**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Resurrection Series**

Acts of the Holy Spirit

Ananias, with his wife Sapphira – Got Questions?

July 14th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024

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(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

Sermon Audio and Texts: roundtopchurch.org / Under Member’s tab

Note: Final version of sermons is posted with possible additions.

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 **Let us read the New Testament account of Ananias and Sapphira to give a foundation for this sermon. I have added Old Testament Scripture references to identify where Peter is drawing from his Hebrew roots.**

**Acts 4:33 – 5:14**

33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

 34 For there was not a 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.

 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 5:1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira,

sold a piece of property,

 2 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.

 It is obvious that Achan’s sin chronicled in Joshua 7 is the same sin.

**Note:** During the battle for Jericho, in the conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 7:19), Achan was to turn in all things taken in battle to Joshua. However, Achan saw a robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a fifty-shekel bar of gold that he “coveted”, took, and hid in a hole he had dug within his tent. During this time of war, God’s judgement for Achan was death to him and all who where complicit in the act and cover-up. See online reference in sermon attachment for fuller details.

 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Achan-in-the-Bible.html>

 3 But 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?

1 Samuel 8:7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?

 And after it was sold, was it not under your control?

 Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?

 You have not lied to men but to God."

Proverbs 28:13-14

13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,

But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

14 How blessed is the man who fears always,

But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

5 And as he heard these words,

 Ananias fell down and breathed his last;

 and great fear came over all who heard of it.

 6 The young men got up and covered him up,

 and after carrying him out, they buried him.

 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours,

 and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

 8 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."

 9 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."

 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.

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

12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

The New Testament account of Ananias (God is Gracious) and Sapphira (Beautiful) is familiar to most Christians. Their story is perplexing in that two Christian people depart from their life here on earth. . . for what we would consider in our modern culture, a minor offense in a church setting. I see their offenses to be making a false pledge to gain prestige, holding back promised money for personal gain, and betrayal to the Christian Community. These are all severe ethical spiritual issues that link them to the arch enemy of God. . . Satan. We will look at the deeper realities of their offense, one of which was the lie to cover-up their sin which sealed their fate. They should have confessed their sin and averted their fate. The betrayal of God and the Christian community was a devastating act. The situation in 1st century Jerusalem is in stark contrast to America’s local body of Believers. Two thousand years ago in Jerusalem, the Christian community was in a constant state of threat for their life and property. We must consider that the Roman state and the theocratic Jewish leaders had already executed Jesus and threatened His followers not to speak in His name.

**Let’s examine the issue of lying from an American and biblical perspective.**

 In my life-time, I remember President Nixon’s lie about Watergate (1972). I came to the conclusion that Nixon did not order the burglary of the Democrat party’s office in the Watergate hotel, but he lied about being involved in the cover-up in a

effort to protect his associates.

 So, many people lie to cover-up a crime that they may not have been found guilty of in our modern judicial system of slick-schooled lawyers. Or they may not have committed an offense but were wrongfully accused. My personal rule, regardless of the issue. . . if I do not want to tell someone something, instead of lying about the question. . . I say. . .I do not want to say! The American system of justice founded upon the Judeo-Christian code allows for a defendant to be silent. And remember. . . the often heard “I take the 5th.” Note the exception.

**Fifth Amendment U.S. Bill of Rights**: No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Of course, the best position to be in, is not to have committed an offense in the first place. Sometimes, we Christians make mistakes and are embarrassed. It happens. Again, it is far better to admit our mess-ups than to lie. A lie to cover-up our mistakes creates a double sin. And, sometimes, our offense involves others; therefore, if the truth of your wrong were known and it might hurt someone else. . . then I go back to my position of silence.

**Proverbs 17:9** He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

**Is there an acceptable time to lie?** The Ten Commandment directs us. . . "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16). This command has two components: (1) false witness; (2) hurt your neighbor. The lie is wrong because it only hurts your neighbor? Some may point to Matthew 5:33-37 and see Jesus teach in His Sermon on the Mount against lying.

**Matthew 5:33**

33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE

 VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'

 There are two issues here: (1) fulfill your vows to the Lord;

 (2) what you swear on.

