamentally, that behavior doesn't really matter. Whether lying or betraying someone, as long as it pays.

[3 : 17] If you haven't watched the program, it's a program around trying to earn, I think it's £100,000, something like that, by working out who murderers are or whatever. I don't really know because I wasn't watching it.

But what I did pick up is the suggestion is there's no consequence whatsoever other than winning or losing.

In other words, that whole issue of self-fulfillment is really the only important thing in life. I get what I want and my goal is to win, therefore I can lie and I can betray others to do so and that's fine and that's okay.

And today we're going to read a passage in the Bible which I have to say I find profoundly disturbing. And you may say, ooh, what's this going to be?

It's an account of a couple who lie to God and what happens to them. And I guess I find it profoundly disturbing to me because I know I have the potential to do exactly what they do.

[4 : 29] Let's read. Acts chapter 5. 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 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 just to human beings but to God.

When Ananias heard this he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened and some 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.

[5 : 46] Peter said to her, how could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord? Listen, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out also.

And 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. And could I say great fear seized me in reading this to you.

A right fear and I hope that's also going to be the case for each of us as we consider this passage and how it speaks into our lives. So I just want to draw out three really, really simple points from this.

But before I do so, can I just say it's so easy for this to be misunderstood. I've even heard it preached, well it was because they didn't give all their money that that's why they died.

[7 : 02] That's not the case. They died because they lied to God. They lied to man and they lied to God. And it's interesting this story happens just after the passage we read last time which was about Barnabas who did exactly the same but gave all his money.

Gave all the proceeds. And in fact some of the translations for this passage actually start with the word but. It's like it's a contrast. Luke is giving a contrast. Here was the behavior of Barnabas and how the believers shared all their things in common and then but.

Note what happens please folks. But. And we hear this story. We read this account. Now we don't know what was going on here with Ananias and Sapphira.

Maybe they just wanted to impress. Maybe they wanted to be in the gang who sold all their possessions or sold fields possessions and gave all the money for the help of the believers.

We don't know. Maybe they were very deliberately and intentionally trying to gain man's approval or even fearful of their disapproval.

[8 : 15] Maybe it was just greed that got in the way but somewhere they end up lying to God. And so three points I want to draw out of this.

The first is this. The amount isn't the important thing. The heart is. When we talk about giving and actually when you read in the New Testament around giving and use of possessions and other resources which God gives us, it's interesting to note that in the vast majority of the passages it actually talks about the heart more than the amount.

Or where it does talk about the amount, it's to reveal something of the heart. Rob drew us into a few passages including that of the widow's mite, the woman who gave everything she had, two small, really insignificant copper coins and yet massive to her because it's everything she had to reveal something about the heart.

And the heart is so important before God. God wants our hearts. He doesn't want or need our money. But actually in him having our hearts, everything else changes.

And so I want to ask a couple of questions. What's our approach to giving? Now when I say giving, you may think I'm talking about money. I guess I am because that's where the passage comes from, but actually I think this applies to every aspect of our lives.

[9 : 50] All those resources we have, our time, our money, our energy, where we put our focus of our lives, those other resources we have, possessions, family, all sorts of different things that we have in our lives which enrich our lives.

What's our approach to how we handle these things? How we steward these things? I guess ultimately, what's our giving say about us?

What's it say about us and our relationship with God? What's it say about us and our walk with God? I guess another question could be this, is it a faith or heart activity?

Is it something which I'm trusting God in, how I manage and use the resources he gives me? is it an outworking of my faith? Or perhaps it's something else.

Perhaps it's fear. Something which controls us, which stops us being generous with God's resources that he's given us, our time, our energy, our money, our possessions, all the different things which God blesses us with.

[11 : 10] Or perhaps it's about the law. Well, I do what's required of me. And you know, we all Christians know we're meant to tithe, don't we? Do we?

I'm not so sure. If I can chuck that one out there, I'm not planning on going there very far today. I'm just going to part that one as a thought. I think the Bible talks about proportional giving and tithe is definitely something which is there in the Old Testament.

But I also think there's a principle there, those who have much, much is expected of. What do you mean? More than the tithe? More than gross?

