

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 1 September 2024

Sermon Title : God's Severe Mercy

Speaker : Rev Shannon Chan

Text : Acts 5:1-16

INTRODUCTION

The sermon today is based on the account of the actions and the deaths of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. This incident arises because of the preceding developments of the early church:

The spectacular coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost started the momentum of the growth of faith in Jesus Christ with 3000 new converts being added. Many signs and wonders were done by the apostle (Acts 2) including one incident where a lame beggar was healed when Peter prayed for healing in Jesus' name (Acts 3). The New Testament believers were united in Mission. They were excited at the opportunity to be involved in God's work and joyfully gathered resources for the benefit of all. There were those who sold their properties and distributed the proceeds to those who had needs. (Acts 4:32-35) An example of such faith and generosity is that of a Levite named Joseph whom the apostles called Barnabas who sold his field and brought the money to lay it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:37).

A writer suggests that time and again, when there is a great move of God forward in the life of the church, watch out for Satan's backlash! If Satan cannot stop the work of God with outside means, he will operate from the inside, using human weaknesses or demonic presence within the membership of the church.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira gives the following two stark insights into God's severe mercy:

1) Miracles of Judgment (Acts 5:1-11)

Acts 5:1-11 records the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira who also sold a property. But unlike Barnabas, they kept part of the sale's proceeds. Sin had been conceived in their hearts and they chose to put it into practice. There was also demonic influence in Ananias' actions. In full discernment from the Holy Spirit, apostle Peter not only saw the gift brought by Ananias, but also the deception and the demon influencing Ananias. This demon is identified by Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts, as Satan.

Peter confronted Ananias and did not mince his words when he asked Ananias why he had let Satan took control so that he lied to the Holy Spirit by keeping part of the money received from the property. Furthermore, Peter discerned too that Ananias and his wife

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

had conspired to test the Holy Spirit in this matter. This was not a casual lie. It was a conspiracy fuelled by sin, and more specifically, by the sin of the lack of integrity.

The Miriam Webster dictionary online says that integrity implies trustworthiness, incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, a responsibility or a pledge that has been made. Godly integrity speaks to our consistency of moral character and godly standards. It means to live consistently, to be blameless and upright in all our motives. Godly integrity speaks to God's inward conviction in our hearts which leads us to do the right thing in all situations.

As followers of Christ, we ought to operate with integrity in all areas of our lives because God is always present, watching and listening. Godly integrity is demonstrated by us being one with the words that we speak. When we say something committing in words to doing something, Godly integrity moves us to put all that we are on the line to perform it and to bring it to pass. By this we show what it means to be faithful to our words – We need to say what we mean and mean what we say. When this is not done, it creates all sorts of problems for others. Furthermore, when we do not mean what we say, this lack of integrity opens the door to being a liar. God hates a lying tongue. (Proverbs 6:16-17)

Ananias and Sapphira sinned in their lack of integrity. They had failed to follow through on fulfilling their vow to pay what they had pledged as Scripture says they should have done. (Deuteronomy 23:21-23) Besides the sin of lack of integrity, they also committed the sin of presumptuousness. They presumed that they could do as they please and get away with it, because God was not going to do anything about it. We too sometimes presume that we can get away with our sins because God is full of grace. God's grace however, is not intended to be a licence to sin.

- In God's severe mercy in miracles of judgement, He supernaturally brings punishment and correction. It was God's disciplinary hand that took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. It seems like harsh justice but only God knows the end from the beginning. Romans 11:22 speaks of the kindness and goodness of God and the severity of God, co-existing at the same time. God is both kind and severe. The goodness of God gives us His best, yet the severity of God does allow drastic and painful things to come upon us when God knows there is no other way to bring us to His goodness. God could not allow Ananias and his wife to continue in their sins because this would have destroyed the witness of the early church.

“If the devil's first tactic was to destroy the Church by force from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within.” - John Stott

- There is an unseen realm where powers and principalities are at war. The greater world we live in is not the seen world, but the unseen world. In the unseen realm Satan tries to get a foothold when he saw how powerfully the Holy Spirit is moving. Satan was trying to thwart the work of the Holy Spirit by using Ananias as his plaything and Sapphira's unrepentant heart as his playground. Hence, their sudden

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

death served to purify and warn the church since fear seized the whole church. (v.11) In this New Testament church God made it clear that a lack of integrity and presumptuousness will not be tolerated. Will God do this again today – strike people dead? We have to accept that God has the sovereign right to determine punishment and discipline in the way and in the time He sees fit.

