Attack from Within—A Generosity Challenge **Acts 4:32-5:15**
Trinity CRC, November 1, 2026 Rev. Richard J. deLange
Series: The Gospel in the World

As we've been working our way through these early chapters of the book of Acts, we've seen the power of the Holy Spirit and the growth of the Church. Then we see a response from Satan and those who hate the gospel or refuse to believe in Jesus. That resulted in persecution which we saw in chapter 4 and will see more of in the coming chapters. But persecution didn't slow down the growth of the church. It never does. In fact, when persecution happens, the church grows.

What we see in the early church, we see again at the time of the Reformation and at many other times and in various places throughout history. Persecution grows the church, despite what the enemies of Jesus are trying to accomplish. Through opposition or attacks from outside, people realize that Jesus is really and truly our ever-present help. He is with us and he's all we need for body as well as for soul.

However, it is also true that the church faces attacks from within. There is always human pride and selfishness and greed that tempt us. We've seen financial and sexual scandals that bring down a prominent church leader and cause people to say that Christians are hypocrites. These things bring out the worst in us and can do more to destroy the church than persecution if left unchecked. Our text for today focuses on what's probably a pretty well-known story of Ananias and Sapphira. I want to read the last verses of chapter 4 to help set the context for chapter 5 and then we'll get into the attack from within which is a generosity challenge to us all.

Please pray with me and then we'll read the passage.

Turn in your Bibles or look to the screen for Acts 4:32.

Acts 4:32 All 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. **33** With 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 **34** that 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 **35** and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

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

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

3 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? 4 Didn’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.”

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

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

“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

9 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.”

10 At 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. 11 Great
fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

This is the Word of the Lord.

♪ “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.”
That’s a pretty gutsy line. We’ve sung it many times and a different version of *Take My Life* today. But do you really mean it when you sing it “not a mite would I withhold”?

An elderly gentleman in the first church I served said to me, “I’m not singing that line. I don’t mean it!” He was honest, but I don’t think he was stingy. I do know he was very frugal. He and his wife would drive across Canada and not spend a dime in a restaurant. They’d make coffee on their camp stove in the morning and fill up their thermos and make a few sandwiches for the road. No stopping at Tim Hortons. They grew up with little and didn’t want to waste anything. They’d rather save the money and give it to a worthwhile cause, whether the church or something like World Renew and World Hunger for which we have an offering today. To this couple, that was stewardly use of their money. They’d save and give their money to causes with eternal value. I know there are people here who have the same attitude. And that’s great.

Now, boys and girls, just in case I lost you already, you might be wondering what a “mite” is. Kind of funny, huh? “Might be wondering about a mite.” Two different spellings. Anyway, that song refers to a mite. This is a mite: , a very small bug. But the song is referring to a very small coin or a small amount of money. We used to say “a penny” but since we don’t use those anymore, I guess

we'd say "a nickel". We could sing, "Take my silver and my gold, not a cent would I withhold!" Mite is simply an old English word for something very small.

We read in the end of Acts 4 about Joseph who was called Barnabas which means Son of Encouragement. He gave it all. Every last cent of what he earned from the sale of a property he owned. He did not withhold a mite. And no one forced him. It doesn't seem that anyone even asked him. He just felt compelled—by love for the Lord and his church community—to give everything he earned. Apparently, he wasn't the only one to do that. Chapter 4:34 says that from "time to time" this happened. It happened at least a few times in the early church. At least some people felt super generous and gave every last mite from the sale of their home or property.

Then in chapter 5 Ananias and Sapphira came along. It seems they've been part of the Jerusalem Church for a while. They've come to believe in Jesus. Being part of the church, they would have endured some of the persecution that was happening, attacks from the outside. In addition, they'd watched as people like Barnabas gave very generously to support the struggling members of the church family, almost certainly people who were struggling because of the persecution Christians faced.

Now allow me to speculate here a little because we don't have many details. But it is pretty certain that Ananias and Sapphira would have heard other believers talking. Maybe they said things like, "Can you believe how generous brother Barnabas is?" Barnabas wasn't looking for attention or applause, but he was very likely getting it. At minimum, he was probably getting a lot of thanks from people who benefited from his generosity. It would have been extremely hard to keep that kind of donation quiet.

So, from here, let's first of all explore what was wrong with giving of Ananias and Sapphira.