Yes. The core issue, though, fundamentally here, is this. It's with our giving as with the rest of our lives, are we prepared to recognize God is our provider?

That he gives us all the resources we need and that we have and we are called to steward these well and that we will give an account for how we steward them.

[12:22] And you may want to, I'm not going to dig into these passages now, but you may want to go and have a look at Romans 8, 32. You may want to go and look at Matthew 6, 33, where your treasure is there, is your heart? Where's our heart?

Second thing, are we prepared to give God full lordship over our resources, including our finances?

It's a sort of follow-on question, not only recognizing that God is our provider, but am I prepared to do something about this where I'm going to say, yeah, actually, God, I'm going to let you have lordship over my resources, over how I manage all the resources you've given me in my life.

And then I guess the third one is this, are we growing in trusting him in every aspect of our lives? You know, we're not just, I'm not suggesting a massive radical change where we haven't got faith, but are we growing in our faith?

Are we learning more and more? Are we going down that journey with him of trusting Him more with those resources he gives us? Trusting him with our health, trusting him with our time, trusting him with our energy, trusting him with our possessions, and yes, trusting him with our finances, but actually anything else which we may hold dear to our hearts and which can usurp the place of God in our hearts as number one.

There was a famous preacher in the UK, a man called Charles Haddon Spurgeon, C.H. Spurgeon, and I'm probably misquoting him because I couldn't find the exact quote when I was looking for it, but the gist of it was this, the final conversion of the human soul is that of the wallet.

[14:04] Interesting, isn't it? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So, let's move on, a second point I'd just like to draw out of this passage.

God isn't to be mocked or lied to. God is holy. Ultimately, Anas and Sapphira didn't recognize who God was.

They thought they could get away with lying to God and thought there would be no consequences. And the reality is God knows everything.

Absolutely. Not just what we do, but our heart and our mind. And I don't know about you, but sometimes when I think about that, I'm shocked that he still loves me.

Because I know my heart and my mind can go all sorts of places which it shouldn't go. And yet in God's grace and God's mercy, amazingly, he still loves us.

[15:22] And we get to benefit from that. I was thinking about how long I would last if when I deceived myself or tried to deceive God, I died.

God, I certainly wouldn't be here preaching today. And yet in his grace and mercy, he doesn't take us out straight away.

But understand this, he's not going to be mocked either. He's looking for our heart. Proverbs 6, 16, lists six things God hates.

And number two on the list is this, on the list is a lying tongue. That's the second thing on the list in Proverbs 6, 16, which God hates.

A lying tongue. Perhaps it's not that surprising, therefore, that Anas and Sapphira are taken out in this situation.

[16:30] But actually in that same list, number four is feet quick to rush to evil. I think, you know, Sapphira coming into the room, not knowing what's happened to her husband, yet quick still to rush to that.

No, no, no, no, we gave everything. A lie, that deceit. And then number five is this, a false witness who pours out lies.

are we a faithful witness to the grace of God in our lives? Do our lives demonstrate the grace of God? Do they communicate something of all that God is and has done to us?

don't know about you, I find it profoundly disturbing preaching from this passage.

You may be sitting here feeling uncomfortable, I am standing here feeling uncomfortable. but this is God's word and we can't play with it and we can't dumb it down and we can't say, oh well it doesn't happen nowadays, God's a bit more loving, a bit more kind, no, no, God is exactly the same today as he was from eternity.

[17 : 56] But in his grace and mercy, in his amazing love, through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, our sin can be dealt with and is dealt with and we don't have to beat ourselves up but we are also called to lead holy lives.

Be sure God knows. Be sure it really does matter.

Now my third point in one sense I think is the most obvious thing to draw from this passage and in one sense it's almost surprising that it was even written great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Wow. Are you surprised? I'm not. What a reputation the believers must have had. Did you hear this?

Can you imagine it down in the marketplace? Did you hear what happened to Anas and Sapphira? They tried to lie to God and he took them out? Great fear seized the church and all who heard about these events what an incredible witness to the holiness of God to the world around them.

[19 : 42] You may say yeah but isn't that a bit weird? Yes. But God's not something we can contain in a box and box up and go it's all okay. God's holy.

