

## Series: The Church Through Which God Moves

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Acts 5:1-11

October 31-November 1, 2009

### “A Church that is Authentic”

Visiting 637 Herbert St—the house was so small—the yard so tiny  
-romanticized notions are changed by reality

Sometimes we do the same with the early church  
-have this idealized notion of this roomy church, this perfect community made up of beautiful people

-but Acts 5 reminds us they were a bit of a mess like us—a complex mix of strengths and weaknesses—brilliant and fearless, depressive and unstable, selfless and selfish (read 5:1-11)

-like every story—this one has a setting-4:32-37

-one that serves as a contrast

-the church was living out covenant community—a result of the work of the Cross

-their radical connections were a testimony of the resurrection

-and people like Barnabas served as a striking example

-but in 5:1ff—the “but” tells us there was another side

-that A&S came with an offering for God seems admirable on the surface

-we pray people will be moved to do this every week

-but rather than receive a receipt from the church, a letter of appreciation from the finance chairman for their act of charity

-a pew with their name on it

-they were immediately removed from the church rolls—removed from earth’s rolls

-without so much as an opportunity to notify next of kin, plan a memorial service

-vss 5 and 10 tell us they dropped dead (lit “exhaled”)

-language that is rather pitiless and dispassionate, at best--clinical

-and we find ourselves a bit perplexed

-these deaths do not make much sense

-*there’s harshness to the tone that offends our sensibilities*-isn’t the church about grace?

-up until now in Acts, God has been revealed as this Giver of life, patiently calling men to repentance, constantly seeking the lost

-but here-God comes off as almost peevish—His flare up a divine overreaction

-shouldn’t they have been given a chance to repent? We will have to go deeper

1-from the start, the story is wrapped around secrecy, collusion

- a plan that they conspired to carry out-vs 4
- Ananias and Sapphira were in on something
- an agreement to keep back a portion for themselves
- which seemed okay—vs 4 tells us they were under no obligation to sell—nor give away

- “while it remained—did it not remain yours?”
- any giving was voluntary—not obligatory
- they could have said—we choose to give this part

2-but go down another layer—and we discover that “kept back” is a generous translation

- for the word also means to misappropriate, pilfer, embezzle-even steal-cf Tit 2:10
- the same term was used of Achan in Joshua 6—who took what was not his and hid in his tent

- and it begins to explain the severity
- Ananias and Sapphira had made some sort of faith promise
- entered into an obligation to give what God provided
- and make a public display to publically declare their generosity—but it was fraud

3-worse—in all of this—they gave themselves over to the influence of the evil one-vs 3

- allowed their hearts to be carried away by his schemes—become willing instruments of Satan
- whose ongoing aim is always to destroy the church
- if not by force—by falsehood
- if not overtly—covertly

4-and it all amounted to deception, lying

- to themselves, to others, and to God
- and God’s response was so severe—so swift
- there was not even room for repentance, restoration

So what is God showing us? Here’s what stands out--

*THERE IS A DANGEROUS SIDE TO WHAT WE THINK IS SAFE*

1-We may think that what we want is safe...but there is a dangerous side to WANT

A-what did Ananias and Sapphira want?

- the same thing a lot of people want—attention
- fame--be it the parents of balloon boy, Paris Hilton, the governor of Illinois
- just find a way to step in front of the camera, shop a TV deal, get noticed
- so A&S exchanged faithfulness to God for the fleeting thrill of recognition

B-but the danger is this—

-*be careful what you want—because God may give it to you*  
-keep wanting, lusting over someone, something—and God may give you over to your lusts—the clear warning of Rom 1:24

-Ananias and Sapphira wanted people to notice—and they received what they wanted—they became household names  
-the stuff of sermons for 2000 years

-what do you want? Really want?  
-what if God gave you over to your wants?  
-would you find that they were too small?

2-We may think lying is safe...but, there is a dangerous side to FAKERY

A-our culture is full of spin, smear, half truths  
-we deny, suppress, minimize what we know to be true  
-make up reality as we go along  
-finesse truth

-worst of all--our society seems to be at ease with fraud, sham, deception, lies  
-EVEN THOUGH WE REALIZE TRUTH ALWAYS RISES TO THE SURFACE—  
ALWAYS!