Wrong Motivation

I'd say it was wrong motivation. Ananias and Sapphira gave a substantial donation from the sale of their land. It could have been just as much as what Barnabas gave. We aren't told whether Barnabas sold 10 acres or just one. Nor are we told how much land Ananias sold. The issue is not the quantity of the gift. The problem pointed to by Peter is lying to the Holy Spirit. They pretended that they gave every last mite of it. So, while they were still being generous, they were also being deceptive. They wanted to appear to be as generous as someone like Barnabas, but they weren't really.

Peter doesn't make a big deal of this because their donation wasn't substantial. He calls them out for lying. They want to look super-spiritual. They wanted to gain some good standing in the church for being very generous, but for being more generous than they actually are. Clearly, they wanted to be a help to some degree. It wasn't that they didn't care about others in their community who were hurting. Let's just say they sold their property for $150,000 Canadian. Or

even 150,000 shekels. The currency doesn't matter. And let's say they gave 100,000 of that 150,000 to the church. That's still a huge gift. A big sacrifice on their part. I'm sure that the amount they gave was substantial, even if it wasn't everything they made. Otherwise, it would be way too obvious that they were lying.

The issue Peter points to is deception. They were giving for the wrong reason. No one was forcing them or even asking them to give all the proceeds from the sale of their land. If they had told Peter, "We sold some land and here's 100 grand", that would be welcome and good. But it seems they said something more like, "We sold our place and we're giving all the proceeds to the church." It's like they were singing, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." That is confirmed when Sapphira comes and Peter asks her if the sold their land for "this particular" price and she says, "Yes. That much!"

Again, we aren't given details, but we can imagine that Peter responds to Ananias, "Really? You got 100 grand for your property? I thought it would be worth more than that. Nonetheless thanks for your gift." And then Ananias says, "Yes, we got 100,000. It's all here." We aren't told how Peter knew they were lying. I assume it was somehow revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. In any event, Peter knew Ananias was lying. Peter caught Ananias in a lie and then God struck him dead. What a shock!

Why is this deception of Ananias and Sapphira such a big deal? Why did it even warrant death? It reminds me of story of Achan in the early days of life of Isreal in the Promised Land. Do you know that story, kids? Maybe you know the story of Jericho better. The people of Israel simply walked around Jericho seven times, shouted and blew their trumpets. Then God brought down the walls and city was conquered. But Joshua had told the people of Isreal that God said everything in the city was to be dedicated to God. In subsequent battles, the people would be allowed to take certain things from the cities they conquered but not in Jericho. In Jericho, everything of value was to be set aside for God.

But Achan took some silver and gold and hid it in his tent. Maybe it was just 1% of everything. However, his deception was exposed and the Lord commanded death for him and his whole household. That's similar to this story of Ananias and Sapphira. It's a similar new beginning for God's people. And it's a similar attack from within that God exposes.

Why does God care about wrong giving motives on the part of Ananias and Sapphira? Because their lie threatens to break the fabric of the community God is building. Instead of the attack on the church coming from outside persecutors, this time it comes through two of God's own people who are listening to their own selfish desires, rather than the Holy Spirit. Peter sees the underlying activity of Satan—lying to the community and to the Holy Spirit. They are deceiving themselves by attempting to deceive the church. More than seeking to help struggling fellow believers, they see their giving as a way to help themselves. They want to gain recognition for their generosity. God, through Peter, exposes this hypocrisy.

I want to think about a couple things here.

First, Luke, the author of Acts, doesn't hide this story. God's people are not perfect. We have the Holy Spirit. We have the power to live the right life and to make the right choices. But we still have freedom to yield to the Spirit and do God's will or not do it. Luke lets us see the brokenness of God's people, already in the early days of the church's formation. The early church was not all perfect. We romanticize it sometimes as all selfless people who've been fully transformed by Jesus. Luke shows us that that is not the case.

He also shows us that God is jealous for the health and integrity of the church. We are Christ's beloved bride. It's bad enough that we face outside pressures. So, it's all the more important that we have a high level of honesty and integrity within the church. The church can't be a loving and caring body if we allow deception to take root because that breeds distrust which will break down our unity.

