

Acts Week 15

The Church advances

We finished up last time in the opening of chapter 5, looking at Annanias and Sapphira and their deaths. Reading it, it does not sound as such an egregious sin, but it was about hypocrisy, the idea of seeking to find favor in others, by saying something that was untrue. While Annanias had control of all he had he had the freedom to do with it as he wished, but when he said he gave all his profit to those leading the church he lied before God, the Holy Spirit. He did so for dishonest gain, pats on his back, seeking a false sense of honor. His violation was not against Peter, no, his hypocrisy was against God.

We have been looking at stages of the devil's tactics both from within the church and from outside of the church. The persecution of the early believers was mainly exercised by the leaders of the church, this would be outside of the church by orthodox Israel believers. Then Satan switched up his tactics and went in to deceive those inside the church and convince people not to believe in this Jesus, this new unproven teaching. He is still at it today.

Over the past few weeks and in a class I am taking right now with Francis Anuso we are looking at "Your Supernatural Life", a term I have heard many times even by some of the pastors I listen to regularly. When there comes something such as a word or message I have not heard used a lot I become interested to find out how they are implying it. We just looked back at Annanias and Sapphira and their deaths over their hypocrisy. Had they merely been members of those societies around them their lie would have found them in deathly ending. Why? Because the outside world knows not the things of God. We learn by the word of God about those things of God.

I want to take a moment to look at the supernatural.

adjective

of, relating to, or being above or beyond what is natural; unexplainable by natural law or phenomena; abnormal. of, pertaining to, characteristic of, or attributed to God or a deity.

noun

a being, place, object, occurrence, etc., considered as supernatural or of supernatural origin; that which is supernatural, or outside the natural order. behavior supposedly caused by the intervention of supernatural beings.

Looking at the deaths of Annanias and Sapphira we can ask ourselves, were their deaths natural or supernatural? Going back and looking at the day of Pentecost, the tongues of fire, the word being taught in others native tongues and all who confess Jesus as Lord, we find the supernatural. In fact, if you are sitting in this church today you and had a supernatural encounter at some point in your life. You were dead, but in Christ you have been made alive.

Ephesians 2:1-5: 1 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

What are strongholds? The plain definition is a place of refuge, or hiding; they are those places where the plotting and planning to destroy God’s children is the center of evil’s plans.

“The enemy is firmly entrenched; these strongholds have been guarded for thousands of years, presenting a great wall of resistance to the Truth. None of this deters the Christian warrior, however. Using the weapons of God’s choosing, he attacks the strongholds, and by the miraculous power of Christ, the walls are breached, and the bastions of sin and error are battered down. The victorious Christian enters the ruins and leads captive, as it were, every false theory and every human philosophy that had once proudly asserted its independence from God.”

<https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-strongholds.html>

Right now in our world we are watching perhaps the last battle between good and evil. While it might not appear to be spiritual it is. Jesus spoke about these battles as commonplace to evil, and that it is faith that carries us through the battles. Watching things unfold in Israel right now we see the physical devastation, but what drives it is a hatred for God’s people.

As we study here in Acts as the church is just getting started we find the strongest battle to overcome at this point is the one between good, those who are opening up the infant church to the rest of the world, and the evil that is in fear of losing their power over the people, which is playing out amongst the religious leaders.

John Stott writes.

“We have now seen that, if the devil’s first tactic was to destroy the church from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within.”¹

As this may seem as stepping back from the writings in acts, it is not, we are looking here at the struggles and persecution of the early church, these same struggles have never ceased from the times we are reading about now. In fact it appears the challenges have only grown faster and in intensity as the millennia have passed.

After the deaths of Anninis and Sapphira was read in **Acts 5:11; So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.**

¹ John R. W. Stott, The Message of Acts. Inner Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. Page 94

It seemed the penalty was far above the crime, but was it? Again it was not Peter they lied to, but an insult to the Godhead. The church was moving ahead in all sincerity and here came a hypocrisy demonstrating a lack of honesty from within. God is a God of honesty, He will not accept the falsehoods of any in regard to the church. Deception is bred and fostered in pride and resentment of others, here we are looking at the religious leaders disdain for the miracles they themselves were unable to perform. Why? Because of the disbelief and resentment toward Jesus, He was not the one they were waiting for. However, do we really think these leaders would have had a difference in jealousy and reprisal had Jesus performed as they sought Him to do? I doubt it, their hearts and minds were focused on their own power and fame, that is the condition of heart the church has struggled with from the beginning.

The Power of the Church

Acts 5:12; And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

The people saw power in this, but became cautious in joining with the new church, and many would not.

5:13-15; Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

Even though many had fears and hesitation we find the numbers still increased. Even today we find people still much the same. People can hear the word and hear of miracles but are resistant to follow and often find ways to disregard the message. One of the largest lies we find today is that the bible is fast becoming just another old book written for the people way back then but has no relevance to us today. How misguided are those who believe these lies.

5:16; Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

How often do we ever focus on the powers God gave His apostles? We speak often of Jesus performing such acts but not often of all the apostles did.

Acts 9:34; And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately.

Acts 9:40; But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Even though they had powers given to them from Jesus, to heal in His name, the leaders did not care, they sought all the more to rid them. Right after Peter had healed many in verse 5:16, the rulers arrested them again.

5:17:18; Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

Today in America we do not as of yet find too many being arrested for preaching the truth although it does happen, and especially during Covid. But there are many seeking to pull believers away from the truth through lies. The jealousy is still running strong, even with some in the church that seek to preach a different message from what the bible says. Many believe in teaching what they call the hidden messages that rely on the manipulation of verse numbers, every third or fourth word while throwing out the rest. God gave us His Word which is Jesus, He made the bible understandable, He left us a love letter and directions we are to follow and we must trust all we read and act upon it as God wants us to do. When those who consider themselves and Christians and distract and cause confusion intentionally they weaken the body of Christ. Many want to have others believe that they are so Holy that God talks to them directly and has appointed them prophets to tell others what He told them to tell you. If you are a practicing and faithful believer trust in what God has done and is doing in you, for He does talk with all believers.

We know the harm and murders of Christians in other nations that are being put to death or imprisoned for their faith. Evil shakes at the hand of God and His followers, for those who believe God, He gives power to tear down the enemy's strongholds.

“The word strongholds is found once in the New Testament, used metaphorically by Paul in a description of the Christian’s spiritual battle: “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses [strongholds]”² Strongholds is only used once in the NASB in <https://www.bibleref.com/2-Corinthians/10/2-Corinthians-10-3.html>

When pastors try to encourage their congregations to study more it is because they want you safe, capable of recognizing the deception of the devil. Deception is perhaps the most threatening trickery evil uses, that they build strongholds to misguide us and weaken the faith.

Psalm 18:30; As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

Psalm 119:114; “You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word”.

Acts 2:21; And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Psalm 124:8; Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Mark 16:16; Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-strongholds.html>

There are many others, I just wanted to give enough to see how God protects those who are His. This is one I have used frequently and God has always been faithful to deliver in the moment. **James 4:7; Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** When I am alone and just going over the words of the bible I will have visions of things I have done in the past that I have repented of, and yet somehow they come to mind and immediately I ask God to remove those feelings and thoughts from me. He is always faithful.