

The Awesome Presence of God

Opening

You do not have to read much in Greek literature to discover what their society valued. Reading Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, one learns that these men allude to the one great goal in society. Basically, their society revolved around the idea that through human effort they could reach full potential and with the blessings of their many gods, they could create a society where peace and prosperity would reign. The Greek word *koinonia* was often used to describe this ideal society. However, history has shown for the Greeks and the rest of the world this is an impossible goal for mankind.

When Luke, a Greek, became a believer, his account of the early church appealed to his fellow Greeks. One of Luke's goals was to explain to the people from his culture that what they long for cannot be found in their plethora of false deities, it cannot be found in human effort, nor can it be found through human potential. A society who experiences true *koinonia* can only come about through fellowship with the true God by way of His Son Jesus Christ and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of people.

We have observed how Luke's account would appeal to a Greek and Roman culture who values a society of tranquility and generosity. Last week Luke showed us the great example from the early church expressing Christian love and care for each other and this brought them into unity. Please move in your Bible to Acts chapter 2, verse 42, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Here Luke uses a key word “devoted” this community had unity because they were devoted to Christ, the apostle’s teaching and each other. In fact, this is how Luke begins the Acts of the Apostles, flip back a page or two in your Bible, Acts chapter 1, verse 14, “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” This is a theme running through the early chapters. The results of being in one accord and devotion are found in chapter 2, in verses 46 and 47 “Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:46-47) This unity, this oneness in their love of God and each other brought blessings; “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The early church flourished even in the midst of increasing persecution because the people were steadfastly devoted to God and each other. The Holy Spirit was creating a koinonia group or church from among the general population. God was calling out people from this Greek culture, those who were being saved and these people were the Church of Christ. Because of the early church’s devotion, they experienced the power of the presence of God and lived in wonder and awe of God as His children.

However, today in chapter 5, Luke shares with us two people who were hypocrites and cared more for themselves than others. Somewhere along the way some of the people of “the Way”, who were in the church lost their way of wonder and awe and deep love for God and for their brothers and sisters in Christ. What happened? Did the apostles quit teaching sound doctrine? Did the people quit praying? Did they break fellowship and quite meeting on a regular basis? No, I don’t think so. Some people although attending church never truly embraced Christ

as their Lord and Savior. They may have become part of the church for all sorts of reasons, but true belief was not one of them. Luke expresses in chapter 9 that the true believers understood to believe in Christ changed everything in the ‘Way’ one thought, believed and lived. Even the enemies of Christ understood this. Saul was not interested so much in those who were in the church but not a threat, but he was concerned with the true believers that were boldly preaching the Gospel, as they were a threat to Judaism; politically and religiously which made them a threat to the elite power base, which Saul wanted to be part of. In chapter 9 we learn, “Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found **any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.**” (Acts 9:1-2) It was through strong fellowship that the early church stood up to this kind of persecution. It is the same today; the remnant church will withstand the societies of the world for we are a threat to the elite’s power and the broad heretical churches of the world for we threaten to expose their false beliefs and that they serve the evil one; both will persecute those who devote themselves to God and live as an Acts 2:42 church. “**They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**” Devoted means an intense commitment to God the Father, Jesus the Son and to each other. This devotion and faith make us an enemy of the world.

In Awe of God

Does Canyon Bible and do we as individuals have the devotion and unity of the early church? Here are some questions to think through and pray about as you consider your commitment to Christ and your brothers and sisters of Canyon Bible.

How devoted are you to sitting under sound preaching and teaching? Do you ready yourself for Sunday mornings to hear God's Word? Do you read and meditate on the sermon scripture passage before you arrive on Sunday? Do you spend time daily in the Word and prayer? If you do **not** do these things, how will you know sound from unsound teaching and doctrine?

How devoted are you to this fellowship of believers? Do you keep in contact with the members of the church? Do you seek out ways that you can meet other's needs? Are you connected in a ministry in this fellowship or do you simply show up and sit? A true fellowship or *koinonia* is a community or a family where every member has a part to play from the youngest to the oldest. God calls every believer to serve in some ministry. It is about people and loving and sharing. It is about loving others and helping those who need help. It is a community effort, not just the efforts of leadership. How devoted are you to the people, your brothers and sisters of Canyon Bible Church?

How devoted are you to monthly fellowship meals? The early church was devoted to breaking bread together. Both the regular observance of the Lord's Supper and time eating together and sharing with each other their lives. Do you stay after the service for fellowship and once a month participate in the fellowship meal? How many of your brothers and sisters have you had in your home for time of studying the scriptures, talking about Christ and life as a Christian, time in prayer and a meal of fellowship? How much time have you spent in listening to other members of the church to better understand who they are and what their successes are and what their needs are?

How devoted are you to prayer? How often do you pray? The Jews prayed 3 times a day and not to be outdone the Muslims pray 5 times a day. Do you pray for

your meals and thank God for them? Do you pray when you go out to eat and not worry about what the other tables might think? Do you pray with your spouse? Do you pray with your children? Do you pray with your children? Do you pray regularly in dependence on God rather than being dependent on something or someone else? Do you pray for your brothers and sisters of Canyon Bible?