 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem,

 for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

 5:37 [Jesus taught] "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes ' or 'No, no'; anything beyond

 these is of evil.

But did God ever lie to fulfill His purpose? So, what is God telling us in the Ten Commandments and what is Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? Do either of these teachings always prohibit deception? After correctly exegeting the text, we receive accounts regarding specific reasons where God allowed a false presentation. . . as we will see.

**Is there an acceptable time to lie. . .** like lying to the Nazis in WWII about not assisting or hiding Jews? This is considered by some to an allowance for a lie. Why? Lying to the Nazis to protect innocent life was not a selfish act as was Ananias and Sapphira. To the contrary. . . it was a selfless act at the risk of life and property. In contrast to Ananias and Sapphira whose lie was perpetrated for personal gain.

**Is there biblical precedence for lying?** We read in Joshua 2 that Rahab the harlot at Jericho lied to cover for the Hebrew spies Joshua sent. Once again, Rahab’s lie was not for personal gain and it was at great risk to her life. Again, Ananias and Sapphira lied for personal gain and to make themselves look like they were contributing at great sacrifice. They had presented a loyalty to God and the Believer’s community but betrayed their trust of the whole Christian community during a time of great hardship.

**Are there accounts in the biblical text where God deceived someone?**

**2 Thessalonians 2**:11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

 The context here. . . Paul is telling Believers what will happen to the lawless one and his followers. God’s judgement is to deceive them. God had already deceived the evil prophets of Ahab.

**Deception:** Stong’s 4106 πλάνη plane; Meaning: a wandering; Origin: fem. of 4108

Usage: deceitful(1), deception(1), deluding(1), error(7).

1 Kings 22:22; Romans 1:28; 1Thess. 2:3; 2 Timothy 4:4

**1 Kings 22:20-23** 20 "The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. 21 "Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' 22 "The LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.' 23 "Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you."

 With these two biblical accounts recording that God purposely used a falsehood to gain His purpose is direct evidence that God can use every tool available to Him to defeat the Devil who is the father of lies (John 8:44). God uses the Devil’s own tool of deceitfulness against him.

**So, why is it ok to lie at times or present a falsehood but Ananias and Sapphira received God’s judgment?**

I see it has to do with God’s motive, not ours, in fulfilling His plan for the redemption of creation. Ananias and Sapphira’s action were perpetrated from selfish personal gain not for the redemption of anyone.

The guilt of Ananias and Sapphira originated in their alignment with Satan, the enemy of God, and His creation and all the life He created. . . at a time when the early Christian Church was the most vulnerable in its infancy. I liken their lie and cover-up to a **time of war** when the U.S. 5th Amendment exception applies. . . [except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger].

Therefore, the effect of a person’s sin is greatly enhanced in a time of **war or public danger**. For instance. . . when martial law is declared when a hurricane hits and restricted zones are created particularly during the clean-up period. This is why Annanias and Sapphira received Divine judgement and lost their earthly life.

**Was Their penalty too Heavy a Price?**

In answering this question, we need to take note that in the United States *Uniform Code of Military Justice* application of the death penalty is applied to many circumstances that may or may not lead to a victim’s death and is applied in a time of war and peace.

**Capital crimes**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital\_punishment\_by\_the\_United\_States\_military

Currently, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, 14 offenses are punishable by death. Under the following sections of the UCMJ, the death penalty can be imposed in both times of war and peace:

 94 – Mutiny or sedition

 99 – Misbehavior before the enemy (including cowardice)

 100 – Subordinate compelling surrender

 101 – Improper use of countersign

 102 – Forcing a safeguard (Soldier enters/violates a posted safe zone)

 103a – Espionage

 104 – Aiding the enemy

 110 – Improper hazarding of vessel

 118 – Murder

Another four provisions of the UCMJ carry a death sentence only if the crime is committed during times of war:

 85 – Desertion

 90 – Assaulting or willfully disobeying a superior commissioned officer

 106 – Lurking as a spy or acting as a spy

 113 – Misbehavior of a sentinel or lookout

From this Code of Military Justice list, we can deduce Annanias and Sapphira were guilty of Misbehavior before the enemy, willfully disobeyed a superior, Mutiny, and that they adopted deceitful ways of God’s enemy, the Devil, and thereby aiding the enemy.

