



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 5 1-16

2000

"Sin Unto Death"

TRANSCRIPT

This morning we are in Acts chapter 5, with an unusual story of Ananias and Sapphira. Luke picks up the story in verse 1 of chapter 5,

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? ⁴ While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

⁷ Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Then Peter *said* to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out *as well*." ¹⁰ And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

¹² At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. ¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added

to *their number*, ¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. ¹⁶ Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

Acts 5: 1-16

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and our time of study in it together.
Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for the time we have together this morning. What a privilege it is to gather together as the people of God, as men and women, young and old alike who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. We thank You for Your glorious plan of salvation, a plan which no man could have conceived, and certainly no man could have executed, but was carried out by the God-man according to Your will. And we thank You for Your love which sent Your Son into the world to die in our place, to ransom us from slavery to sin and judgment to come, to redeem us by His own precious blood.

Father may we live lives of gratitude in light of all that has been done for us in light of all that we have in Him. Thank You for salvation which is of You and You alone, and salvation that is complete: 'He who began the good work in us will complete it, perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.' (Phl 1:6). So we praise You for that, Father.

We pray that You'd bless us with appreciation of Your grace as we study this text together this morning, and we pray that You would put within our hearts a proper attitude. We come before the throne of grace this morning, Father, confessing our sin. We confess that we come into this place this morning with divided hearts, with hearts that love the things of this world. It's true of us, Father; it's true of the early believers. We have that principle of sin within our members that Paul speaks of in Romans 7, and it frustrates us just as it did him; but we praise You for Your grace, we praise You for Your patience with us. We thank You, Father, that in the heart of every believer is the third

Person of the Trinity—that He has sealed us, and He protects us, and He does a work within us. He changes us; He sanctifies us, and we know that He is working within us. And we pray, Father, that You would expose our conditions to us, and that He might change us and that He might sanctify us further, and conform us increasingly to the image of Jesus Christ, that we might live profitable lives for You.

We don't have much time to do that, Father. Life is short; the days are moving by, and soon the end will come for every one of us. May we come to the end of our lives, may we come to that day when we stand before the Savior and be able to present to You a heart of faithfulness, a life that's been well spent in Your service. May You teach us that and move us to be like that this morning, as we study together.

Bless us spiritually. Build us up in the faith. We pray for those who have physical needs, and those who have difficulties. We pray that You'd give them encouragement, that You'd give them healing. And Father, may You create within each of us hearts of thanksgiving and a gratitude for all that You do give us.

And bless our meeting this evening as we return to this place to celebrate the Lord's Supper—as we recall His first coming, and His death for us, and all that we have in Him because of His sacrifice in our place. And help us to recall and to remember that He's coming back. His first coming is not the conclusion; He will return, as the angels told the apostles as they gazed up into heaven on the Mount of Olives, that He is coming again, as He left. And we know from John's testimony at the end of the Bible, that when He comes His reward will be with Him. And we live for that, and we look to You to bless us to that end this morning.

Bless our final hymn; may it prepare our hearts well for our time of study. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) One of the English Puritans, Richard Sibbes, had a vivid description of the devil's influence on the Christian's life. He said, "It is Satan's practice to go over the hedge where it is lowest." And what he meant was that, 'Satan is able to produce spiritual depression in the Christian, or draw us into temptation by finding our

weaknesses and exploiting them to our unhappiness.' 'It's his aim', someone said, 'to make us walk sinfully, and if not, then uncomfortably.

The devil is active in the church, doing what he can to stir up mischief, bring the saints to grief, and thwart the work of the Gospel. And it is important that we know that and guard against it because the devil is a restless evil. He doesn't sleep. He works and, as we see from our passage in Acts 5, the consequence of his work, and letting him over the hedge can be very serious. Ananias and Sapphira did that—and they died.

