

Ananias & Sapphira

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[0 : 0 0] If you've got a Bible, you can go to the New Testament book of Acts.! Acts chapter 5. Acts 5 and then verses 1 to 11 is what we're going to be reading this morning.

Listen to these words. Luke, the companion of Paul, writes these words and he says, 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. And then Peter said, Then 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's the price.

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.

[2 : 0 3] At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. And 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray, let's ask for God's help as we study this together this morning. Gracious God, There are sometimes parts of the Bible that are confusing to us as we read them.

And yet we know that your word is truth. And so even as we come into difficult passages like this one, we ask that you would open our eyes to see what is truly there, to be changed and transformed by what we see.

We want to be fed by your holy word this morning. We want your spirit to do a spiritual work in us. And so we ask all these things for Christ's sake and his glory. Amen.

So we continue in our series in the book of Acts, now up to chapter 5. Last week what we looked at was we looked at the very end section of chapter 4 where you get the snapshot of the life of the early church and you get to see the radical generosity that was a place in the early church.

[3 : 2 1] People taking properties that owned, selling them, bringing that money to the apostles' feet to be distributed amongst the poor, serving people who were poor. Radical, radical generosity. At the end you get a little positive example of this generosity.

A guy by the name of Barnabas who's sort of lifted up for everyone to look at and say, look at this guy. Look what he did. He took some of his property, sold it, and took the money and put it at the feet of the apostles for the poor.

Now what Luke does is he contrasts that positive example with a very stark and negative example here in chapter 5.

Ananias and Sapphira. They sell a property. They bring the proceeds to the apostles' feet, but it's pretty clear from the text that there is deceit and dishonesty in their actions.

And the deceit lies in the fact that they keep back a portion of the proceeds while pretending to be giving it all. The issue is not so much that they keep back a portion of it.

[4 : 30] We looked at this last week. Peter even intimates, you're entitled to do what you want with your property. It's yours. It's your money. Do what you like with it. The issue is not that they kept back. The issue is that they pretended to be giving the whole when in actual fact they only gave a part.

And so then the apostle Peter, with the help of what seems like must only be divine revelation, he confronts them. He confronts them on their sin, and in response, without even uttering a word, they drop down dead.

Under the judgment of God. Now if last week's passage sort of made us uncomfortable from an ethical point of view, we looked at the generosity, the radical generosity of the early church, and thought, sure, who lives like that?

If that made us uncomfortable, then I think this week's passage will make us equally uncomfortable, if not more uncomfortable, but for a different reason. Not because we're intimidated by the example of the early Christians, but because of this seemingly ruthless judgment by God.

Why does God do what he does here? Why does he seem to be so harsh? That is probably your gut instinct as you read this passage.

[5 : 45] It's always been my gut instinct, no matter how many times I've come back to this passage. And so that's what we want to explore together this morning. So here's my hypothesis that I'm hoping to tease out for you in the course of this sermon.

God, I think, is so ruthless in dealing with the sin of Ananias and Sapphira because through their actions, they, number one, profane the purposes of God, and number two, they profane the presence of God.

They profane the purposes of God and they profane the presence of God. And you should all be very impressed by how many Ps I managed to get into the points this morning. That's the thesis.

Let's try and figure this out. Here's the first one. Profaning the purposes of God. To profane something is to treat something with gross irreverence or gross disrespect, particularly something that is considered sacred.

When we were in here early this morning, I made a joke. Trevor was turning on the sound and he climbed up on the pulpit and we're like, oh, you can't do that. This is sacred. You can't come up here. You go to some sort of churches like that where the furniture itself is considered sacred.

[6 : 49] That is not the case here. I don't advise jumping on the pulpit and things like that, but it's not sacred. Nothing in the building itself is sacred here. But profaning is to treat something that is actually sacred with gross disrespect, with gross irreverence.

