

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Power in Every Circumstance

Acts 5:12-42

Intro: One thing we learn from the story of Ananias and Sapphira is that God is not indifferent to the sins of His people. God was doing a new thing on earth through the ministry of the church and that work was marked outwardly with great power and it was marked inwardly by great purity. So far in the Book of **Acts** Luke has shown us that the Spirit-filled church is unified, magnified and multiplied. That's what was happening in this church and Satan was not having any of it. He set about implementing his malevolent plan to divide the church, disgrace it and decrease it. That is his plan for every church and he will do it, if we let him.

Satan's plan in **ch5** involved planting an evil thought into the mind of Ananias and we saw that not only did Ananias agree with it, he ran with it, dragging his wife right along with him into judgment. Satan's tactics have changed many times over the last 2000 years but his plan remains the same. He's trying to destroy every work of God and, although he knows he can't defeat God, he can easily defeat the people of God who are walking in their own strength. Satan found 2 candidates in this congregation who were willing to put their desires ahead of God's truth and they became willing participants. It may seem harsh that such a seemingly minor infraction cost them their lives but when you consider that they willingly allowed themselves to be used as a tool of Satan to cause damage to this new work; then God's judgment was really a gracious act that prevented them from going to far.

But here's the thing, this judgment not only prevented damage to the church, it actually leads to greater revival.

12-16 – Satan not only failed to disrupt the activity of the church, he created an environment where ministry in and around the church exploded! This was not his intention of course, it happened because God intervened to protect the purity of His people. It was His judgment of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira that brought about this resurgence. **Vs11** states that "great fear came upon all the church..." Normally, we would say that fear is a bad thing but the right kind of fear – a healthy respect for a holy God and a fear

of sin and the consequences it brings – that’s a great start for a revival! In fact, most major revivals have almost always been marked by a radical work of God in dealing with the sins of believers. Not the lost, but the saved! That may seem counter-intuitive but it makes perfect sense.

How can we expect the message of the Gospel and the ministry of the church to advance the kingdom of God when the people of God who carry that message and do that ministry are harboring unconfessed sin in their hearts? They may work real hard to keep that sin hidden but eventually, if they choose to persist in it, God will expose it. Maybe not like He did with Ananias and Sapphira, but it will be exposed and it will be painful. Now, God doesn’t do this as a form of retribution or punishment; He does it to vindicate His Word. One of the results of God being vindicated in the church is that the ministry of the church gains strength.

Christians tend to think of revival as something triumphant and glorious, an overflow of God’s power and blessing on the church. It may be that but before it is that – it is judgment day for the church. But after the judgment, after God’s people have gotten their hearts right and things are settled; then His blessings abound upon all.

This principle applies equally to the individual as much as to the congregation. After all, what is a congregation but a group of individuals? What should we do? How are we to prevent the judgment of God coming upon us? I’m not talking about condemnation. If you are a believer – there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ([Rom 8:1](#)). But clearly, there is the probability of bringing dishonor to the name of Christ and damaging His reputation in the world and doing harm to His work. How do we prevent that? Paul tells us in [I Cor 11:31-32](#). If we would judge ourselves – examine our actions and motivations in light of God’s Word and respond appropriately – then we would do God’s work for Him in our own hearts. If we will strive to learn His Word and stubbornly apply the principles and truths we find in it to our lives, there will be no need for judgment from God.

That’s what happened in our text: judgment lead to fear which lead to a true revival.

12 – Clearly, the church had been shaken by the judgment of Ananias and

Sapphira. Some may even have wondered if they had lost the blessing of God permanently but that was not the case. They had prayed in 4:30 that God would continue to do signs and wonders in the name of Jesus and God is answering that prayer right here. Not only was the Holy Spirit doing many signs and wonders through the hands of the Apostles but the people were once again all with one accord. This restored unity is itself a greater display of the power of God than any particular sign or wonder. Our selfish hearts and stubborn minds can be harder to move than any mountain.

13-14 – These 2 verses may seem to be at odds with each other but they actually describe a double blessing. This group of believers had a wonderful reputation for integrity in their community and everyone knew it was a serious thing to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The incident with Ananias and Sapphira reduced the appeal for the casual commitment. There wasn't a line of posers waiting to get in to take their place.