John tell us in 1 John 5:16, that there is, "a sin unto death." That's not the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12, verses 31 and 32. And John isn't talking about sin that is committed by unregenerate people, or a sin that results in a Christian losing his or her salvation—(Christians cannot lose their salvation). When they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are given eternal life. It's eternal; and cannot be taken from them, it cannot be lost. John is speaking of physical death, not eternal death. And Christians can commit sin that results in that. They did at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes of those who abused the Lord's Supper...and as a consequence he writes that, 'many among them were sick.' "...and a number sleep." he said. (vs30b). That word, 'sleep', is a euphemism for Christian death.

Sin is serious...we learn that in Acts 5, with an example of divine discipline that corrected and purified the church. The background for it is found in chapters 2 and 4 where we read that the church was growing and living together in unity and generosity. It was a time of great sharing. People sold their possessions and they gave the proceeds of the sales to the apostles; 'they lay them at their feet' in order to meet the needs of the saints. (Acts 4:34-35).

Now, this is not communism, as has been suggested, (and as we dealt with some weeks ago when we considered this). People sold their possessions and gave them to the apostles for reasons other than what we would find in some political maneuvering such as communism. What the early Christians at Jerusalem did was not the result of 'central planning'; it was not some policy that came down from the apostles that they

designed and imposed upon the church. It occurred spontaneously among the people, out of love for the brethren. It was all voluntary; no one was coerced into giving anything.

What happened was unusual. What happened in Jerusalem was unnatural—was spiritual and gives a glorious picture of what happens when people are regenerated, baptized into Christ, and walk by the Spirit. They think differently; they act differently; they live unselfish lives.

That can't happen by writing laws and enforcing them—that happens from a real change of heart. It occurs from the 'inside out'; that is what happened in Jerusalem. And so at the end of Acts 4, we have an ideal picture of the church.

But nothing is perfect. No church is perfect, and Luke gives us a true picture of the church in Acts chapter 5...and it illustrates to me, the advice that Oliver Cromwell gave to the artist who was painting his portrait. The artist wanted to flatter the Lord Protector and so, rather than paint his flaws, he produced an attractive picture, (which displeased Cromwell). He said, "I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, warts and everything. Otherwise, I will never pay a farthing for it."

Well Luke gives us the church truly, 'warts and everything', when he recounts a great sin that almost disrupted the church's unity—a sin if not of hypocrisy, of worldliness, of deception, which is a testimony to the credibility of his historical account. This is no *hagiography*, (not, 'an idealized account for purposes of propaganda'). It's honest history, 'warts and all'—and it's for our instruction. It is an account that has lessons that are to be taken to heart by each and every one of us individually—and by the church as a whole.

Luke's introduction to the incident is the selfless giving of Barnabas, (that was his nickname, and it meant "*Son of Encouragement*"). He was certainly a great encouragement to the early church, the church of Jerusalem. We read at the end of chapter 4, (*verses 36&37*), that he, "owned a tract of land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet". He was a man who laid up "treasures in heaven".

(Mat 6:20). He was a man who sought first God's "kingdom and His righteousness", (Mat 6:33), and he made a good investment of his worldly goods in 'the things of the LORD.' He did it because he loved the LORD...did it because he loved the LORD's people. He was a generous man, and his generosity was greatly appreciated by the church. No doubt Barnabas was the subject of a lot of conversation, and had a great deal of praise.

And one couple that was impressed was Ananias and Sapphira, who were struck, no doubt, by his kindness...and maybe also by the respect he was given. So they decided to imitate him; we read that "they sold a piece of property". (Acts 5:1). [But they had made an agreement to keep some of the profit for themselves while pretending to give the full amount to the church.]

The question that inevitably arises when dealing with this passage is, 'Were Ananias and Sapphira true believers?' And, so far as we know, they were. We risk overestimating ourselves when we think that a believer could never do what they did. We are all susceptible to their sin—which has more than one side to it. It was hypocrisy, (they lived a lie). And it was worldliness, (they coveted money). Now who can claim to be free from any of that?...Well maybe the most mature among us, but not many.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, on the basis of this text would never let the congregation of 10th Presbyterian Church sing the third stanza of *At Calvary*. (We sing that hymn a great deal; we all enjoy singing it, but that third stanza is,

"Now I've given to Jesus everything,
Now I gladly own Him as my King...")

