

- I. Intro
 - A. I invite you to open your Bibles to Acts 4:32, p. 1161 in the Bible in front of you.
 - B. One of my favorite movies from back when I could still stay awake through a whole movie—in the 90s—was a movie called *Crimson Tide*, Gene Hackman and Denzel Washington
 1. Whole premise of the movie is that a message was sent to a nuclear sub to launch missiles. At the bottom of this message is an authentication code that matches the codes they have on the sub. Then a second message is sent to abort launch but the abort launch message gets cut off in transmission without the authentication code. So the question is "Is this message to abort authentic? Do we launch or don't we?"
 2. Everyone on the boat is taking sides either with the captain, who wants to launch missiles or the with the second in command who is saying, "What if the abort launch is authentic? We could cause World War 3 if we don't take the time to authenticate the abort mission message."
 3. Here's the wonderful and terrifying truth: You and I are the authentication code for the message of Jesus.
- II. The message of Jesus is authenticated by a Church that obeys it.
 - A. If we live the way He lived, love the way He loved, and pursue holiness the way He was holy, the world can look on and at least consider that Jesus' Gospel is authentic.
 - B. Satan knows this. He knows it well. And so what we're going to see in our passage today is his attempt to undermine the Gospel message from within the church.
 - C. And we are going to see what lengths God will go to to protect the integrity of His Church and root out the evil that infiltrates and undermines Jesus' Gospel.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. [For] There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. [Reason great grace was on them: they

actually lived out the message of Jesus] *Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)*

This is a church where the preaching didn't end with words but action. And their commitment to live like Jesus lived authenticated the grace they preached.

- D. The Gospel message of Jesus is true whether or not the church authenticates it by obedience.
 - a. But the whole world is left in confusion when we don't
 - b. "Is Jesus legit or not, because I have a hard time knowing by watching His followers?"
- E. But when we obey Jesus, loving our brother and living in honesty about who we are, the message of Jesus is authenticated by our authenticity.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. [Serving both his reputation and his greed at the expense of his character] (Acts 5:1-2)

- F. This "first sin" in the church mirrors the "first sin" of mankind.
 - 1. Just like Adam and Eve, this man and wife, desiring to be more than they are, desiring honor and reputation apart from God's provision, conspire together to deceitfully bring about their own glory.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?" (In other words, "No one said you had to sell that land and no one said you had to give all of the money away, so why lie?") (Acts 5:3-4a)

"Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. (Acts 5:4b-6)

- 2. If you're like me, you're tempted to think that this outcome is a bit extreme: death for a lie about generosity? But I think that response of,

"Wow, that was extreme" reveals more about our casual, "No big deal" view of sin than anything else.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. (Acts 5:7-11)

- III. The message of Jesus is undermined from inside the church by pride and hidden sin.
 - A. What we see: pride and deceit
 - B. Why we see it: because Jesus wasn't first and they were not surrendered to the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. The magic we see in the early church: Jesus is first and, through prayer to God, they were totally surrendered to the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. What we see in Ananias and Sapphira: I am first and the power of the Holy Spirit is no match for my dishonest, greedy scheme. I will use God to promote ME.
 - C. Using God to promote my own reputation is high treason. Pride: When my reputation is more valuable to me than Jesus, I become the enemy's undercover asset.
 - D. My hidden sin isolates and imprisons me.
 - 1. Story: Alcatraz. Solitary confinement was a solid metal door. Couldn't see in. No one would know what was done inside that cell. But that isn't freedom.
 - 2. Hidden sin is like solitary confinement: yes, no one can see in, but you also can't get out.
 - E. My hidden sin is Satan's hidden weapon against the church.
 - 1. Middle East ambush story
 - 2. Like a roadside bomb or stashed weapon that he can use at an opportune moment.
 - 3. Secrecy is an American value, not a Christian value.
 - a. If we truly believe what we say that sin is—that it is a disease that leads to spiritual death—then why in the world are we acting like it's ok to deal with it alone?

- b. If you had the symptoms of cancer or heart disease or diabetes, which of you would keep to yourself and say, "I have the right not to tell my doctor"?
 - c. Truthfully, some of us would do exactly that and we would receive the obvious consequence of that foolishness: death.
 - d. In the same way, when we keep our sin secret, when we isolate ourselves in our disease, all we will ever reap is destruction.
 - e. And the tragic reality of hidden sin is that it ALWAYS hurts those around us.
- F. The Gospel of Jesus is adequately clear: you are deeply flawed! So why do we in the church keep putting on the facade that we aren't?
- 1. Part of authenticating the message of Jesus is admitting the sin He died to save me from.
 - 2. It's not soiling the name of Jesus when I agree with what the cross says about me: that I am both deeply sinful and deeply loved.
- IV. True Gospel community is not about the appearance of holiness. It's about the honest pursuit of it.
- A. YOU CAN'T PURSUE SOMETHING YOU PRETEND TO ALREADY HAVE!
- 1. That's like claiming I can bench 300 lbs when all I can do is 50.
 - 2. If I pretend I can do 300, I'll never get there for real because I'll be ashamed to start working out with 75 and then 100 and then 125 ...
"Why are you doing reps of 75? I thought you could do 300?"
 - 3. To honestly pursue holiness, I must first admit that I am not holy.
- B. Lie of the enemy: you can either be fully known or fully loved, but not both. You have to choose: be fully known and rejected or be fully loved because you hide the right things.
- 1. In a world where being fully known is terrifying and being fully loved seems impossible, through the cross of Jesus, God the Father is proclaiming that you and I can be both FULLY KNOWN and FULLY LOVED.
 - 2. Yes, I fully know what you've done and that's exactly why Jesus died in your place.
 - 3. Yes, I fully love you. That's how much My Son, Jesus, pleases Me. His death for you not only pays an infinite debt, but also bestows on you an infinite inheritance of love with Me forever.
- V. Jesus invites us to be FULLY KNOWN and FULLY LOVED.
- A. It is only in a relationship that I am fully known that I can ever be convinced that I am fully loved.
- 1. If you aren't convinced that you are loved, my question is this: what are

- you hiding?
2. When I hide my sin, the devil has grounds for a very powerful argument against you: "If they knew THAT about you, would they still love you?"
- B. Satan's offer: be hidden and isolated to earn temporary reputation.
- C. Jesus' offer: be known and forgiven to enjoy eternal love.
- D. If you read on in verses 12-16, you'll see that because sin was dealt with in the church, God continued to do incredible things.
1. God loves His church. He has designed our life in community together and with Jesus first to be able to withstand ANYTHING.
 2. The question is NOT "Will God's church prevail?"
 3. The question is rather, "Will I be a part of its struggle or a part of its success?"
- E. Ask yourself these questions and discuss them in community if you dare to be the church God has called us to be:
1. Is there any pride or hidden sin that I haven't even confessed to God?
 - a. Yes, He knows it all.
 - b. But if you don't put yourself on the operating table, the surgeon's knowledge of your disease is of no use.
 2. Who do I trust to help me out of my prison of pride and hidden sin?
 - a. Being fully known and fully loved is not easy, but it is SO worth it.
 - b. Don't you want freedom? Don't you want joy? Don't you want peace?
 - c. Freedom, joy, and peace are on the other side of obedience.