When the church, that is you and me, is devoted to God, the result is what God inspired to be written in scripture. Please go to Acts chapter 4, verse 32, “**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.**”³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.³⁴ 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 sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” Why did Luke point to Barnabas, was it because he was an example of devotion to God and the church? The early church of chapter 4 was made up of “those who believed *and* 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.” Barnabas may have symbolized many of the devoted and faithful in the church.

Two Sundays ago, we studied the Apostles and after their prayer for boldness, they were bold in their Gospel proclamation. Reading 4:33, “**With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.**” The early church became a people

living in “the Way” devoted to God and meeting the needs of the people of their community. They would look around their house or farm or business to see if there were things they really did not need. At this point it was extra stuff. In America people take the stuff they are not using and do not need and put it into a storage unit and pay rent so no one else will be able to use it. But in the early church, their thinking, no doubt went something like this; I have extra and brother or sister so and so is in need. I can sell this extra stuff and give the money to the Apostles, to the church, and they will know how to best care for those who are needy.

Christ reaches past socio-economic classes. Christ’s love transcends all human categories and places everyone on equal footing. There are historical accounts of Christian slaves leading Bible studies where their Christian masters were in attendance. All this is simply a shadow of how society will become Koinonia when Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom.

Joseph was the model of a true believer of the God who had saved him and the Holy Spirit gave him a caring and encouraging heart. So much so, that at some point the church renamed him, Barnabas, because it meant ‘son of encouragement’. How many of us would qualify to be renamed Barnabas? It was not unusual for people to be given new names when they became Christian because they were now saved and wanted to be identified with Christ and live in devotion to Christ. My name, William, mean protector, I did not need to change my name because I am to be a protector of God’s Word. Luke introduces us to Barnabas to show how we are to be. We are to be giving and encouraging like he was. I do not think people like Barnabas can be overlooked in the early church and quick spreading of the Gospel. Christians today with the devotion and kindness and a heart like Barnabas will also do much to advance the kingdom of God.

I found it interesting that Barnabas was a Levite. We are not sure how Barnabas came to own the field he sold because in the Old Testament Levites were forbidden to own property. We do know that Levitical laws had fallen into non-practice, just as the country was no longer focused on living for God. This is just another interesting way God was showing the New Covenant was replacing the Old. The sacrifices of the Old covered sin but the New forgave sin.

Barnabas and the others were the real thing. They did not walk around parading as Christians but lived daily as Christians. It was their changed hearts and the power of the Holy Spirit that caused them to live the way they did, caring for others more than themselves. This change occurred through their salvation causing God to remove their heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh with the Holy Spirit living within them. This is exactly what God was foretelling the prophet Ezekiel, ¹⁹“I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 11:19-20) Being Christian is a complete transformation of heart, mind and soul being lived out in the midst of corruption.

Not all who call themselves Christian are – not in the early church and not today.

An Affront To God

From my study and preparation for this morning, it appears that from the time of Judas’ defection - to the time of the birth of the church, the disciples, now apostles had not experienced serious internal conflict. But now because of the sin nature of people a problem arose that jeopardized unity among believers and people’s relationship with the Holy Spirit. Reading at Acts 5, verse 1, “But a man

named Ananias (*whom Jehovah has graciously given*), with his wife Sapphira (*precious stone, sapphire*), sold a piece of property, ² 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." These two discussed how they could sell their property, like some others were doing but rather than giving all the proceeds to the church they would secretly keep some for themselves. However, they wanted the church to believe they had given all of the proceeds. Ananias whose name means; *Jehovah has graciously given much* and God had done this for Ananias. Sapphira whose name means *sapphire a gemstone associated with royalty. A sapphire is believed to be good for attracting abundance, blessings, and gifts* which God had also given an abundance to. These two decided to lie to their fellow believers. The problem was not keeping some of the proceeds of the sale but lying to the apostles and their brothers and sisters in Christ. Ananias and his wife were not filled with awe over the presence and power of God but sought the accolades of men. They thought they could fake it. They desired others to think well of them as they publicly laid money at the Apostle's feet. In doing so, they were telling the community that they were giving their all. Others had sold property and given the proceeds to the apostles, we do not know if they gave all or some, but they were honest with the church. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the recognition the others had received and it appears they were trying to one-up the others. So, they lie and say they have given all of the proceeds.

What's the problem here? After all, I am sure they gave a large portion of the proceeds. The problem is not that they kept some. Today, someone could sell something and give a portion to the church and keep some for themselves or a person could sell something and give it all and that is OK. So, what is the problem. The problem is that they lied, which is sin, because they said that they

were giving it all to the Apostles. All the believers there were in unity, they were caring for each other, they were powerfully preaching the Gospel, signs and wonders were wrought through the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was working wonders and power through this early church because they were in complete unity. They were boldly preaching the gospel. All the church was doing and living out in unity and God was doing for them great wonders which resulted in awe and fear of God.