And he, (*Barnhouse*), said, "If God acted in the same way today that He did in the fifth chapter of Acts, you'd have to have a morgue in the basement of every church, [*Laughter*] and a mortician on the pastoral staff." [*Laughter*]

A lot of our hymns express the ideal rather than the real. It is a lot easier to sing,
"Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also,"
than it is to actually do it. (*Verse 4 of A Mighty Fortress is Our God*)

Ananias and Sapphira show just how unnatural the life of the Jerusalem church was. People don't like to part with their money; they don't naturally deny themselves. But they also illustrate what the end of ego is; they show that true contentment does not follow from the pursuit of pleasure. And they show the truth of the Lord's words, 'He who loves his life will lose it.' (Jn 12:25). Well, that's a salvation text, a 'Gospel text', but in principle it applies to the life of *discipleship*—which involves self-denial.

And Ananias and Sapphira lacked that fully. The couple didn't have to sell their land—didn't have to give any of the price of that sale to the church. And Peter told Ananias that in verse 3; "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.'" (Acts 5:3-4).

Why did he do it? It's the question that Peter asks him. Maybe he wanted to get the acclaim or acceptance that Barnabas received, (but without the sacrifice). Or it may have been less calculated than that, and begun with a genuine desire to help the church. But as the silver from the sale fell into his hand, Ananias found that it was hard to part with it. He was mesmerized by the money, thought of all the nice things he could have, the security that it would give—and he had second thoughts about his gift. You can imagine how it might have happened.

And so what may have started with good intentions was corrupted by a love of money; an idol became an open door for the devil. They decided to keep some of the profit—but in order to not be thought less spiritual than Barnabas, they lied about it.

The sin of Ananias was not that he did not give everything. He wasn't required to give anything. The LORD loves a cheerful giver; He wants only what we desire to give. He would not have been pleased with Ananias if he had given everything grudgingly. But he wasn't required to give any of what he gave. The sin of Ananias was hypocrisy. Motivated by worldliness, by covetousness, lied; and as Peter said, 'Satan filled his heart' to do it.

The love of money has a powerful hold on people. For many it is where, 'the hedge is lowest'. And Satan took advantage of this problem in Ananias' life. Satan is a very cunning, very powerful enemy. He has various schemes and devices to oppose the work of God, and he was certainly active in those early days of the church. The Day of Pentecost, he lost 3000 souls. And daily he lost people from his spiritual domain as the Lord was adding them to the church. And so he began a counter-attack by outward persecution. The authorities arrested Peter and John while they were preaching in the temple, brought them before the Sanhedrin and warned them not to speak about Christ again.(Acts 5:40).

But that didn't stop them. In fact, the church became bold; it continued to speak the Word of God...and it was united. A united force is hard to beat. And so to disrupt the church's unity, Satan changed strategies and attacked the church from within, and found his agents in Ananias and Sapphira.

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump...", (Gal5:9). Paul repeats that proverb twice in order to say that, 'Sin left unchecked in one member will affect the whole body.' And here, Satan encouraged materialism, worldliness, selfishness, so that it would spread and destroy the oneness of the church and affect its effectiveness in the city of Jerusalem. He played on the couple's weakness—their love of money and approval of men...and they were completely unaware of his involvement in their hearts.

Peter had experience with that himself. In Matthew 16 we read that Satan inspired Peter to oppose the cross. Peter didn't know that; he thought he was saying something good when he told the Lord that He, 'would certainly not go to His execution!' But he learned differently when Jesus rebuked him and said, "Get behind Me, Satan..." (vs23). Peter had no realization that Satan was within, working on him.

Later, Satan 'sifted him like wheat', (Luk 22:31), so that Peter denied the Lord three times the night of our Lord's arrest. Peter had no realization at the moment that what was happening was a work of Satan within him. He had let the devil 'over the hedge' because of his overconfidence.

So Peter knew the power and the skill of the evil one. He is not omnipotent; he is not omniscient; he is not omnipresent; (only God is that), but he is powerful. And so having experienced the devil's devices and seen them at work in others over the years, Peter later would write, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith..." (1Pet 5:8-9a).