God's just. He's majestic in all his ways. I think sometimes we could just parcel God up into a nice little bundle which we can manage and God wants to break out of that box.

We create in our lives, in our hearts and go hey see me for who I am. Great fear, a healthy fear of God, of who God is.

Changes our lives but it also will change the lives of those around us who don't even yet know Jesus because they'll look on and go wow these people are different. Many of you won't be around but five years ago in the midst of the COVID pandemic we took up an offering a bit like we're doing this morning a special gift week offering and that offering we decided to give the entirety away no matter what the offering was and because we felt that in the midst of the turmoil of COVID we wanted to be able to bless our town and speak into our town and how could we hold on to money just to pay a mortgage and to reduce our mortgage on the building when we had so much need in our town.

And those of you who are around may remember that I didn't actually look up the exact amount but it was something like 47,000 pounds was given by us as a church. And what we'd said is we were going to give a proportion of that to every school so that they could support the parents because they knew the families who were most in need on the ground.

[21 : 26] And so after that offering had all come in and we had time to process it we sent letters to every school because it was a bit difficult to contact people in those days and you couldn't pop around and all that sort of stuff and say look we're a church in town and we just want you to know that we are concerned for you and your school and your parents and your community and here is a gift and I can't remember the exact number but it was about 15, 16, 1700 pounds we sent to every school.

Do you know what? Two schools got back to us and said we can't take this. It's a scam. We don't know what the scam is but it's definitely a scam. Others, I remember having a conversation with one head teacher who was in tears.

That's what the people of God are called to be like. Generous. A heartfelt generosity. That was the most amazing moment in the history of our church I believe.

As we put down our needs and said let's just bless our community. If you're part of us, well done and thank you again.

I still live in awe of the generosity which was expressed at that time by us as a church. So I want to come to a conclusion.

[22 : 45] Three things. God's after our heart. He's after your heart. He's after my heart. And he doesn't just want a little bit of it.

He's after all of our hearts. Everything. All that we are. God. That's ultimately a Christian, a believer, a follower of Jesus. Hey, we lay down our lives.

We give them to God. We surrender them to God. Say you're the great I am. You're the Lord of Lords. You're my saviour. You've won me. And I'm yours. And I know most of us would go amen to

that.

God. But I think at the same point in time we have to challenge ourselves and then go, and how am I really doing? How much of my heart has God really got?

So that's my second question. Has he got it? Has he got your heart? Has he got my heart? And to what degree has he got it? And can he have it all?

[23 : 52] That's what he's looking for. Can he have it all? And then out of that I guess flows the final question.

And then how do we steward what God's given us? Everything in our lives. That we live before a holy God in a way which brings him glory and honour which isn't about legalism, which isn't about I've got to do this, this, this, this and this.

But which is a heart yielded to him saying, God, your kingdom come, your will be done in my life.

And so I want to lead us just in a prayer like that.

And if you'd like to join me, I'd be thrilled for you to join me, but please don't do it to please me. This is between you and God. And as I do that, if we can have the band back up because we can head them back into worship.

And worship is part of our surrender to God. It's part of us saying, yeah, God, you are, when we sing these songs, please don't sing them if you don't agree with them. But if you agree with them, hand on heart, going, yeah, God, that is how I want to be before you.

[25 : 00] You may not yet be there, join the club, but it's about the heart, it's about saying, hey, this is where I want to be. And this is the journey I'm going on. I'd like to invite you to stand if you're able.

And you can put into your own words your prayer. I'm going to pray out a prayer, though, and if you want to use that, that's great. But you can express yourself to God. God. Lord, help us to see you in the enormity of all that you are.

Great and mighty, holy, awesome God. Lord of lords, great I am.

Lord, where we've got wrong images of you, we choose to cast them down today and call them out for what they are.

And we cry out, Lord, where we've allowed those to shape our lives, God, forgive us. We repent, we turn away from those lies.

[26 : 43] We want you to be our God. All of you, in all of us. And so we give you our hearts afresh.

Help us to let go of all that other rubbish which gets in the way. Renew our minds by your spirit.

Keep us holy before you.

as your chosen people. And we pray your kingdom come, your will be done, in and through each of our lives, and our corporate life together.

Empower us by your Holy Spirit to do just that. do you!