

## Sermon: Bold Authenticity

### IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. Have you ever used the excuse or when has someone told you that there are too many hypocrites in the church? What was your response?
2. What would be a good response to this comment?
3. Tell of a time when you or someone you know has experienced the generosity explained in vv 32-34?

### UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. In what ways had Satan attacked the Jerusalem church? With what effect? (Acts 4:3,4,18-21 for stories of Peter and John)
2. Consider the sentence in v32: "All the believers were one in heart and mind." Did this describe Barnabas? Did this describe Ananias and Sapphira? Why? Why not?
3. Pastor Ashwin quoted, "We're not hypocrites because of what we say or because of what we do... we're hypocrites when we hide our faults and try to act as if we have it all figured out." What is your definition of 'hypocrisy'? How does the story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrate hypocrisy? What was the irony of their names?
4. What might have motivated Ananias and Sapphira to do what they did? What would they gain by lying about the money they received from selling their land?  
(Optional question) Read the story of Achan. Joshua 7:20-26; 22:20  
How is this story similar to that of Acts 5:1-11?
5. Why did 'great fear seize' the people? (vv 5, 11) What did this mean? What was the impact on the Jerusalem church?
6. What does the story of Ananias and Sapphira teach us in the church today?

### OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. Why does 'authenticity' take 'boldness'?
2. Ashwin related the story of a German church drowning out the screams of the Jews being sent to death camps. What might be parallels for us? How are we listening to the 'screams of the world'?
3. How authentic is the label of 'Christian' for you? Is there an area in which you are 'putting on a mask'? What is God saying to you about this? What do you need to do about it?

#### Resources:

<http://archives.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/cure-hypocrisy>

*UnChristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity and why it matters*, David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons. Baker Books, 2007.

*When a nation forgets God*, Erwin Lutzer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnD8VzBAPo8>

### THE WORD (NIV)

#### Acts 4:32-5:16

<sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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 <sup>34</sup>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 <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. <sup>36</sup>Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), <sup>37</sup>sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

<sup>5</sup>Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup>Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. <sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." <sup>9</sup>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." <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. <sup>12</sup>The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup>No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. <sup>15</sup>As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. <sup>16</sup>Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

# Sermon Study Summary

Pastor Ashwin has been preaching from the Book of Acts on the theme of boldness in the early church. In his last sermon he shared Prov 28:1: "The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

Some time ago a zoo in China temporarily shut down due to fraud. When a mother and son visited the zoo an animal labeled "African lion" starting barking. Zoo keepers admitted that the "lion" was actually a Tibetan mastiff, a large dog. Many churches today have the same problem – they are not what they claim to be. When a church is not bold, does not stand up for her convictions, and is weak in its witness, prayers and authenticity, it will not make a dent in enemy territory, nor advance God's mission and purposes for their generation.

In contrast, the early church members were courageous. Even their strongest opponents were amazed! From a small group of men and women, they were now growing by the thousands. Each believer was empowered by the Spirit. They witnessed boldly and had a powerful prayer life. There were signs, wonders and miracles. Their unity magnetically drew people to Jesus. Satan used intense *external* persecution from religious leaders. It didn't work. Instead, the church became purified with a greater resolve to glorify Jesus. The early church shared all their possessions. From time to time people voluntarily sold their land and houses to give to the poor. Barnabas, an encourager and a model of generosity, did so. (4:32-37).

Now Satan tried to sabotage the church from the *inside* using two people who co-operated with him. Ananias and Sapphira heard about Barnabas and wanted the same status and recognition. What did they do? Ananias approached Peter and said he and his wife also sold their property. They took part of the sale and claimed it was the full price! Peter supernaturally discerned his lie saying, "How has Satan so filled your heart!" (5:1-4) The word "filled" is the same word used when believers were filled with the Spirit. Ananias became a vessel of Satan. Satan knew he could damage the church by making them hypocrites.

When Peter asked, "Ananias, how have you lied to the Holy Spirit and **kept** some of the money?" the word "kept" is the same word as Achan's sin in the Book of Joshua. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they defeated the Canaanite nations. But Achan kept the spoils of war disobeying God's command to completely destroy everything. That one sin caused the defeat of the Israelite army in battle. (Josh 7:20-26). The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was almost identical to Achan's. If this sin was not dealt with, the entire community would have paid a price. God struck both Ananias and Sapphira dead for lying. Was God too harsh? God wanted to shield the early church from the sin of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy quenches the Spirit like no other sin! It robs the church of its power and influence and saps the life out of a Community Group or gathering. He intended His church to be authentic and pure.

Our word hypocrite comes from the Greek word HUPOCRITES, which originated in Greek theatre where actors wore masks to change identities. Both Ananias and Sapphira wore masks to look spiritual! The name Ananias means "**God is gracious,**" but deep inside he was stingy, lacking grace. The name Sapphira means "**beautiful,**" the same word for the precious stone sapphire, but her motives were hideous inside.

We all are guilty of hypocrisy. An article in *Relevant* magazine says: "**We're not hypocrites because of what we say or because of what we do—we're hypocrites when we hide our faults and try to act like we've got it all figured out.**" Hypocrisy can cause God to withdraw His Spirit if we don't deal with it! It affects our witness and we lose our credibility. The church is imperfect, but posing as if we are perfect when we're not means we're faking. God demands that we be real!

Next to the problem of evil, hypocrisy is the most common reason for unbelievers rejecting the Christian faith. In their book *UnChristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity and why it matters*, the authors interviewed thousands of young non-Christians. 85% of outsiders who had exposure to Christians and churches said that Christianity is hypocritical. Half of young *churchgoers* agreed that Christianity is hypocritical. When Gandhi was asked why he didn't want to be a Christian, he said, "**I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.**" That hurts!

In his book *When a Nation Forgets God*, Erwin Lutzer tells one man's story while living in Hitler's Germany. This man and other Christians knew what was happening to the Jews, but tried to distance themselves. A railroad track ran behind their church, and each Sunday morning they were disturbed to hear screams coming from the train. It was carrying Jews like cattle en-route to death camps. The Christians began singing hymns when the train passed, loudly enough to drown out the screams. Years later this man still heard that train in his sleep. "God forgive me," he said. "Forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians, yet did nothing to intervene."

Going back to Ananias and Sapphira, what was the result of God's swift judgment? "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (5:5, 11). No one dared join them, but the next verses say men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number! (5:13-14). This means that no pretenders were part of the group. The ones who joined were genuine! And the church grew!

Today, when we are hypocrites, we see the price our families, our neighbourhoods, our churches and our society will pay. But when we demonstrate bold authenticity and remove our masks, we become magnets who will draw people to Jesus. Our world is longing to be part of a community that is real. Where else can they find such community except in the church!

Today's message can produce a lot of guilt. However, Jesus died on the cross so that we can be made clean of all our sins. We come to the cross with a broken heart and contrite spirit, knowing we are loved and accepted just as we are. In Him alone we find forgiveness. So we remove our entire pretense and come to Jesus with honesty. Jesus does a deep work of transformation! As we humbly acknowledge our failures, He redeems us from the grip of sin and gives us power to live an authentic life!