We can be certain of this: That if the church is active and obedient, it will be under attack. If you are progressing in the Christian life, he will try to devour you. If not much is happening in your life, if you are just going through the motions of serving Christ, he probably won't disturb you at all...it's right where he wants you. If he does anything, he'll do what he did with Ananias and encourage you in that.

The way to resist the devil and the temptations that lead to a bad end is to be "firm in your faith", (ibid.); to submit to God. James tells us that when we do that, he flees. (Jas 4:7). Ananias had done the opposite; he had not submitted to God, was not trusting in Him. He was only thinking of himself, not of God's kingdom and righteousness; and to protect himself and promote his reputation he lied—not just to men but, (Peter says), "to God." (Acts 5:4c).

That must have come as a surprise to Ananias. God had not been in his thoughts at all; but when he heard these words Luke writes, "Ananias fell down and breathed his last: and great fear come over all who heard of it." (Acts 5:5).

Sin cannot be compartmentalized. There are no sins against man and sins against God...all sins are against God. All sins against man are ultimately sins against God...and He deals with it, sometimes severely.

Well, awed by what had happened, the young men who were strong, who were physically able for the task got up, covered Ananias, carried him outside and buried him. About three hours later his wife, Sapphira, came to the church looking for Ananias, unaware of what had happened to him.

And Peter spoke to her, (he tested her integrity). We read in verse 8, "Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' Then Peter *said* to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out *as well*.' And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things." (Acts 5:8-11).

This is the first time that the word, '*church*', appears in the Book of Acts. It is a word that is described in connection with fear: "great fear came upon the church." Nothing like this had happened before in the church; it had been a happy fellowship, full of young, excited believers. Ananias and Sapphira were probably active members, close friends with many of the people...and suddenly they were dead. So shock and fear settled over the church, as people learned the lesson that being a Christian is serious business.

And as these young believers discussed the incident among themselves they may have recalled incidents in the Old Testament that were similar to it. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, priests of the LORD, who offered strange fire on the altar and were struck dead by God. Uzzah, who touched the Ark when it was being moved to Jerusalem, and was struck dead.

So far as we can tell, each of those individuals was a believer. In fact, it could be argued that Aaron's sons were, 'Only trying to improve worship', and Uzzah was 'protecting the Ark'. And so they were struck dead for what might appear to be innocent, almost trivial offenses.

But what each of these incidents illustrates is that it is always wrong to break the Word of God. It is always sin to violate Scripture. And sin is never trivial...there are no 'small' sins. And this tragic incident in Acts 5, was designed to teach that to the church at

the very beginning. The church was young—and from the start God established, in a very clear way, how seriously He takes sin and the purity of His people.

This is what God did at the beginning of Israel's history with Achan in Joshua chapter 7. God put a ban on the city of Jericho. That's the first city within the land of Canaan, west of the Jordan River, that the nation conquered. And so, as they entered into the land, God stipulated that there was a ban on the city of Jericho. They could take the spoils of war and the victory of all the other cities, but this city was dedicated to the LORD. And so, when it was conquered, it was to be burned, and its wealth was to be put into the treasury of the tabernacle.

But Achan saw some treasures, saw some beautiful things, and he coveted them. He saw a rich, Babylonian garment; he saw some gold and some silver, and he took them for himself. No one saw him do it...did it secretly and hid it all. —But God saw and the consequence of his sin was a major defeat in the next battle that the nation fought. It was made weak, and people died.

Achan's sin was discovered; it was exposed; and he was put to death. Guilt was 'put away', and the vitality of the nation was restored; and it went on to victory and conquest. It was a lesson for the people at the very outset of their national life in the promised land, that God takes obedience seriously—that He requires purity in His relationship with us.

And that is what happened here at the beginning of this new work of God with the church. An event like this is rare; it's what Dr. Johnson called 'a signal case'. It was a big warning to the church of how God feels about hypocrisy and worldliness. And hypocrisy, lying to God, happens in a lot of ways. Kent Hughes, who was the minister at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois wrote, "We share Ananias' sin, not when others think we are more spiritual than we are, but when we try to make others think we are more spiritual than we are."