Second, then, we must seek to expose hypocrisy in our own hearts and lives. In addition, we ought to help one another with this. That's a form of church discipline—we help each other become better disciples. However, it's critical to take the log out of our own eye first! As individuals, we must recognize that our hypocrisy, lying and self-serving action threatens to damage the fabric of the church. If we accept lying to one another as a normal part of church life, then we'll never build the kind of loving and trusting community that we see growing in Acts where believers cared deeply for each other. Whenever someone was in need, the church helped out because they were supporting one another, blessing those who lost much for the sake of Christ or just fell on hard times for other reasons. It was not a perfect church but it was doing many of the right things that build the church stronger.

Friends, deceiving ourselves is so easy to do. Why? Because we want to build or protect our reputation. We want to create a persona that is better than what we know to be true about ourselves. People do this on Facebook and Instagram all the time. We post the best of our life, not the ugly stuff. And that can carry into the church where we aim to deceive the people around us, as if to show that we are more spiritual or godly than others. That we have it all together while others are messed up and broken.

The actions of Ananias and Sapphira provide a window into the spiritual sickness that can attack the church from within. Spiritual warfare starts within as we all have to fight our own sinful desires, lest they destroy our lives, the lives of our loved ones and even break the church down. God didn't want the church accepting deception because deception is a tool of the devil, to break down what God is building.

Remember, dear people, sin is its own form of punishment. We don't see ourselves for who we really are and don't want others to see that. So, we pretend which becomes hellish because we have to keep up the lie. We use God to build a reputation for ourselves instead of getting our reputation from God. You could

argue that Ananias and Sapphira missed the point of the gospel, of grace. Rather than seeing their identity in Christ and their worth in him, they tried to create a reputation of being super generous. They didn't see that their lack of integrity was going to destroy the community if God had not stepped in. God exposes the wrong motivation in their giving.

Correct Motivation

So, if Ananias and Sapphira had the wrong motivation for their giving, what is the correct motivation?

a. Knowing Grace

Let's start with grace. All **giving flows from grace**. Giving itself is a form of grace. Generous giving starts with recognizing our need for Jesus. It flows from our love for Jesus. It's a result of trusting Jesus.

If I don't see my need for God's grace in Jesus, then I think I can take care of myself. If I earn God's grace, then I'm in charge and in control. But if sin is what we say it is, then we need grace to be connected to God. We need Jesus in order to receive grace.

The Reformation was all about grace. People in the church 500 years ago were deceived into thinking they had to earn their own way back to God. They said Jesus paid for the sin you were born with, but after that, you have to cover your own debt. Martin Luther and some before him and many after him realized that was not true. It made for salvation by works and we are incapable of ever paying for our own sins. This is the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and set me free from the tyranny of the devil."

We've probably all heard it many times but without that truth—fully believing it—we aren't going to embrace the joy of giving that flows from being saved by grace. You see, Ananias and Sapphira clearly didn't give with a cheerful heart. This passage doesn't say they weren't believers. But they were still struggling with self-preservation and sinful desires.

Do we delight in our salvation and live out of the comfort of belonging fully to God because of Jesus? If so, this passage challenges us to check our heart for the right motivation in our giving.

The late Rev. Timothy Keller told his congregation to measure their heart's warmth by asking, "Are you finding God's grace more glorious-and-moving now than you have in the past?" Keller measured spiritual growth by two things moving together: a clearer view of your own sin and a deeper grip on God's mercy for it. Ask, "Am I increasingly conscious of the evil of my heart? Then, do I have a growing dependence on and grasp of the preciousness of the mercy of God?" Seeing more of your own sin as you grow can mean God is exposing pride, selfishness, resentment, greed or desires you'd previously excused. You see,

friends, grace only feels glorious once self-righteousness and self-dependence loses their grip. In this way, we remember we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus alone and for God's glory alone.

The story goes that Erasmus, a Renaissance scholar at the time of the Reformation, was watching with the pope as wagonloads of wealth were brought through the gates of the Vatican. Turning to Erasmus, the pope observed. "No longer can the church say with Peter, 'Silver or gold have I none.'" Erasmus replied, "True. And neither can the church say to the lame man, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" In other words, Erasmus saw that the drive for riches in the church had poisoned the minds and hearts of the leadership, just as it had crept into the heart and mind of Ananias and Sapphira.

