**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 6-6-2021
The Real Deal**

I had a very positive seminary experience. It was a great school to attend and to grow and learn. But one thing that was emphasized in my seminary, and I’m sure basically every other seminary or college was to make sure that the work that we turn in was ours. When we turn in something that is not really from us, we call that plagiarism. And plagiarism today is viewed as showing a lack of integrity, of not being real or genuine in one’s work.

For it is better to turn in assignments that are poorly done, but are our work, than to turn in someone else’s work with our name on it. That would be wrong. That would be hypocrisy. Most people would agree. In fact, failure to turn in one’s own work could result in severe penalties, including being expelled from school.

And I’m sure that we can all tell of stories of similar things from our life experience. Warning that we were given or that we gave on the importance of honestly, of not cheating or cutting corners, whether it’s in sports or work or in other ways.

I think of my daughter Leah sharing stories with me of gymnastics and how sometimes when coaches have instructed the group to do this exercise in their training, sometimes people have not strictly followed. Sometimes they do not do as many push-ups as they were told to do or they cut corners in their laps to run.

Whatever the case may be, there is the temptation to do things with a lack of integrity. It could be fudging numbers for tax purposes. It could be cheating in a sport; it could be exaggerating on an application for something. And Christians are not immune to these temptations.

When we do mess up as Christians, the proper response is to be honest to God by quickly confessing it to Him as a sin and then ask for His help to live in victory over that sinful temptation.

But this morning, as we continue exploring some of the supernatural events found in the Book of Acts, we will be highlighting how dangerous it is to fall into the sin of hypocrisy.

Let us turn now to God’s Word, found in Acts 4:32-5:11

**32All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.**

**36Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.**

**5:1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2With 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.**

**3Then 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? 4Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”**

**5When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.**

**7About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”**

**“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”**

**9Peter 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.”**

**10At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.**

This is probably a story from Acts that is not preached on very often. It isn’t the most feel-good of stories. But it is hugely significant for several reasons. So let’s unpack it together.

As we attempt to unpack it together, it is helpful to recall from the gospels how Jesus’ strongest words of rebuke and correction were directed towards the religious leaders. And it was largely due to their hypocrisy. They wanted to look more spiritual than they really were. They wanted the praise of others. They wanted to look good. And it was this pride and hypocrisy that made it so difficult for them to come to Jesus in faith.

In this section of the Book of Acts, it is fascinating that the text we are looking at today is given a very prominent place in one of the early sections of the book. And this may surprise us a bit, for it doesn’t highlight one of the many miracles that are found in the book. But as we will see, the issue involves whether the questions of being the real deal, of being an authentic Christian or being a hypocrite. And this is extremely important to the Lord.

First, let us consider the positive example. We read about this man named Joseph. We are told he was from Cyprus and that the apostles gave him the nickname Barnabas, which means ‘son of encouragement.’

This man was the real deal. With a nickname like ‘son of encouragement,’ it is clear that he was not focused on himself in an unhealthy way. Rather, he was a man of integrity who wanted to be a blessing to others. With a nickname like his, he was certainly seeking to encourage others often. To build others up. We see Barnabas living out this nickname in that way that he supported bringing Mark along on his second missionary trip, even though he had abandoned the first missionary trip.

And here in this text Joseph is selling a field and taking the proceeds from the field to offer as a resource for the apostles.

And then we read of the story of Ananias and Sapphira. On the surface, it looks that they are doing something very similar. They also sell something and they offer proceeds to give to the apostles. But the results were very different.

In fact, their actions were so severely offensive to the Lord, that God strikes them dead.

So what was the issue? The issue was their lack of integrity. Their flagrant hypocrisy.

It wasn’t that Barnabas was perfect. I’m sure that Barnabas sinned and that he confessed his sin to God when he messed up.

But the actions of Ananias and Sapphira reveal two people that certainly appear to be not the real deal.

We read how they lied about how much the parcel was that they sold.

They lied to the apostles, but more importantly they lied to God. The problem was that they wanted to look super-spiritual. It wasn’t about genuinely wanting to bless others in Jesus’ Name, they were being hypocrites and wanted to impress by inflating the numbers.

They were putting on a good show and likely they wanted to gain influence by their apparent generosity. This sounds a lot like the Pharisees, who as a whole were looking to be well-respected and adored by others.

But we know through this story as well as in many other places in Scripture that the Lord sees right through all of this. And through Peter’s words, the Lord brings judgment upon them.

So what are we to make of this story? Why is it to be so critically important for Christians to mediate upon?

***I believe that it is simply this. The Lord expects His people to be the real deal.*** The Church is be comprised of people who have chosen to deny themselves. We are to not live like worldly people do. We are to live with sincerity and authenticity. We are to be the real deal and not hypocrites.

Jesus said in Luke 8:17 **“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”**

The context of this verse was to remind Jesus’ hearers that eventually it will be made known as plain as day who has surrendered to Jesus and who has not.

The Lord sees everything. On the surface, things may look one way. But in time, it will be seen for what it really is. No one really gets away with anything. Even if things go unnoticed by others, the LORD sees all things.

As the church today, being the real deal is especially important. Why? Because we are called to be Jesus’ representatives in this world. His ambassadors in this world.

When the church lives like the world, when the church lives in hypocrisy, it can misrepresent Jesus to the world. And this is a very serious thing to God. The church is to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. How can this be done when the church looks just like the world?

Jesus’ strongest words against the religious leaders of His day centered around their hypocrisy.

I want us to consider this in closing. It is not about performing enough for God. It’s about being the real deal. It’s about coming before Him with humility and sincerity each day and recognizing our daily need for Him.

When we are the real deal, we do not live to make a name for ourselves, but to make Christ’s Name more fully known in this world.

Let us all be Barnabas’ friends.

And a key to this is to be faithful and to have integrity and honestly in the “little things.” In the seemingly insignificant things. If we are faithful and genuine in the little things, in the things that we know no one would see but God, then we will be faithful in the bigger things as well.

Every day is a choice. May we live to be the real deal for Jesus.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

English Bible: The Book of Acts

BibleGateway.com