Examples of Ananias' sin today include, 'creating the impression that we are people of prayer when we are not', 'making it look like we have it all together when we do not', 'promoting the idea that we are generous when we are so tight we squeak when we smile.' [Laughter]

Well, preachers are guilty of that and much more, themselves. It's easy to say the right things...It's hard to do them. And so this passage is a mirror for my soul as much, or more, than it is a mirror for yours. It is a sobering text...and it has been sobering to me as I have considered it over the week. The thought even occurred to me, 'Wouldn't it be something if I fell down dead in the middle of this sermon!?' [Laughter] God would make a point that way, wouldn't He? [Laughter] Well, the sermon's not over, so we'll see. [Laughter]

The fact that it records a rare occurrence doesn't mean it never happens, or can't ever happen. John speaks of sin leading to death in 1 John 5:16. That is still true. As stated earlier, this is not spiritual death, but physical death. The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira was for this life only. —But still, that is very serious. God does not ignore our sin; He is very concerned about purity in His people. And so He deals with us when we put the Spirit of God to the test, when we grieve the Holy Spirit. He may not destroy us, (that's very unusual), but He will discipline us. And very often, what the Spirit does when we grieve Him is He grieves us. He withdraws His blessing from us so that we will not withdraw from Him. He will never leave us nor forsake us, but He will hide His face in order that we will seek His face. He will create a storm within our soul in order that we will seek our peace in His fellowship.

The fact that such incidents as this one are rare only means that God is longsuffering; He is very patient with us. But the lesson is there: He, "desires truth in the innermost being," (Psalm 51:6). And to produce it He deals with His people, always. He disciplines His people like a father disciplines his son. He is always dealing with us to produce truth in the innermost being—and that is what we are to be seeking.

And so, we are to consider ourselves; we are to consider our condition. Do we have that? Do we practice truth in the innermost being as a reality in our life?...Or do we practice deceit; do we live as hypocrites? Do we harbor worldliness in our innermost being?

Where is the hedge lowest in your life? God knows it. He knows everything that we are, everything that we do. Our private lives are public lives to Him; and He disciplines. That is the way that Satan's influence in the church is overcome.

God does not discipline us because He's angry with us, like we become angry and disappointed with one another when we offend or fail. God disciplines His people to correct them. And this, as I say, is how He overcomes Satan's influence in the church. It's through discipline, and it's how the LORD makes us holy, and purifies His church. That was the purpose of the events of Acts 5.

And God produced that. He turned this tragedy to the church's advantage, and made Satan's work an occasion for blessing—to cleanse the church, to make it sober and strong. “The church came under great fear”, we read, as the result of this divine discipline.

And with fear came power. We see that in the remaining verses. Verse 12, "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico." So there we see them again, all meeting ... thousands of Christians meeting there in the outer court of the temple, praising God and worshiping Him. "But," we read in verse 13, "none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem." So the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira had a purifying effect. The unity of the church was strengthened; and all but the totally committed were scared off. The rest dared not associate with them. You can just hear what they say, ‘They die, in that group. God deals with them severely.’ But others were saying, ‘Yes, but there's great healing and great blessing that takes place.’

And many of them did come. Many of them were drawn to the church, to the message of the apostles. Many believed, in fact so many that in verse 14, (now Luke doesn't give a specific number here, but he does elsewhere...earlier in the Book of Acts we have specific numbers of people), but here, in verse 14, he simply describes them as "multitudes of men and women."

Verse 14, "And all the more believers in the Lord, *multitudes* of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed."

It was an amazing demonstration of power in the apostles. They were doing, 'signs and wonders' with complete success. In fact, even Peter's shadow was efficacious for healing.

Now that sets a standard for people who maintain that, 'The gifts of the apostles are for today.' If that is so, if 'signs and wonders' are as much for the modern church as they were for the early church, then we should see the same phenomenon today as was witnessed then: Complete healing; without failure; "...and they were all being healed." But that's not happening. From all the evidence it would certainly seem that such gifts have ceased.