So here's the second and greater challenge this tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira brings to us. Give Generously.

b. Give Generously

Before I say more, let's be clear that giving money is not something everyone can do equally. Giving of our time and talents is also giving to the Lord. I spoke to someone last week who was concerned about not being able to give much money to the church, almost thinking that that could disqualify them from being part of the church. Notice from Acts 4 and 5 that some were well-off and some were not. Some sold property so there would be money to help those who were in need. So, giving generously is for all of us but it's going to look different for all of us as well.

When I say this passage challenges us to give generously, I do so because I see people like Barnabas giving sacrificially. They understand that we live by grace and that God will care for us. The prophet Malachi told God's people that they were robbing God because they weren't giving as they could. He reminded them—and us—that everything we have is from God in the first place. So, giving back to God is an act of faith. Read the book of Malachi. It's just 4 short chapters. Nowhere else in the Bible and for nothing else in the Bible does God say "Test me." But for giving he does in Malachi 3:10.

Perhaps it's because he knows how hard giving can be for us. We have a hard time letting go of our money. For some strange reason, the more we have the harder it can be to let go of it for many people. That's because our wealth makes us fearful of losing our earthly comforts and makes us think we deserve more. Most of us have worked hard for it so we get a little bit too protective of it. We don't want to just give it away. We might need it later. And, of course, a case can be made from the Bible for investing well and planning.

But that doesn't discount or negate God calling his children to give and reminding us that giving generously and sacrificially will be a blessing for us. We must be givers as Christians. MUST. It flows from grace, remember? And remember that it's not simply about money though that is the heart of our text and what I'm talking about today.

I believe I have said this before. If not from the pulpit, I know I have said to people in private. This: “You cannot outgive God! You cannot outgive God!” Because money has the temptation to horde it for ourselves, the best thing we can do to break from that temptation is to give it away. Give generously. Give more than you think you can afford. If you only give what you have determined will give you the kind of comfort zone you want, give more. Give past it. If you’ve never moved into “the stretching zone,” which is out of your comfort zone, then you should give more. And then let God surprise you. Let yourself see his provision for you. Test him and see if he doesn’t provide in amazing ways so that you don’t even miss what you gave. Instead, you’re happy that you gave it.

Most of you will know from the budget this year, that I returned $20,000 of my salary to the church so that we could hire two interns: Gavin and Ken. Gavin has subsequently become our youth pastor. In addition, I continued to give my usual tithing. I’m not saying that to brag. I’m saying it because I felt that’s what God was asking me to do. I saw that he put these two guys in our church—not by chance—these two young men who have a desire to be pastors. And I wanted to encourage them on that road because we need more pastors in the CRC! We really do. So, I’ll just testify that I have not missed the money I gave. Not one bit. God has more than provided.

Now, what about you? I hope and pray and I’m working toward the time when we as a church will see how we’ve been blessed and say, “Let’s do something a little out of our comfort zone. Let’s step out in faith and give generously. Some people say, “give recklessly”, to mean give past the point where it hurts. Some of us are way too comfortable. We have so much money we can do whatever we want. But try sacrificing for the sake of the Lord’s church and his greater kingdom. What could we do as a church with an extra $100,000 on our budget each year? What great mission projects could we support? How many struggling people could we help? Rather than just doing what we’re doing now, what more can we do? What needs is the Lord showing us that we can give toward?

The point is that we aren’t giving to make a name for ourselves, like Ananias and Sapphira tried to do. We’re giving because we rest in the comfort of belonging to Jesus. That’s something that can never be taken away from us. It is eternal. And when we give to the Lord’s work, we’re giving to something that is eternal as well. For example, if your giving results in more people coming to Christ, then that’s huge. That’s making an eternal difference for the kingdom—for those people who are not Christ’s but will become his. Give because gratitude is overflowing from your heart since Jesus’ saved you. That’s the greatest gift we can ever receive and it’s the greatest gift we can share. It’s the challenge the Lord Jesus has put before us in the Great Commission—to tell people about him to the ends of the earth.

Friends, we have been given much. Way more than most people in the world. Don’t waste it. Give generously because you love Jesus and his mission. Give because you love your neighbours. Let giving generously become normal for you because you are eager to share what God has blessed you with. Let us be

known as those who give generously because we know and trust the Lord who has given his all for us. Don’t give begrudgingly. Don’t give cautiously. Don’t give because you want to impress others. Don’t give for the wrong reasons. Give because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to save us from our sin. That’s an eternal gift that we are privileged to have, enjoy and share.