One Step Forward
Two Steps Back

Acts 4: 33 - 5: 11
One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

- When it comes to church growth, progress is never in a straight line. As a matter of fact, many times it’s one step forward, two steps back.
Acts 4:33-5:11

- The one step forward was a man named Joseph (AKA Barnabas).
- The two steps backward were a couple named Ananias and Sapphira.
Acts 4:32-33 (Power & Grace)

• 32 The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the Apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.”
Acts 4:32-33 (Power & Grace)

- 34 For there was not one needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the Apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.
Community or Communism?

• Some readers have tried to equate Acts 4 with a type of “communism,” but it is the exact opposite!

• In a Community, each individual voluntarily chooses to share of their means – out of the goodness of their hearts – with the object of glorifying God.
A Man Named Joe

• First introduced to us as Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus... his heart and soul were of such a nature that he would never be addressed by that name in Scripture again... but instead he would from then on be forever known as Barnabas (The Son of Encouragement).
Acts 4:36-37

36 “Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the Apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles’ feet.”
Acts 4:36-37

- “Barnabas” - A Great Compliment!

- Earlier, in Acts 2:32, Luke informed us that God’s favor or approval rested on these early Christians, because of their benevolence, and their many selfless behaviors.
Luke 22:27

• “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves?”

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.” (John 13:14)
A NEW MAN

• Joseph was apparently in “the greater or more blessed” category. He voluntarily provided for the immediate needs of his newly found Brethren.

• This is an example of a huge Step Forward in THE FAITH. Joseph, the former Levite from Cyprus, became Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, when he dedicated his life to serving Christ.
Luke 22:27

• “One cannot serve Christ and not serve his fellow man. Likewise, one cannot serve his fellow man and not serve Christ... The two are, in fact, inseparable.”
Matt. 25:31-46

• "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left."
Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'
Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'
Matt. 25:31-46

- The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'
Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'
Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' These will go away into Eternal Punishment, but the righteous into Eternal Life.
Matt. 25:31-46

• *Genuine Benevolence and Voluntary Christian Service are two huge steps forward in the growth of the church, and in the *individual faith* of one of God’s people...*
A Contrast in Character

• If *Barnabas’ life and actions* represent *one huge step forward* for the fledgling Faith, *Ananias and Sapphira* represent the opposite... *Two Steps Backward.*

• *Two examples, not of benevolence and service, but covetousness and deception.*
A Contrast in Character

• *Acts 5* records two major steps backward in church growth and discipline. Our first clue is that these verses begin, with the word “But”.

• *This is almost never* a positive sign.

• *It is almost always* an indication of a shift in direction....and since Barnabas’ direction was forward...

• *Let’s get a running start at this* let’s start in *Acts 4* and recognize the *contrast*---
A Contrast in Character

• **Acts 4:36-5:6**—“Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the Apostles (which means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and [He] brought the money and laid it at the Apostles’ feet...
A Contrast in Character

- Acts 4:36-5:6—**But** another man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, (so far so good) and **kept back some of the price for himself**, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the Apostles’ feet.
A Contrast in Character

• Acts 4:36-5:6— But (another redirecting conjunction) Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?”
A Contrast in Character

- Acts 4:36-5:6— While your land remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And even after it was sold, was it not under your control?
- The obvious answers are “Yes.”
A Contrast in Character

- **Acts 4:36-5:6**— Why is it that you have **conceived** this deed in your **heart**?

- “**For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.**” (Matt. 15:19)
A Contrast in Character

- Then, Peter states Ananias’ most heinous crime-
  - Acts 4:36-5:6 — “You have not lied to men, but to God.”
A Contrast in Character

• And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.”
A Contrast in Character

• "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!"
A Contrast in Character

• Bring the whole tithe into the store-house, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."
A Contrast in Character

• Like the story of Ananias and Sapphira, this passage actually has much less to do with money, and so much more to do with Faith in God—and that Individual Spirit of Love and Community— that God desires in each Individual Heart.
Acts 5:7-10

- Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened [to her husband]. And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.”
Acts 5:7-10

• Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”
Acts 5:7-10

- And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.”
Applying the Passage

• This isn’t God being vindictive or greedy…

• This simply illustrates the fact that even believers can sometimes be led into a bold, even flagrant sin, particularly when *money is involved… (*three days before April 15th).

The love of money is the root of all evil. (1 Tim. 6:10)
Applying the Passage

- Covetousness, hypocrisy, and a desire for the praise of men are all ample enticements for some men and women to seek to receive God’s full blessings for something less than their full-hearted service.
Applying the Passage

- Joseph’s generosity and Ananias’ and Sapphira’s greed served as a perfect contrast in obeying God’s Will vrs. disobeying God’s Will.
Applying the Passage

• In fact, the sudden, dramatic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira rather than confusing the new church regarding “fellowship,” [Community] actually helped clarify its meaning and its purpose.
Applying the Passage

- It’s really about **glorifying God and not ourselves.** It’s about “not robbing God” [and ourselves] of the opportunities He has granted us to **serve others.**

- **It’s about serving Christ, even as we serve one another…**

- **The final verse in our text today, Acts 5:11** says-
Applying the Passage

• “And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.”

• These extraordinary events served to establish the Apostles’ authority in the church. Under their tutelage, Barnabas had become a man the Apostles could rely on and one they could point to as an example of the genuine FAITH and BENEVOLENCE and ENCOURAGEMENT toward others.
Applying the Passage

- In addition, these extraordinary events served to **purify** and **warn** the church in its infancy, that **God cannot, will not, condone hypocrisy or pretense in the church of His Son**. And to make this crystal clear, **God determined to lay the two bodies of Ananias and Sapphira directly in the path of every hypocrite who would seek to enter the church of our Lord.**
Applying the Passage

• And to make this crystal clear, God determined to lay the two bodies of Ananias and Sapphira directly in the path of every hypocrite who would seek to enter the church of our Lord.
Applying the Passage

• *If Ananias and Sapphira had succeeded in lying to Peter, IF THEIR HYPOCRISY HAD GONE UNPUNISHED*, it would have severely damaged the Apostles’ authority, and certainly led to future *disunity* in the Body of Christ.
Applying the Passage

• These two complimentary stories are not from some obscure manuscript written during the days of the Old Covenant.

• These events occurred in the first-century church – to believers in Jesus Christ...
Applying the Passage

• *These stories were recorded to remind us today* that God still sees the *hearts* of men, *(1 Sam. 16:7).*

• *He still hates sin in all its forms,* *(Jer. 44:4).*

• *He is still concerned about the purity and the healthy progress of His Son’s living church,* *(1 Cor. 11:17-34; 1 John 5).*

APPLY NOW
Applying the Passage

• How about you? How has your progress been lately?

• Has your walk been one step forward and two steps back?

• Are you an faithful example of FAITH and encouragement for others... or an example of HYPOCRISY and sin?

APPLY NOW
Applying the Passage

- Today is the day to choose your direction.
- Will you continue to live in sin, knowing the fate that awaits you?
- Or will you step out on faith -- and either obey Christ’s Gospel, or repent and return to Christ’s desired path of righteousness?
- This next step is up to you...