**God’s Quick Judgement**

 Some may say that it is odd that Annanias and Sapphira died quickly. I see this judgement is the act of God and not Peter. It is highly believable that when they were exposed that their grief was too much under the circumstances of being caught as betrayers (treason) of the community who was under severe persecution. I can accept that their God-designed neurological-biological system simply shut down due to being overloaded with guilt. I do not need proof to believe God can judge a person and strike them. However, for those that are hard-of-heart. . . here are two online sources verifying that grief can cause someone’s death. I know, it is a matter of timing.

Grief Can Actually Kill You, And Scientists Have Figured Out Why

Health - 24 October 2018 - By Peter Dockrill

<https://www.sciencealert.com/grief-can-actually-kill-you-scientists-figured-out-why-depression-broken-heart-bereaved-death-inflammation>

How grief rewires the brain and can affect health – and what to do about it

“Grief can reinforce brain wiring that effectively locks the brain in a permanent stress response,” <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2021/03/10/how-grief-rewires-the-brain-and-can-affect-health-and-what-to-do-about-it>

Summation

 The account of Annanias and Sapphira contains many wrong doings. First, they held themselves and their wants above God and the Christian community and in a time of great threat. Adam and Eve did the same. They all succumbed to fallen human pride. God gives us a healthy pride which is self-esteem and confidence and satisfaction in oneself; that is self-respect to accomplish God’s goals in our life. But then there is the sinful pride. . .which is the pursuit of something at the expense of others for pleasure that comes from abusing relationships and associations for personal gain or achievement, or to possess something that is seen as a source to bring public honor. A person wants something their way at the exclusion of God and at the expense of others. Second, their pride produced the sins of a lie, fraud and betrayal which brought severe judgement.

American and Western society, in general, are divided on judging people for any actions or statements they make. Some believe there should be no accountability, this is called anarchy. At the other end of the spectrum are the proponents of capital punishment reserved for capital crimes in civilian cases. However, we can see the U.S. military has a different code for applying the death penalty but still within the confines of the U.S. Constitution.

When you add God into the equation, then those who do not want to be held accountable by God for anything. . .speak the loudest voices in protest. To alleviate their pain from accountability, they simply deny God’s existence. . . no judge. . . no judgement. This leads us to the primary lesson we receive from Annanias and Sapphira which is judgement and swift accountability. This is in stark contrast to our American judicial system when it takes a decade or longer for the state to execute anyone from the date of the capital crime conviction. So, judgement is often delayed and becomes ineffective. This brings us to the highest lesson from their sin. We Believers have the highest heartfelt obligation to God and the community of faith. I see betrayal as the most grievous sin committed by Annanias and Sapphira. Please make note that Annanias and Sapphira were Christian Believers who sinned. There is no evidence that they were eternally separated from God. They paid the earthly price for their sin like King David did when he lost his son, birthed by Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:14).

One reality I want to leave you with is that “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” **(1 John 1:8-10).**

**1 Corinthains 11:28-32**

But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. **AMEN**

**Sermon Attachment**

Your Questions: Biblical Answers: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Achan-in-the-Bible.html>

First Chronicles 2:7 refers to Achan as “the troubler of Israel, who broke faith in the matter of the devoted thing” (ESV). In the days of Joshua, when the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh built their own altar east of the Jordan River, the other tribes used the story of Achan as a warning: “Do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. When Achan son of Zerah was unfaithful in regard to the devoted things, did not wrath come on the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin” (Joshua 22:19b–20). So who was this “troubler” named Achan, and what did he do?

The story of Achan is found in Joshua 7. God had delivered Jericho into the Israelites’ hands, as recorded in Joshua 6. The Israelites had been instructed to destroy everything in the city, with the exception of Rahab and her family, as well as the city’s gold, silver, bronze, and iron. The metals were to go into the tabernacle treasury; they were “sacred to the Lord” (Joshua 6:19) or “devoted” to Him. Jericho was to be totally destroyed, and the Israelites were to take no plunder for themselves.