But here we are told of two people who were not in awe and wonder of God. They thought they could lie and no one would ever know the difference. They thought little of God and they thought they would not get caught. The danger here is that if this kind of behavior started, then God may not continue to bless the church with saving people to be brought into the church or empower the Apostles to preach and teach. Sin in the life of a church will always hinder or even stop the work of the Spirit. These two people did not experience God correctly. To them, God was a means to an end - not the end itself. This had to be stopped especially at the beginning of the Church's influence in and among the world. God did not want the world to enter into this church's DNA. Reading at verse 3, **“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?’”** Because Ananias and Sapphira told everyone the proceeds of the sale was dedicated to God, their lie, is sin, they are stealing from God. We see this in churches today, people make a show of giving and try to get people to believe they are giving more than they are because they want the attention. It is the same as this story, they are lying to God and church. They think no one will know, even though this is impossible, for God always knows. As Jesus taught, **“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.**

³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:2-4) In this case the Father saw what was being done in secret and punished the sinners for the good of the many.

As an aside, I have to also mention, that Maurice found a song whose title is “God’s Gonna Get ‘Cha For That” by George Jones and Tammy Wynette released in 1975. As bad as Maurice wanted to do this song and as funny as it is and as sad as it is we decided not to. He might play it after the service and you can find it on YouTube. But here is how it starts –

God's gonna get 'cha for that
God's gonna get 'cha for that
There's no place to run and hide
For He knows where you're at

There was no place for Ananias and Sapphira to hide from God and God decided to make an example. I believe what was going on had been dealt with before by God. By Luke’s choice of words and the similar wording found in Joshua chapter 7 relating the account of Achan. By the way, this would be a good chapter for your study time this evening. Achan, whose name means “*troubler*”, which he lived up to, had kept back for private use what was dedicated to God. Many innocent people died because of the sin of one. But the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was even worse because the property belonged to them and when they sold it, they were not under any obligation to give anything to the Apostles and yet they did so under the pretense of deception, making themselves out to be more generous than they really were or even more generous than the true believers who gave all of their proceeds, like Joseph who was renamed Barnabas. Just like with the

deception of Achan which corrupted His people, God did not want the deception of Ananias and Sapphira to enter into His church.

Returning to the pretense, follow along with me at verse 3, “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?’⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.” God the Holy Spirit let Peter know exactly what was going on. The truth always comes out at some point and God wanted Peter to address this sin quickly before it effected the church.

The truth was Ananias and Sapphira were testing God. This is an extremely serious offense. Just like those in the wilderness tested God time and again, God finally causing the whole generation to die in the desert. The account of Achan in Joshua who stole what was forbidden, testing God and causing the death of many Israelites due to the fact that there was sin in the camp. Now, there is sin in the camp again, God’s newly birthed church and God will not put up with it. Here, God sees the death of these two as the best thing for the church. Sin, in this case, is judged immediately so that the work of the Spirit and the ministry of the Apostles could continue unhindered. Ananias was to spiritually lead his wife and he failed just as Adam failed to lead Eve. History of the Bible is filled with the stories of many suffering for the sin of one or a few. Here God spares the church by sacrificing the few or in this case the two.

What happened to the church as a result of God's judgment on these two? The answer is found in verse 11, "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things." God was so gracious to pass judgment swiftly on these two unbelievers who were pretending to be Christians. By acting this way, the church was restored and the Gospel continued to be rightly preached and people were continuing to be brought into the fold. People saw the greatness of God and the importance of Christ's Church. Just like in Luke chapter 5 when Jesus healed the paralyzed man, the Pharisees came out in strong opposition to Jesus, as they always did, but the result was, ²⁵ "immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. ²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today.'" (Luke 5:25-26) So, by the power of almighty God, once again, the church was in awe of God as they saw His power to pass swift judgment.

So, my beloved where does this leave us?

An Exhortation to Godliness

I think, on the one hand, we are a giving group. Since this church has existed, I have seen many of you reach out and care for others. I have seen you work behind the scenes or in secret to care for others. I have seen you rally the troops and help others. I believe we desire to live and serve God in unity.

On the other hand, the Early Church offers a model that cannot be attained unless God works and causes us to love Him way more than we love material goods. So, my challenge to you, is this - Pray to God and see if there are any areas where your love for Him and those in the church - could be better shown by your generosity. My beloved give of your time and material goods, which includes

tithing because we live with a heart of flesh given by God and live for His glory. Who could use a little help from you – time spend in encouraging.

God is working in amazing ways. I can see Him work as I watch how you live and care for others. I can see your devotion to the Apostle's teaching, to this fellowship and to prayer and yet, I also know that you and I can do more to meet needs and advance the kingdom of God. So, let me ask, "Where can you do more and be more effective for God? How can you love God and others more?"

Let me close in prayer.