Here, it's God's sacred purposes through his church because that's what we're seeing unfold in the book of Acts. How his purposes are played out in the church. It's that sacred purpose that Ananias and Sapphira are profaning.

So let me show you what I mean. Have a look at verse one. 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 and he brought the rest and he put it at the apostles' feet.

And 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? Did it not 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 he died and great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

[8 : 07] Now that sort of judgment that we see here, I think it's something we often associate with the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible. A lot of Christians tend to think that the Old Testament, in the Old Testament God is, he's all mean and capricious, striking down people left and right but that when you sort of get to the New Testament, what happens is Jesus comes and all that smiting sort of goes away and God becomes much more relaxed and gracious because of Jesus.

Sadly, I think that's a very common view about the Bible and I say sadly because you can only actually ever really come to that sort of a conclusion with a very superficial reading of Scripture.

A much more detailed, dedicated study of the Bible will actually show you, first of all, that God is exceedingly patient, exceedingly kind, exceedingly gracious towards habitual sinners in the Old Testament who of all people deserve his judgment but then secondly, that God in the New Testament is also highly contemptuous of sin and evil and harsh in his judgment of it.

Jesus has some very strong things to say about sin. It's very naive and simplistic to read the Bible in such a way that pictures the God of the Old Testament as being sort of wildly angry but then somehow pacified by gentle Jesus, meek and mild, into being a cuddly, loving grandfather figure.

throughout Scripture, from Genesis all the way through to Revelation, you will find that God displays boundless, boundless grace for sinners and yet he also deals ruthlessly with sin. It's consistent.

[9 : 51] Same God. What is helpful though as we think about Old Testament and New Testament is to try and understand this moment of judgment in Acts 5 is to reflect on moments of similar judgment in the Old Testament and Luke, the author, actually wants us to do that.

So every single commentator, I didn't read a ton, but every single commentator that I read this week in preparing this sermon pointed out that in verse 2 where it says that Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the money, it is basically the same phrase we find in the Old Testament story of the sin of Achan.

So you go back to your Old Testament, after the first five books you get to the book of Joshua and in the book of Joshua the Israelites, this new fledgling nation, cross the Jordan River and they go into the promised land and they are instructed by God to flush out the idolatrous child-sacrificing Canaanites from that land to take over the land that God has promised for them.

The very first thing they do, and maybe you learnt about this in Sunday school, maybe you even reenacted this at Sunday school, but they take down the city of Jericho, they march around the walls and they blow trumpets and the walls fall down. Maybe you did that at some point in your life.

They're under very strict instructions though as they engage in that battle not to take any plunder from the battle, but to devote everything over to the Lord. Almost as if it's sacred, devote it over to the Lord.

[11 : 20] In chapter 6 however, we find that one individual, a man by the name of Achan, took some of this plunder. What the text calls the devoted things and he kept it back for himself.

Same phrase that we find in Acts 5. And as a result of Achan's sin, what happens is Israel go and fight their next battle against a much smaller city and they get horribly, horribly beaten. And so, Joshua, the leader, just like Peter in Acts 5, also I think relying on divine revelation, discerns Achan's guilt, confronts him on it, and the whole community is called together to exercise God's judgment upon him by stoning him.

So I think you can see the parallels between the two stories. And by putting them next to each other, I think we start to see why God judges Ananias and Sapphira so harshly.

In the case of Joshua and Achan's sin, Israel, at that point in the history, what they're doing is they're coming out of the Exodus. They're receiving God's law in Sinai and now they're going into the promised land to fulfill, finally fulfill the covenant promises that were made to them to their forefather, Abraham.

This fledgling nation now is going to be unleashed by God to fulfill those covenant promises, to bring blessings to all the nations. That's what Genesis 12 says, what was promised to Abraham, to be this kingdom of priests that Exodus 19 says they're going to be.