2) Miracles of Mercy (Acts 5:12-16)

Acts 5:12 tells us of the many signs and wonders that the apostles performed among the people. One of the signs of the Kingdom clearly displayed was the church in Jerusalem actively involved in what might be called “power ministries”. Jesus healed a blind and mute man by casting out a demon. He explained that if He casts out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the Kingdom of God has come upon the people. (Mathew 12:28) One way to know that the Kingdom of God is authentically among us is seeing healings and deliverances from the demonic in the life of Christians and the church.

The most important healing we can ever experience is spiritual healing through receiving Jesus into our hearts and lives as Saviour and Lord. ‘Salvation’ in Greek means ‘wholeness and healing’. Healing is a part of the ministry of salvation. However, in addition to the sickness of spirit that comes from being dead to God because of our sins, there is the sickness of spirit that is a consequence of being involved or ensnared by the wrong sort of spiritual realm; dabbling in the wrong sort of spiritual realm brings consequences. We need to be aware of the supernatural world under the control of Satan and in rebellion against God.

Ananias and Sapphira were likely Christians involved in the life of the early church and in particular, Satan was able to fill Ananias’ heart to make decisions contrary to the will and way of God. Satan is no respecter of persons and it does not matter how smart or resistant we think we are, but if we put down the welcome mat to Satan, he will gain a foothold and we will suffer the consequences. Beyond this, one’s spirit can be crushed through the circumstances of life. A writer suggests sickness of the spirit is not medically quantifiable, but the consequences of such sicknesses can be seen every day where the spirit is out of harmony with God. For example, in hospitals, consequences some of which can manifest emotionally, psychologically, and physically with obvious symptoms.

- Acts 5:16 records crowds gathering and bringing with them those who are sick and tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed. Those healed by the power of God will return home to become the major Gospel carriers from Jerusalem to Judea and beyond.
- Healing flows from the cross – Isaiah first said that by Jesus’ stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Healing is the central part of the atonement and part of the Christians hope. Deliverance also flows from the cross. It’s on the cross that Christ disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15). Jesus’ victory gives us power and authority

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Copyright © 2024 by Faith Methodist Church. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

over the powers of darkness. Jesus has entrusted to the church the tasks of ministering both healing and deliverance to those in need. Therefore, when a church fails to minister healing and deliverance, its effectiveness will be less than what it could be or should be.

Mark 16:17-18 say that these signs will accompany those who believe – in Jesus' name they will cast out demons, lay their hands on the sick and they will recover. It is helpful then that a church has a ministry of healing and deliverance so that there is a place for those who need it. The apostles were able to do this ministry because of the purity of their hearts – cleansed channels fit for the Master's use. 'Purity of heart' means a desire to please God, fear of the Lord, worshipping, obeying, cherishing, and loving Him with all our mind, heart, soul and being loyal to Him in all our decisions.

CONCLUSION

"Don't miss the connection between purity preserved and power displayed. God blessed a pure church with spiritual power." - David Guzik

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Read Acts 5:1-11 together and spend 2 minutes to reflect on it.
 - a. What does it tell you about God?
 - b. What does it tell you about man?
 - c. What does it tell you about the relationship between God and man?

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share a testimony of how you have experienced God's severe mercy in your life. Include how this experience has shaped your faith and life.

OR

Seek the Holy Spirit's revelation on how your Life Group can be a channel of God's miracle of mercy to those in need by ministering healing and deliverance to them. Discern together areas you need to change and how you can be equipped to do so effectively.

6. With a prayer partner, pray for the action steps/changes you have committed to in questions 3a(ii), 3b(ii) and 5 above, surrendering your fears and challenges to God. Pray to support each other as you seek God's power and vision to fulfil His clarion call to bring His healing to those in need.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Living Hope – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f2FXxDVO6w>
2. Tabernacle – Awaken Generation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hvJiLXNqUQ>
3. Refiner's Fire – Brian Doerksen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rII4UzVTuQo>

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7