

# Gospel Values

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[ 0 : 01 ] Today's reading is from Acts chapter 4 from verses 32 up to chapter 5 verse 16 and this can be found on page 1096.

Acts chapter 4. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own but they shared everything they had.

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there was no needy person among them for from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus whom the apostles called Barnabas which means son of encouragement sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Now a man called Ananias together with his wife Sapphira also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

[ 1 : 36 ] Then Peter said, Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.

When Ananias heard this he fell down and died and great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up the body and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?

Yes, she said, this is the price. Peter said to her, how could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord? Listen, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out also.

[ 2 : 51 ] At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and finding her dead carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people and all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade. No one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded by the people.

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their numbers. As a result, people brought those who were ill into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem bringing those who were ill and those tormented by impure spirits and all of them were healed. This is the word of the Lord.

Well, good morning and welcome to St. Silas. My name's Robin, as Martin said. I'm a member of the congregation here and we've got a fantastic chapter of the Bible to look at together this morning.

[ 4 : 14 ] So why don't I pray and then we'll look at it together. Father God, we thank you for your word to us.

We thank you for the Bible and we thank you that you speak to us through it. We pray that you would teach us, that you would correct us, that you would rebuke us and that you would train us in righteousness to equip us for every good work.

And so have mercy upon us, we pray, and be with us. We ask that you'd bless us as we listen today and that we'd be shaped by your word, by your spirit. We ask for this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, it may not seem at first glance, but this passage we have today is actually wonderfully relevant to our lives.

It's relevant because one of the things that it touches on or centers around is values or principles that a group of people hold.

[ 5 : 22 ] And if you spend a bit of time thinking about your own life or even the way the world operates, it operates around values and principles.

Even in the business world, major companies function because of the core values they hold. You take the company Apple, for example, a company started by Steve Jobs, set up in the 1970s.

When it first started, it was founded based upon a list of values. You can actually find them out on the internet. They're quite famous. I've just got a few of them to sort of look at together.

One of them was, each person is important. Each has the opportunity and the obligation to make a difference. It's quite a good principle.

They said, he said, we build products we believe in. Not a bad thing to say. He said, we want everyone to enjoy the adventure we're on together.

[ 6 : 20 ] And then he said, we want to create an environment in which Apple values flourish. He had these list of principles, these core values that he set up for his company, Apple. And Apple was based on those values and is still based on those values today.

And as we think about that, that's true in the corporate world, if you like. We might be able to see how other areas of our life revolve around values in your own home.

our friendships. Maybe on a bigger scale, we might say that democracy is a key value for Western society. And what we've said so far, but we've talked about groups of people, that is equally true for church, isn't it?

That's equally true for church. There are certain values that we expect in church. It'd be an interesting experiment, I think, to go around and ask what do we think the values of church are?

What's foundational? What is sort of less important or superficial? And furthermore, if we're thinking about values for the church, what are God's values for his church?

[ 7 : 28 ] And do ours marry up with his? And what happens if they don't? These are just some of the important questions we will be figuring out and we're going to be digging into this morning.

And so we're going to be looking at this bit of the Bible in three sections. You should see those sort of three headings on the handout that you were given this morning. And the three sections are common gospel values, gospel values confronted, and gospel values bring growth.

Common gospel values, gospel values confronted, and gospel values bring growth. But I'm sure for some of us, as we heard the reading this morning, for some of us, maybe this wasn't the first thing that we thought about.

Because in the middle section, we have this terrifying account of Ananias and Zephira dropping down dead. And I just want to say from the off that we're not going to skirt over that.

You might have lots of questions about what's going on here. I can't promise that we're going to answer all the questions that may come up from hearing something as shocking as that. But what I hope and what I want us to do is we might have to park some of those things for the moment, because I don't want some of those questions to distract us from what we're talking about.

[ 8 : 42 ] Because we're going to get to it and look at it, but we're going to think of how that's related to church values or God's values for his church. And the first thing we're going to do is look at the values of the church that we see at the end of chapter four.

Look at our first point, common gospel values. Common gospel values. And we started talking about Apple, Steve Jobs, the values he had for his company.

But for the Apple company to grow as it has done, I think there must have been, there must be still, and there must have been at the beginning, agreement between everybody at Apple with his values.

That will be one of the reasons, amongst many, that they've done so well. Successful businesses recognize and implement this type of thinking. For any community or a group to flourish the core values, they must exist amongst its members.

And we see that in this first church that has been growing in number. As we've looked through Acts, we've seen that they've grown in number from the preaching of the gospel. And we've seen that up until now.