Not that God does not heal today. He can and He does; but healing and material blessings in answer to prayer are different from a man, and a man's shadow, being the agent or the instrument of divine healing. The miracles that occurred are called 'signs and wonders' for a reason. They were evidence of the new work that was occurring in Jerusalem—and gave testimony to the truth of it.

Just as Christ's 'signs', His miracles called 'signs', gave witness to His claim to deity, so too, the apostles miracles were witnesses that their ministry was of God; and that it was a continuation of Christ's ministry, or that Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead and He has ascended to the right hand of the Father. He is not physically

present in this world; but He is the head, and we are the body, and His power is still at work, and was at work in a very dramatic way, in the apostles to demonstrate that they were continuing His ministry—that what He began, was continuing through them.

In fact, the ministry of the apostles resembled the Lord's early ministry in Galilee: People from outlying towns and villages streamed into Jerusalem with their sick and they were healed, all of them.

The point has been well made, I think it was made by Dr. Johnson, that if people insist that we should expect the same miracles today as then, then it follows that more people should be struck dead due to hypocrisy. We're not seeing that, fortunately.

But these were unusual events for a unique time, and we should understand them in that way. They were 'signs'. Miracles were 'signs' that confirmed the apostles authority at the beginning of this new work. And God's discipline was a 'sign' that signaled to the church how God feels about cold hearts and hypocrisy.

That is the lesson for us. God hates hypocrisy. Satan roams the churches, looking for the low places in our hedges to come over and work his mischief. And so we must be alert; we must be vigilant; we must be firm in our faith. We must be seeking what God desires in us, and He desires truth 'in the innermost being'.

The tragic incident of Ananias and Sapphira taught that fact to the church in Jerusalem. A great fear came over it, so that the people reevaluated themselves. As a result, the assembly was purified and became increasingly effective in the Lord's service. God does not need to use anyone in His service. He does not need to use us to accomplish His work. Jesus told the Pharisees when they complained to Him about the people who were calling Him, "KING", that if they became, "...silent the stones will cry out!" (Luk 19:40). He can use the rocks if He so desires.

He could use the angels of heaven to be His messengers, to proclaim the Gospel and teach the Word of God. (And we would think, 'Well, they would certainly be more

effective and more eloquent than we are.')

But He has chosen to use people; and He uses most effectively those who are true and pure in heart. So we should pray as David did in Psalm 139, (verses 23-24),

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way."

He will do that, and He will make us useful in His service.

But to be useful in His service, we must first be in His family. And only believers in Jesus Christ are children of God. Have you believed in Christ as Lord and Savior? If not, then you need to realize that you are a sinner deserving of death. If the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira seems unusually harsh, even unfair, then it is because we fail to take seriously just how serious sin is. God is holy, and He is within His rights to judge sin, and sinners, at any time. It is only because of God's patience that you are allowed to take another breath. The day will surely come when your life on earth will end, and you will be taken away; you will breathe your last, and then the judgment.

There is a way of escape, and that is through Jesus Christ. He died for sinners; and all who believe in Him will be saved. So if you're here this morning without Christ, look to Him, believe in Him, repent of sin, trust in Christ, and receive from Him at the moment of that act of faith, forgiveness and life everlasting.

May God help you to do that, and enable each one of us to strive for pure lives, to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and do so out of thankful hearts with gratitude for the grace that has been extended to us.

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We say the word, 'grace', and in saying it we confess, by virtue of the meaning of that word

that we are undeserving; we are sinners. This *grace* is 'favor for the undeserving'; we thank You for Your mercy, which is 'help for the helpless'.

And that is what we are, Father, in and of ourselves we are helpless sinners. We could not save ourselves, but by Your grace You have saved us through the work of Your Son and the power of the Spirit who quickens the dead, brings them to faith in the only One who can save, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You for sending Him into the world. We pray, Father, that You would make us men and women who live lives of earnest, genuine service for You. Help us to, 'seek first Your kingdom and righteousness, with the knowledge that by doing that all these other things will be added to us.' (Mat 6:33).

May we live for You, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)