[12 : 55] They're going to fulfill these promises now in the land and there's external opposition to them at first from Pharaoh obviously in Egypt but then later on through several Canaanite kings who attack them and try to stop them from getting into the land but there's another type of opposition, another threat to God's purposes at this very kind of crucial and fragile stage in the life of Israel and that is the threat that comes from within.

That's the threat of covenant breakers derailing everything sort of from the inside of the community through their deceit, through their disobedience. You see, how are they going to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation like Exodus says when there's deceit and there's unholiness in their midst?

And so to send a very, very, very stark and very clear message right at the very outset as Israel go into the land God rains down this ruthless judgment upon Achan's sin.

So I think it's clearly meant to serve as a specific example at a specific time. There are many, many other Israelites in the Old Testament who sin in different ways and they don't receive the same treatment and so as readers that's got to make you go, hang on, God is trying to communicate something very specific here.

This is not his normal way of acting. Now in Acts 5, we see parallels. Acts 5, here's this fledgling church right at the beginning just starting out their mission of bearing witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 32] That's what they've been called to do. Just like Israel taking the city of Jericho, this fledgling church has some early successes. There's Pentecost, thousands coming to faith at Pentecost.

There's the healing of the lame man at the temple, many more coming to faith. Just like with Israel, there's external opposition. But here it comes in the form of the Sanhedrin and their threats.

They're putting Peter and John in prison for the night. And now, in our passage, just like with Israel, there's an internal threat. Ananias and Sapphira.

How can this early church bear witness to the extravagant love of Jesus Christ, the radical generosity of Christ's sacrifice if within their own communal life there is this hypocritical generosity riddled with deceit, riddled with vain glory?

And so God acts decisively, very decisively and ruthlessly to send a very clear message straight out of the gates at the beginning of the life of the New Testament church.

[15 : 38] And this is the message I think that he's sending. You shall not profane my covenant purposes. Don't profane what I'm doing here in the mission of the church.

It's the same message that he sent in Joshua 6. Think about how Ananias and Sapphira are profaning God's covenant purposes.

Think about the specifics of their sin. So first there's deceit. Peter says to Ananias in verse 3 there, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?

There's lying there. There's deceit. Deceit undermines the mission of God right from the very beginning because how does God fulfill his covenant purposes through the church? Well he fulfills it through proclamation.

Through the proclamation of the gospel. If you think of the mission of the church, the tip of the spear of the mission of the church is to proclaim what God has done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In Christ, we actually proclaim the fulfillment of all of those promises made even all the way back to Abraham now coming to fruition in Jesus.

[16 : 44] That's the good news. That's the gospel that we preach. That is the very tip of the spear of the mission of the church. We go out into this world and we say, friends, you need to hear this. You need to hear this.

This is really, really important. This is momentous news. You need to hear this. We human beings, we are horribly, horribly alienated from our creator through our sin. But God in his great mercy, what he's done is he's come near to us.

He's entered this world in the person of Jesus Christ to live a life that we were incapable of living, to die a death that we deserve to die for our sin and then to offer us all forgiveness and hope if we would place our faith in him.

That's the mission of the church, to proclaim that. Maybe you're new to church this morning and you're wondering what are Christian churches all about? That is what Christian churches are all about. But friends, who's going to believe us if we are riddled with deceit?

Who's going to listen to the words coming out of a community full of liars? And so God strikes down Ananias and Sapphira. It's not just deceit though, there's hypocrisy too.

[17 : 55] So hypocrisy is pretending, pretending to be generous when in fact you are no such thing. Think about how hypocrisy undermines the mission of the church. In bearing witness to the resurrected Jesus Christ, there's a sense in which we as a church offer new life.

We say to people, you can change or maybe more accurately, you can be changed in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. You can grow in holiness, you can grow in love, you can grow in kindness, in goodness, in mercy, in patience, in gentleness, you can become a new man or a new woman.

But who's going to believe us if we are riddled with hypocrisy? Why would you listen to the promise of change that comes out of a community all wearing masks?