[ 9 : 49 ] But what we see is they're all in agreement about what the core values are. Just look with me in verse, in chapter 4, verse 32. All the believers were one in heart and mind.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. It's amazing, really. They're in agreement about what matters in one heart, one mind.

And so everything we read about them in the verses that follow, they're all in agreement about. This is what they're about. It's who they are. It's what defines them.

And so let's look together. What is it that defines them? Verse 32, a bit further down at what defines them, says, No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own.

But they shared everything they had. Everything they had. Verse 33, And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them that there was no needy persons among them.

[ 10 : 54 ] Verse 34, Those who owned land or houses, sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

And then in verse 36 we get a sort of an example of this worked out in this guy Joseph who they call Barnabas. He sells his fields, he brings all the money, lays it at the feet of the apostles to be distributed and he's sort of commended for that.

It is a totally radical way of living and we get this picture built up of what the core principles and values this church has and that they're all in agreement about it.

And so far we've had they share everything they have but it is so that there is no one needed among them. Now, you might be thinking why?

Why would any group choose to live like that? that? You might be thinking is that a little bit unrealistic? Everything. Well, it certainly wasn't normal in first century Israel and it isn't normal today.

[ 11 : 57 ] I mean, sure, there's lots of people who share their wealth, who give to charity but this is different. This is being ready, not saying they all give everything, this is being ready to give it all and a whole community sharing this mindset of one heart and one mind.

In verse 33, we get a reason why they live like this and that it's not unrealistic. Look at verse 33 with me.

With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.

Right at the center of this community, it's the preaching of the gospel that they continue repeatedly to testify to one another of the resurrected Lord Jesus who now reigns and rules over them, the one who has beaten death and won victory for them.

It hasn't just saved them but it is being worked out in their lives transforming them. It is a life transforming gospel that they repeat to one another and it's like a snowball that gets bigger as they repeat it to one another.

[ 13 : 25 ] They grow and are transformed and love one another and share everything they have together. The sharing with one another, being ready to give, it's not an accident, it hasn't come from nowhere.

This is the effect of the gospel at work in their lives as they reflect on God's grace, on his kindness to them, on his abundant goodness to them.

As they reflect upon a risen saviour and the secure future they have as they realise that everything they have is a gift from God.

Their life and possession, an amazing thing happens. They don't care about holding on to it anymore. They don't care about holding on to it anymore. It's evidence that they get it and they really have been transformed.

They really have been transformed. And whilst in this church the sharing we see is really all, it's kind of centred around possessions, isn't it? Whilst it's not less than that, this principle should govern all church life.

[ 14 : 34 ] I wonder, you know, I said at the beginning, if we were going to do, sort of go around and ask what would be the core values of church, is it this that sprung to mind?

That we'd be ready to give away everything, ready to give it, so that no one would be in need because of the abundance of God's goodness to us.

the encouraging thing for me as I think about this is that, and maybe for some of us sat here, that we can think of lots of people within our church community who epitomise this kind of mindset, ready to give it all, and I'm not just talking about finance, though of course that's in the reading, so that is part of it, but who give away their time, energy, to meet people's need and are ready to give it all in abundance even when they're like tired.

God has blessed us here so much as a church. We can all see that. Imagine for St. Silas, if this characterised us, wouldn't it be great, wouldn't it be a great thing, if this is what we were known for as a church?

When people spoke of St. Silas outside these walls, they said things like, you know they really love each other there. You know, you can really see that something is happening.

[ 16 : 04 ] They talk about the gospel, they talk about the good news, but it's not just hot air, they actually live it out with each other. It's amazing. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing? But, surprise, surprise, churches are made up of people, and it's not as idyllic as we first think, because like all churches, and I'm sure if we were to look in this church's history, that we have in-house church problems, and all is not well in this first church, as we encounter the first in-house church problem.

As we move on to our second point, gospel values confronted. Gospel values confronted. Think back to these common values that Apple share.

One of them was we are here to make a positive difference in society, as well as make a profit. So, it's a pretty good value, and if you were to look through them, they do seem pretty idyllic, but there is some good ones.

But the reality is that when people are involved, inevitably, I'm guessing not everyone would have agreed with Steve Jobs. Employees don't always embody the values, and when we hear about that happening, or we see that in the real life, in a corporate world, people lose their jobs, they don't work for the company anymore.

[ 17 : 44 ] That's pretty normal, we understand that, that happens. It's the same in human relationships, isn't it? When someone doesn't share our values, either one of two things happens, either we distance ourselves from them, or we come together and have some sort of disagreement, a confrontation.