-we've become so cynical of political statements—we find ourselves agreeing with Lily Tomlin, who once said—*"I try to be cynical, but it is hard to keep up"*

-hardly a week goes by we don't feel duped by someone  
-I found myself tearing up when Richard Heene hugged his boy Falcon—relieved he wasn't on a terrifying balloon ride  
-only to discover it was all a hoax—I felt taken

-some people in my life lie to me on an ongoing basis—and seem to think this is okay  
-maybe this happens to you  
-I hate this—it ruins fellowship—destroys trust  
-it tells me what they really think of me

-how much more God must feel this—especially when people use religion as part of their lies  
-use it to enhance their standing—as Ananias and Sapphira tried to do—without any fear

B-but here's the danger—lying is actually dangerous to one's health—*lying to God is fatal*

-“There are six things the Lord hates—seven that are detestable—pride, a lying tongue...a false witness who pours out lies”-Pro 6:16

-Jesus delivered His harshest statements, severest warnings to religious liars  
-who put on faith like a piece of clothing—rather than live something that flows from a deep inner well fed by a pure source

-Woe to you religious—all nice and prettied up—but full of disgusting rot on the inside (aka Ananias and Sapphira)  
-the cost is steep--for lying, hypocrisy is a stab into the very vitals of the body of Christ—the church is a community centered around the truth

-the text asks us—is our faith real, genuine, authentic?  
-or are we faking for the crowd?

3-We may think that God is safe...but, there is a dangerous side to GOD  
A-this may offend our modern, western sentimentalism—that assumes He is harmless  
-but you can't miss this in the text—it is there throughout Scripture—a sign that says "Beware God!"

-it's important to have the signs posted in certain places—in a sanctuary, where we have our private devotions, whenever we choose to do something in His name

B-why? Because as Acts 5 warns-God is not safe

-Paul hints at this in Rom 11:22-“Behold the goodness and severity of God”  
-to warn us that while God has immeasurable compassion—He can also be dangerous

-take the altar too casually—as Aaron's sons—and you won't survive  
-make up your own rules when touching the sacred—and you may end up like Uzzah

-take what's devoted to God-like Achan-and there will be consequences  
-infringe the sanctuary—like Uzziah—and you might be struck by God

-“it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”-Heb 10

-Jesus loved the little children—but He also came into Jerusalem and cleared the temple—withered the fig tree, shook the earth

-in his Jesus, Mean and Wild, Galli notes--“We hear the melody played by the strings but ignore the brass and wind *and especially the percussion sections*”

-we can reduce God to the dimensions of our needs, imaginations

-emasculate and accommodate Jesus to our sentimentality

-assume His main mission is to bolster our self-esteem—and assume He is safe  
*-but nothing wondrous is safe*

-do we fear God more than we fear men?

-do I occasionally tremble at the sense of His presence?  
-when it comes to the sacred—am I too casual?

-finally—

4-We can assume church is safe...but, there is a dangerous side to CHURCH

A-church can seem rather benign

-but in its early moments—the church was anything but that-vs 13

-“none dared to join them”

B-Jesus has dangerous words for His followers

-if anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother—he cannot be My disciple

-none of you can be My disciples who does not give up everything

-teach in My name—and you will incur the stricter judgment

-take communion carelessly—and you may not survive

-enter the holy of holies at your own peril

APP

Acts 5 asks us—have we become a bit soft around the middle?

-become tone deaf—hearing only the melody played by the strings (grace, mercy, comfort)—but ignoring the brass and wind and percussion sections of the spiritual life (holiness, reverence, fear, and judgment)

Church fathers—they ran from the task

-they were dealing with the sacred—they feared for their lives

-JB Phillips-“It’s like putting in the electrical, and the power is on”

Prayer

“Lord, thicken our skin. Guard us from a sentimentalized approach to faith that becomes offended by Your severity. Give us a passion for truth that is stronger than our inborn desire for fame. Help us to see the unhealthy wants that so easily attach to us, before you are compelled to give us over to them. Work in us a holy hatred for deception of every kind—the lies we tell ourselves, tell others, tell You. Forgive us for calling words unloving just because they were tough. Help us to learn from this story when to be tough and when to be tender. Don’t

let us be so mushy that we can't speak a firm word in season; protect us from a harshness that has no grace. Have mercy on us—tough or tender.