Shortly after their success at Jericho, the Israelites moved on to attack the city of Ai. The spies Joshua sent to Ai thought the city would be easy to overtake—much easier than Jericho—and they suggested Joshua only send two or three thousand troops. Much to their shock, the Israelites were chased out of Ai, and thirty-six of them were killed. Joshua tore his clothes and bemoaned their attempts at conquering Canaan. He told God, “The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?” (Joshua 7:9). God responded by telling Joshua that some Israelites had sinned by taking devoted things. The people were to consecrate themselves, and then the following morning the perpetrator would be identified by lot (see Proverbs 16:33).

When morning came, each tribe presented itself. The tribe of Judah was chosen by lot, then the clan of the Zerahites, then the family of Zimri, then Achan. “Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me’” (Joshua 7:19). Achan confessed his sin, admitting that in Jericho he saw a robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a fifty-shekel bar of gold that he “coveted,” took, and hid in a hole he had dug within his tent. Messengers from Joshua confirmed the plunder was found in Achan’s tent, and they brought it before the assembly. The Israelites then stoned Achan, his children, and his livestock and burned the bodies; they also burned Achan’s tent, the plunder he had taken, and “all that he had” in the Valley of Achor (i.e., the “Valley of Trouble”), Joshua 7:25–26. The pile of stones was left there as a reminder of Achan’s sin and the high cost of not obeying the Lord.

After Achan was judged, God told Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land” (Joshua 8:1). The Israelites laid an ambush and soundly defeated Ai, killing all of its inhabitants. This time, the Israelites were allowed to take the plunder for themselves. Only Jericho, the first city in Canaan, had been wholly devoted to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 18:4).

The story of Achan is a stark reminder of the penalty of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23a). We also see two truths illustrated plainly: first, that sin is never an isolated event—our sin always has a ripple effect that touches others. Achan’s sin led to the deaths of thirty-six of his fellow soldiers and defeat for the whole army. Second, we can always be sure that our sins will find us out (Numbers 32:23). Hiding the evidence in our tents will not conceal it from God.

Achan’s sin was grave. He took what was God’s. The Israelites had been specifically warned about the consequences of not doing as God instructed. Joshua told them, “Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise, you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it” (Joshua 6:18). Achan’s sin was a clear and willful violation of a direct order, and he did bring trouble on the entire camp of Israel. Also, Achan was given time to repent on his own; he could have come forward at any time, yet chose to wait through the casting of lots. Rather than admit his guilt and perhaps call on the mercy of God or at least demonstrate reverence for Him, Achan attempted to hide. “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

The precious metals Achan took were meant to be given to the tabernacle; they were God’s possession. So Achan not only disobeyed a direct order, but he stole from God Himself and then covered it up. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is a similar warning against lying to God. As to why Achan’s entire family was destroyed along with him, that is a bit difficult to understand. Most likely, they were complicit in the sin—they would surely have known about the hole dug in their tent and what was hidden there. Or perhaps their execution was a demonstration of just how pure the Israelites were called to be.

In the story of Achan we see just how deceptive sin can be. In the midst of a miraculous victory, Achan was enticed by a robe, some silver, and some gold—certainly none of that compares with the power of God he had just witnessed. Yet we know our own hearts can be just as easily swayed. James 1:14–15 says, “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Another aspect of sin’s deception is that it promises a benefit that it just can’t deliver. The stolen items did Achan absolutely no good; he couldn’t spend the money, and he couldn’t wear the clothes. What seemed of great worth to him was actually worthless, buried in a hole in the ground while guilt festered in his heart.

In Joshua 7:21, as Achan finally confesses his sin, he relates the process that led to his destruction: “I saw . . . I coveted . . . and took.” This is the same process that leads to many sins today. Achan was deceived by sin’s lies, but we don’t have to be. “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:16–18). Real blessing comes from God, not through the pleasures of sin.

Throughout the Bible we find that mercy accompanies judgment, even in the story of Achan. God was merciful in limiting the destruction caused by Achan’s sin. He also quickly restored the nation of Israel after the sin was dealt with. In Joshua 8 we see Israel defeat Ai and renew their covenant with God. God forgives, and He desires to be in relationship with His people. Even when we do not understand His commands, we can trust His character. He is the unchanging One and the Giver of good things. Achan’s story is both one of warning and one of hope.