On the other hand, the church kept growing but this was good growth. Though people realized it was a serious thing to be a Christian, the Spirit still moved with power on the hearts of many and many continued to accept the Gospel. Notice to whom Luke says they were added; not to a denomination or a movement but to God Himself! So not only were miracles being done, but also the gospel was being preached with such power that people were responding to it in large numbers.

15-16 – Did Peter's shadow have the power to heal? Luke doesn't say that it did, he merely says the people believed that it did. We read in Luke's Gospel where a woman was healed by touching the hem of Jesus' robe. There wasn't any power to heal in Jesus' clothing – but it was the way that her faith was released. Similarly, there was no power in Peter's shadow but there was power when a person believed in Jesus to heal them and the passing of Peter's shadow may have helped some believe.

However God chose to bring about the healing, there's no doubt that a remarkable work of healing was present at that time. Luke tells us that although many were brought to the apostles with many different types of ailments, both physical and spiritual – they were all healed. A 100% rate of healing is a pretty high bar to match. Not for God, of course but there are plenty of religious hucksters out there on the circuit who would love to claim it for their ministry. It's impossible to miss the connection between the purity of the church that was preserved in the first part of this chapter and

the power of the church displayed here. God blessed a pure church with great spiritual power. Things are going great for that little church in Jerusalem, but not everyone is happy about it!

17-28 – This passage would be more comical if it wasn't for the utter darkness in the hearts of those who opposed the Gospel. What we as a church must consider is that the time of great blessing described in **vs12-16** was followed by a time of renewed and intensified persecution. This persecution began in ch4 with the frustration of the Jewish leaders. Christianity was spreading rapidly. Multitudes were responding to the Gospel. Those in charge of the religious and political life of Israel were justifiably distressed at what was going on and were afraid it might disrupt the status quo they were enjoying. Three things bothered them:

1. The name of Jesus. They were bothered that the preaching and the miracles being performed by the Apostles were in “the name” of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified. The way they speak of “that name” again and again shows how disturbed they were by it. They had destroyed Jesus because He was a real threat to them, but “that name” was still being proclaimed to the people. Though they denied it publicly, deep in their hearts they were guilty for having destroyed what was quite obviously a very righteous man.
2. The resurrection. They were also frustrated by the fact that the preaching of Jesus involved the resurrection. The Sadducees (17) didn't believe in the resurrection. For them, the preaching of Christ was an attack on their knowledge of the Scriptures and their theological position. More than that, the resurrection, if it was true, was proof of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. This was an extremely dangerous possibility and for them, an intolerable assertion.
3. Jealousy. These leaders refused to deal with the apostle's claims on a noble level. They were jealous that it was Jesus' name being proclaimed, not theirs. They were also jealous of the apostles because they were preaching powerfully and doing miracles and because people were following them. The religious leaders wanted both of these things: They wanted to be well known, to have a “name” among the people; and they wanted people to follow them.

In short, this is nothing more than that age old conflict between living truth and dead tradition. The new wine could not be put into old wineskins nor could new cloth be sewn onto worn-out garments. As a result of the resurgence of the Gospel message in Jerusalem, the leaders move against the Apostles again, only this time is more forceful than before. They weren't content with just a couple; they hauled all 12 of them into jail this time. Of course, that didn't stop God from acting on their behalf. He sent an angel to go down and bail them out of jail; sans a bail-bondsman.

Now, you'd think this would have given these leaders pause to consider what was going on but it didn't. It wasn't that they couldn't see the evidence clearly on display before them – they refused to see it or even consider it as an option. In fact, not only didn't the Sadducees believe in the resurrection, they didn't believe in angels either. So their theology is really taking a beating on this day! When they discovered that the disciples weren't even in jail but were back out at the temple teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus, they sent to have them arrested again! they had them brought before the Sanhedrin and they began to make their accusations

They 1st accused them of disobeying orders: They had previously ordered them not to teach in Jesus' name (4:18). That was a simple assertion of authority. It didn't make any difference to them if the Apostles were right or wrong. Next, they accused them of filling Jerusalem with their doctrine. Although they didn't intend it as such, this hateful indictment was an admission that the church was increasing and getting the job done. Finally, they accused the Apostles of trying to make them guilty of the blood of Jesus. Strangely enough, at the trial of Jesus, this was the very thing they had willingly taken upon themselves (Mt 27:24-25). Now it was and they were appalled at the thought!