So, we understand that that is kind of normal, what happens when values aren't shared, we understand that. If that's the case in human relationships, relationships, how do we think it matters for the spiritual values and principles that God has for his church?

And here, as I said, we have the first in-house church problem. Ananias and Zephira don't share the same core values and principles as the believers. They're not in one heart and mind with them, but with each other, with one another.

And it ends in confrontation. Let's look together. Chapter 5, verse 1, we read Ananias together with his wife Zephira also sold a piece of property.

Bear in mind that's very similar to Barnabas at the end of chapter 4, who also sold something, but he brings the money and puts it all at the feet of the apostles.

[ 19 : 06 ] Look at verse 2, with his wife's full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself and brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Now, at this point, I'm well expecting, we might be thinking, well, what's wrong with that?

He still gives money to the church, doesn't he? Does he not still do that? What's the big deal? But Peter, look at Peter's response, he has a divine revelation from God, he knows what's going on.

Verse 3, Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

End of verse 4, what made you do such a thing? You have not just lied to human beings, but to God. The core values of the church, God's values, are confronted and what happens is totally shocking.

It is totally shocking. When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And then the same thing happens to his wife. Peter asked her, and remember at this point, the money that Ananias has brought, it's still at Peter's feet.

[ 20 : 26 ] Tell me, he says to Zephira, is, looking at his feet, is this the price, is this money at my feet, is this the price that you and Ananias got for the land?

Yes, she said, that is the price. Peter said to her, how could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord? Listen, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.

At that moment, she fell down at his feet, where the money is still laid, and died. we can't dress this up.

It is totally shocking. It should shock us. God strikes them down. God strikes them down, and the offense, here to be clear, it's not simply that they wouldn't share their stuff.

love. Let's just remind ourselves of what Peter says. He said, you have not lied just to human beings, but to God. How could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord?

[ 21 : 45 ] It's the blatant hypocrisy, trying to pull the wool over his eyes. It's looking holy on the outside, giving money, wanting to be a Barnabas, but secretly keeping the money on the inside, not wanting to be a Barnabas at all.

Hypocrisy is the issue. They're out and out hypocrites. What they value, it doesn't match up with what God's people, the believers value, or what God values.

And for the sake of clarity, I think a couple of things need to be said about these two. Firstly, these two would confess to be members of the church themselves, to be members of the believing community.

Now, we're all guilty of hypocrisy on some level, but the spiritual hypocrisy here is specific. You can't be guilty of this type of hypocrisy if you don't claim to be a member of the church.

If you're here as a guest this morning, and you're quite open about not being a regular member of the church, and are still questioning what Christianity is about, and you're quite open about that, this is different to that, or any hypocrisy that you have, this is totally different, because Annas, Nice, and Zephira would confess to be part of the believing church community.

[ 23 : 15 ] The reality is, whilst they would confess it, they're not true members of God's people. They are frauds. they haven't been changed by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, they lie to the Holy Spirit. They're not believers. We must make that clear, because of what happens to them. We must make that clear, because of what happens to them.

They're judged. If you're a genuine believer here, Christ has taken the judgment you deserve. Christ has taken the judgment for our hypocrisy.

These two receive judgment because they're not part of the believing community, although they could confess to be. And it should shock all of us.

It should warn us. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. This story is terrifying. And it's hugely different from merely being at odds with Steve Jobs.

[ 24 : 24 ] because the one they're at odds with is a holy God who has no sin, who is different from us. He's the one who the Old Testament says is a consuming fire.

He's the one who, when Isaiah touched the ark, fell down dead as well. This God hasn't changed. He is as holy as he was in the Old Testament.

and he can have no sin apart of him. He's the God who made them, the one who put breath in their lungs, who keeps their heart beating. He's not one to be messed around with.

These two are the heirs of Judas. Satan has entered their heart just like his, and they would have ravaged and savaged the church just like him. Now, I don't have Peter's insight.

None of us do. He's an apostle. So he, God, gives him divine revelations that none of us have. But what I do know is that this part of the Bible is here to confront us and warn us that if there are those amongst us, and as I said earlier, it's amongst our members who want to look wholly on the inside, but on the outside, but on the inside remain unchanged and are hostile to God.

[ 25 : 51 ] If there is anyone living a life that is Ananias and Zephira like, this death, or these deaths, we see, they point to something much worse.

Just like these two are separated from God's people by physical death, there is an eternal spiritual separation, one that goes on forever. The reason is so shocking, because you might think that being a member of a church means that you're safe from this.