Masks of holiness where on the outside we look squeaky clean but on the inside we're rotting away. And so God strikes down Ananias and Sapphira.

And then thirdly, it's not just a seat and it's not just hypocrisy, it's this sort of covetous desire for a claim. Ananias and Sapphira want the church community to look at them in the same way that they look at Barnabas and go, wow, what wonderfully generous people you are, what amazing people you are.

[19 : 26] John Stott, the late Anglican theologian and preacher says this, he says, they wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity without the inconvenience of it.

So in order to gain a reputation to which they had no right, they told a brazen lie. Their motive in giving was not to relieve the poor but to fatten their own ego.

Now think how that undermines the sacred mission of the church. Over and over and again, Luke's emphasis, Luke emphasizes the core activity of the mission as bearing witness.

We saw this all the way from chapter 1 of Acts. It's bearing witness and what are we bearing witness to? We're bearing witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus. He's the focal point. He's the one who should get all of the acclaim, all the praise.

It's his name that we come and we lift high. But who is going to listen to us and set their highest gaze upon our Lord Jesus Christ if we are a community full of personal glory hunters using religious facades to get the attention to actually focus on ourselves?

[20 : 39] Why would you be inspired to praise Christ when all the people around you who speak Jesus this and Jesus that do it in such a way that they're actually always drawing attention to themselves and their own achievements and their own accolades?

And so God strikes Ananias and Sapphira down. My friends, do you see why he's so ruthless? You might be uncomfortable by it, but you can see why he's doing it.

You know how the church responds? Look at verse 5. fear. Fear. Fear. When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died and great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

Fear. It's there again in verse 11. Fear. When we think about God's mission in promoting his gospel through the advancement of the church, I think there needs to be a healthy, reverent fear in us that we might not profane his sacred purposes.

The story of Acts 5 is not normative in the sense that God is probably not going to strike you down on the spot for an act of deceit. He might, but he's probably not going to do that or an act of hypocrisy!

[22 : 01] or glory hunting. But it is a true story here to warn us and to evoke in us that healthy fear. It is supposed to make you stop in your tracks and go, what on earth is this?

Why is this happening? In the mission of God as the church, we are engaged in sacred activity and we dare not profane it.

We dare not treat it with gross irreverence, with gross disrespect. Here in the church, there should be, I think there should be concerted effort to ensure that we interact with God and we interact with each other at a very high level of integrity, for example.

Ridding ourselves of the sort of deceit that we find here in Ananias and Sapphira. Since I first discovered the Westminster Standards, I've always loved a section of the Westminster Larger Catechism where it treats the Ten Commandments and it gives a kind of an in-depth analysis of how to think about and apply the Ten Commandments.

I think it's probably the best ethical statement you can find in the English language is that section of the Larger Catechism. But I love particularly the way it treats the Ninth Commandment. Do not bear false testimony. So this is question 144.

[23 : 20] What are the duties required in the Ninth Commandment? And the answer that the Westminster Divines at the Assembly put down was the duties required in the Ninth Commandment are the following.

Preserving and promoting truth between one person and another. Upholding the good name of our neighbor as much as our own. Appearing and standing for the truth from the heart sincerely, freely, clearly and fully.

Speaking the truth and only the truth in matters of judgment and justice and in all other things. A charitable esteem of our neighbors. Loving, desiring and rejoicing in their good name and sorrowing for and covering their infirmities.

Freely acknowledging their gifts and graces. Defending their innocence. Readily receiving a good report and unwillingly admitting an evil report concerning them. Discouraging tale bearers, flatterers and slanderers.

Love and care for our own good name and defending it when need requires. Keeping lawful promises. Pursuing and practicing of whatever things are true, honest, lovely and of good report.

[24 : 28] Now imagine a community that lived like that. We would all have to cancel all our social media accounts first of all. But imagine a community that lived like that.