The leaders didn't need to worry about the Apostle making them guilty, they already were and they knew it! We can tell by the way they talked about "this name" and "this man." They were guilty of murdering an innocent man and they could not handle the consequences of that guilt. They are not alone in their guilt. The truth is, we are all guilty of the blood of Jesus because it was for our sins that He shed His blood. If you are refusing to accept His payment for the penalty of your sin, then you stand in opposition to Jesus as much as these religious leaders.

Look at the contrast Luke provides between the Apostles and the council of these religious leaders. The council was educated, ordained and approved and yet, they had no ministry of power. The Apostles were just ordinary men, yet God's power was at work in their lives. The council was desperately trying to protect themselves and the status quo of their dead traditions while the apostles were willing to risk their lives to share the living Word of God. The dynamic church was enjoying the new while the dead council was merely defending the old. As the trial progressed the Apostles became the judges and the council became the accused.

29-32 – In Peter's response, he presents the Gospel in its elemental form. First, he indicts the council for the death of Jesus. He then affirms yet again that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that He has been exalted by the Father to His right hand. Peter concludes by declaring once again that he and the rest of the Apostles were eyewitnesses to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and as such, their testimony should be believed.

33-39 – Needless to say, Peter's response didn't go over very well with that crowd. They were furiously plotting their collective demise. But it seems that cooler heads prevailed, or at least 1 cool head prevailed. Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee, was widely respected by his peers and highly esteemed by the people. But, although he attempts to employ cool logic to offset the overheated emotions in the room, his approach to the Apostle's claims is still wrong.

To begin with, in classifying Jesus with 2 other known rebels, Gamaliel showed that he had already rejected all the evidence. To him, Jesus was nothing more than another zealous Jew, trying to free Israel from Rome. Did Theudas or Judas ever do any of the things Jesus had done? Were they raised from the dead as Jesus was? Gamaliel was clever enough to calm the enflamed passions of the council but his logic was not sound. His appeal to history or past experience was shortsighted and misleading. History doesn't always repeat itself and success is no test of truth. No matter how you look at it, Gamaliel's wisdom was not only foolish, it was disastrous.

The greatest weakness of his advice was that he encouraged a wait-and-see approach when the council was faced with a life-and-death issue that demanded a decision. There are many issues in life that don't demand a courageous decision of conscience. But, when we are faced with a serious

matter of conscience, we'd better stop and examine the evidence carefully. Gamaliel refused to do this. He missed an opportunity for salvation because he turned this meeting into a petty discussion of Jewish rebels. But Jesus had made it clear that it is impossible to be neutral about him and His message of salvation. Sometimes, being neutral means making a quiet decision to reject God's offer. No decision is still a "No" decision. Refusing to accept God's offer of salvation is a definite "No" response.

If Gamaliel was really afraid of fighting against God, why did he not honestly investigate the evidence, diligently search the Scriptures, listen to the eye-witnesses and ask God for wisdom in this matter? This was the opportunity of a lifetime and he completely dropped the ball. The sad irony is that from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, these same religious leaders had been fighting against God and they continued to do so in spite of all the supernatural evidence that was on display before their very eyes. There is none so blind as he who will not see.

40-42 – This beating the Apostle took wasn't a slap on the wrist, it was 39 lashes. It was a severe beating but they took it gladly because: 1) Jesus told them it would happen so this was a fulfillment of His Word. 2) The opposition of men means the approval of God. They not only knew that they were on the right track but that God approved of their efforts. 3) They considered it a privilege to suffer for the name of Jesus. The fellowship of the suffering of Jesus is always accompanied by the power of His resurrection and the disciples were excited to be entering into both.

This persecution failed to slow down the spread of the Gospel, in fact, it actually facilitated it. But, all through out **ch5** we have seen that God has overruled every adverse assault by those who oppose Him, whether it's Satan or the religious crowd. Satan's attack lead to revival, the Sanhedrin's arrests, threats and beatings lead to greater rejoicing in the church and greater witnessing outside the church. What kind of work is it going to take in your life to see the power of God displayed in a similar way? Will it be opposition or persecution? Will it be an influence or a direct assault of Satan? Will it be judgment of God on long-held sin in your life or will it simply be coming to grips with the truth of God's Word and allowing it to judge you? Out of all these options, self-examination is the best as long as we are honest about it and not try to justify our selfish decisions. 😊