Imagine a community that practiced truth telling in that consistent way. that wide ranging way. If you're an outsider and you come into contact with a community like that and you taste and you experience something of that community, think how much more inclined you will then be to believe them when they say, my friend, I want to tell you about Jesus and His saving love for you.

See, friends, out of reverent fear, not wanting to profane God's sacred purposes. We should be a community ruthlessly committed to truth telling. Then in the church there should be, I think, a concerted effort to stamp out hypocrisy.

In a world of masks, which I think we all know we live in, in a world of masks, how incredibly refreshing and reassuring is it to find someone who doesn't just talk a good game but who in a very unassuming way gets on in ordinary life and lives a good game.

Religious leaders are often in the spotlight for their hypocrisy in the news, in the media. And that's understandable because by virtue of their public office in religious institutions, they're often spending a lot of their time standing up in front of people and publicly teaching about how to live good, holy, moral lives.

[26 : 05] And so it's really big news then when it's found out that they were saying one thing in the pulpit but they were doing the exact opposite in their personal and their private lives. It makes the headlines. What doesn't get in the news though are the countless ordinary Christians who humbly!

and simply bear witness to Jesus Christ with their lips and then in the ordinary day to day bear witness to Christ in their basic obedience. Simple obedience.

As loving and nurturing fathers and mothers, as servant-hearted friends, as sacrificial givers, as diligent colleagues, as patient sufferers. That never gets in the news. And I'm not talking here about perfect people.

These are people who know their sins, know their inabilities, know their inadequacies, but they're quick to repent. They're quick to ask for forgiveness, to practice patience, to practice grace.

Those people don't get in the news. There are lots of those people but they don't get in the news. But when you come into contact with a community like that, when you taste and experience a community like that, you are going to be so much more open into dropping your own mask, realizing your own sin and then fleeing to the mercy of Jesus Christ.

[27 : 33] And so friends, out of reverent fear then, let us not profane God's sacred mission by tolerating hypocrisy. Let's drop the masks. And then there's the glory hunting.

The glory hunting under the guise of authentic religion. So pretending to praise God when you're really saying, look at me, look at me, look at me. In a world of people desperately, desperately trying to make their mark in life, trying to win the approval of their peers, of their friends, of their parents, in a world like that, to then come across people who are just comfortable in their own skins and content.

Well, that's such a disarming experience. To find a community where there isn't that sort of relentless striving, that relentless attempting to make a name for yourself, where the people just seem to be at rest.

If you come into a community like that, if you come into a community full of people who are joyful, peace loving, contented people who aren't just ruthlessly trying to make a name for themselves because they've already been united by faith to the name above all names, our Lord Jesus Christ, if you come across a community like that, you're then going to want to know so much more about this name above all names.

You're going to say, I need this. I want to get out of the rat race and experience something of what you are experiencing. And so friends, in reverent fear, we must not profane God's saving purposes by turning the exaltation of Christ into the exaltation of me.

[29 : 18] Not just me, you. Us. God acts so ruthlessly here because he will not have his sacred purposes profaned.

Secondly, profaning the presence of God. It's not just profaning his purposes. It's his very presence that is actually profaned by Ananias and Sapphira.

You'll notice that Peter says to Ananias at the end of verse 4, you have not lied just to human beings but to God. See, there's the obvious damage that deceit and hypocrisy and glory hunting can do to a church community and the relationships within that community.

And that's fairly straightforward. But the offense actually goes beyond sort of person to person and relationship to relationship. The offense is not just an offense against the church and the people in the church.

It's an offense against God himself. And here's why. It is because the church is the one place until Jesus comes again but it's the one place where God especially puts his presence.

[30 : 26] It's the one place where he especially dwells. Now again, the Old Testament is really helpful to us here. So if you go back to Exodus 19 where we actually get the Old Testament church assembling for the first time, the foot of Mount Sinai, you see something of this.

So Israel come to the mountain to receive the law of God, to receive what are actually the stipulations of the covenant that God is making with them and God there tells them something very important. He says, you're going to be a kingdom of priests.

Now you say, well what exactly does that mean? Some people, what they look at that passage meaning being is they say, well it's our role in mediating God's word to the nations, to the watching world.

Priests mediated God's presence to the people. When we're a kingdom of priests, what we're doing is we're mediating God's love in the gospel to all the nations around us. And I think that's possibly there in the imagery, but I think a more central idea that's being conveyed in God calling us a kingdom of priests is that God will dwell in our midst.

When he calls Israel a kingdom of priests he's saying, God is going to dwell in your midst. Because think, priests ministered in the tabernacle or in the temple. They went into the presence of God through very significant consecration.

[31 : 51] So washing and all sorts of sacrifices, all sorts of intricate washings, all sorts of intricate sacrifices, they get to go into the presence of God, into the place where God dwells.

And so it's no surprise then that if you go to the New Testament the apostle Peter refers to the church as a holy priesthood, a temple, a spiritual house built upon Christ the cornerstone, the place where God dwells.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament church we're pictured as the place where God puts his special presence. We get to dwell in the presence of God because of Christ's consecrating work.

Through his shed blood we get washed. Through his sacrifice our sins are atoned for. Now if you think about the church as the one place, the side of heaven, where God specially chooses to put his presence in the same way that he specially put his presence in the tabernacle in the Holy of Holies or in the temple.

Well then that really ups the ante for sin in the church doesn't it? So the sort of sin that Ananias and Sapphira engage in doesn't just profane the purposes of God, it profanes his very presence.

[33 : 10] In the Old Testament so many of the stories that are similar to this account of Ananias and Sapphira where people are struck down by God in very dramatic fashion, so many of them involve profaning his presence.

At the foot of Sinai, Israel are told that they will drop dead if they as unconsecrated people come and touch the base of the mountain. Think about in the book of Leviticus, there's the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who go and the text says offer unauthorized fire in the presence of God, that is they take a censer and they go and light it up and offer incense in an unauthorized way, he strikes them down dead.

Think about Uzzah in 2 Samuel, he reaches out and he touches the Ark of the Covenant where God manifests his special presence and Uzzah is struck down dead.

The text actually says he is struck down because of his irreverence, that is he profaned the presence of the Lord. Wherever there is a profaning of the presence of God by unconsecrated people, there is swift and there is ruthless judgment in the Old Testament.

And I think those Old Testament accounts are supposed to come back to your mind as you're reading through Acts, as you come to Ananias and Sapphira and you see them drop dead.

[34 : 32] See friends, I think the weight of this account needs to sit with us. You need to feel it.

You need me to not just go, oh guys, it's not really as bad as it looks. Let me do some Greek and Hebrew stuff for you quickly here and then you can all go back and feel good about yourselves. You need to sit with the weight of this.

It needs to push us to see what we're actually engaged in here in this thing called the church, this very ordinary thing called the church. This is not just some sort of new ethical community that's trying to be truthful in a world of deceit or authentic in a world of hypocrisy.

There are lots of other communities trying to do that out there, trying to give a better vision, a better moral vision to society out there. You can find other communities like that, but you cannot find other communities where the presence of God dwells.

The presence of the living God dwells. And so the church is not an ordinary community in that sense. Let me close with this. Besides the apparent harshness of God's judgment here, readers of this text historically have actually always struggled with Peter's harshness.

[35 : 49] He's not particularly gentle or pastoral here with his members of his congregation, right? When I was first thinking about preaching this passage, I thought, well, maybe I should take a leaf out of his book.

And I'll turn to everybody who hasn't paid their tithe yet and say, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit? Best pay your tithes before God strikes you down dead. You can do that.

Why is Peter so harsh? How has Satan so filled your heart? What he's saying to Ananias there? He's saying your heart is full of the prince of darkness.

There isn't really a worse insult than that. Your heart is full of the prince of darkness. Evil personified is in your heart. You know that Peter was once on the receiving end of this sort of pastoral treatment.

You know that? In Mark chapter 8, Peter finally starts to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. He's a bit doff, and so it takes him a while, but by chapter 8, the doffness is starting to fade, and he starts to understand that Jesus is the Messiah, at which point, Jesus then unpacks his mission for Peter.

[37 : 03] And he tells Peter, and he tells the other disciples that he is going to suffer, and that he's going to be rejected, and that he's going to be killed. And on hearing all of this, Peter takes him aside and says, not in your life.

He rebukes him, the text says. You're not going to do this. You're not going to die. He rebukes him. But Jesus turns very swiftly, and confronts him to his face, and says, get behind me, Satan.

You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but the concerns of man. Same thing, get behind me, Satan. Same kind of harsh language that we see in chapter 5 of Acts. Get behind me, Satan.

You see, Jesus knows, he knows that without his death, without him going to Jerusalem and dying, without his death, there is no consecration, there is no washing away of sin, there is no sacrifice to make atonement.

He knows that. He knows that without his death, God will not come and dwell among the church, because there will be no church for God to come and dwell among.

[38 : 07] Amen. Amen. See, in Peter's rebuke, Jesus sees evil personified.

He sees the devil himself. He sees the devil who would have us remain in our sin. He sees the devil who would have us, you and me, separated from the love of God for eternity.

And so Jesus, in a moment of eternal love, love for our souls, love for your soul, love for my soul, he turns to Peter and he says, get behind me, Satan. And he uses the harshest words he probably could have come up with.

And then he turns and he heads resolutely towards the cross to die. Now, I think Peter must be feeling something of the force of that original encounter as he stands now in front of Ananias and Sapphira.

And he looks them in the eyes, knowing what they've done. And he thinks, I cannot let you in your deceit profane this blood-bought community.

[39 : 17] I cannot let you in your hypocrisy spit on the sacrifice of my Lord. I cannot let you in your self-seeking, self-glorifying, self-serving, self-exalting actions, trample on the self-sacrificing one who was exalted on the cross.

You will not profane his presence. The presence that he secured at infinite cost. The cost of his life. I think that's what's going on in Peter's mind.

Friends, we need to feel the weight of this passage. And so my prayer is that we will feel the weight of this passage this morning. That we will be filled with a holy and irreverent fear that then in turn produces a deep commitment in us towards God's sacred purposes through the church.

His sacred mission in the church. May we understand, not just have a response of fear, but may we understand something of the glory.

That word glory actually means weight in some sense. May we understand the weightiness of what it means to be participating in, inhabiting a community in which God dwells by his spirit.

[40 : 35] And then may we be humbled. Humbled by the consecrating sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. Because that's the only way we get to sit in this community and not get struck down.

That's the only way we get to be able to do terrible things and repent of those sins. And Jesus welcomes us back with open arms and says, come, come into my family. I love you. I want you to be part of this community.

And so that should fill us with humility. That because of Christ we are numbered as one of his own. Let's pray together.

Our Father and our King, we ask, Lord, that your word would sit with us this morning. It's a somber topic.

It's a serious topic. But I ask that we would feel the weight of it this morning. That your spirit would impress it upon us. Lord, I am so thankful for Jesus this morning because we do not weigh up the truth of this passage without knowing the love of the Savior.

[41 : 51] Without knowing his forgiveness. Without knowing his amazing consecrating work. His blood washing away our sin. His life as a sacrifice of atonement.

Let us cling to Christ. We can't make the perfect community here. We are going to profane your purposes. We are going to profane your presence. We're going to say stupid things.

We're going to do stupid things. We're going to seek our own glory. We're going to tell lies. We're going to be full of hypocrisy, Lord. But won't you turn us back each time?

Won't you let us see the glory of this thing called the church that you are creating? Won't you cause us to flee back to Jesus and his forgiving love? Help us to be this church, Lord, we pray.

Amen.