This informs us of a different reality. You can attend church every week since the day you were born, but you might still be hostile to the living God and it is terrifying to fall into his hands.

I don't want that to happen to anyone here.

We as a church don't want that to happen to anyone here. We really don't. And in God's patience and kindness, he's giving everyone here today the opportunity to do what Ananias and Zephira don't do.

[ 27 : 08 ] They could have responded differently, they chose not to. There's seeds of hypocrisy in all of us. Where does this confront us? Where we've done the outward spiritual thing with a cold heart.

If this is you, if it feels like your heart's exposed, and it's probably a lot of us, we know what we can do right now.

I can tell you what to do right now. We can repent. That means turn to Christ, asking for his forgiveness, and do it today.

Why not? Today is a good day to turn to Christ. Today is a good day to turn to Christ. We must feel the weight of this, to oppose God's values is incredibly dangerous.

And so we move on to our final point. God's values bring growth. God's values bring growth.

[ 28 : 21 ] We think back to the company Apple, and I think we'd all see that over the last 40 years, they have grown exponentially.

they're a huge company now. They have a massive global success. But I wonder if some of their growth is down to the values that they started with in the 70s.

Each person is important. Each has the opportunity and the obligation to make a difference. Fantastic. It's wonderful. That quality, we'd say it's exactly what God says about each person.

Each person is important. What we see following these events is that the church grows. And it grows in two ways. It grows in number, but it also grows in purity.

It also grows in purity. And whilst we observe growth in this section, the way that it's sort of explained to us is through the responses that come from the watching world to the events that we've just looked at and how the responses from the watching world demonstrate growth.

[ 29 : 37 ] Before we dig into this, I just want to clarify. It's something basic. I want to clarify what I mean by a response. What I mean is that any reaction to any situation is the way that you choose to respond.

The reason I say that is that can be active or passive because even being indifferent to something, that is your response. it's the same when you watch the news for example or you find out who won the footy.

You respond and we all respond differently, passively or actively. The people in first century Jerusalem are presented with a real situation and we're presented today with the same situation through the word of God.

the first century people watching on they've witnessed this unbelievable radical community with everyone sharing everything because of the news of the resurrected Lord Jesus and how much God has done for them.

They're ready to give it all. And then some members of the community have confronted these values and this strikes them down. And then in verse 12 something else happens.

[ 30 : 48 ] verse 12 the apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And so after witnessing all this how are they going to respond?

How are they going to respond? We see two responses I said. We see growth or two things happen. We see growth in number and growth in purity. First response is some stay away from God.

Verse 13 no one else dared join them. The response is probably out of fear for their own lives isn't it? I'm not going anywhere near that group.

You see what happened to them two. I'm not risking my life. I'm not going to go anywhere near it. Perhaps they realise they have different values to the church and don't want to end up like those two they've just seen buried.

But as surprising as it may sound the Lord is still at work in that situation. Because he's purifying the church. The out and out hypocrites are staying well away.

[ 31 : 50 ] There is growth in the purity of the believing community. Whoever is left must be genuine. The second response is completely the opposite.

They see what's going on and they make a beeline for the community. Verse 14 more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Verse 15 and 16 people are bringing the sick those tormented by impure spirits and all of them are being healed. People are running to God from what they've seen and some are staying away.

The church is growing in purity but it's growing in number as well. Either way it's growing. God loves his church. He loves his church.

He loves to see people come to faith. He loves to add people to his family but he will protect it as well. He will protect it. He won't allow himself to be misrepresented by his people.

[ 32 : 52 ] He will protect it. He will purify his people. It's great assurance to us that he will purge out anything that he doesn't want to belong in there. It's very encouraging for us here today because it means that nothing will stop the church from growing.

nothing will stop the church from growing. Both in number and in purity. The confrontation brings renewal within the church. The witness is genuine from genuine believers.

The people who sign up, they must be genuine. Only genuine people in need of a saviour want anything to do with a God like this. We can be encouraged that we will grow in number but also if we ever go through a period of maybe we stagnate in terms of numerical growth, it might be because the Lord is growing as impurity.

It might be because the Lord is growing as impurity. But I suppose the obvious question I want to leave us with today, we've had this real situation presented to us and how do we respond to this God, the living God that we're presented with.

The real values that matter are not Steve Jobs' values for Apple or the values I have at home or relationships. The real values that matter are God's values. Do you want to run away from him or do you want to run towards him?

[ 34 : 29 ] Do you see the radical community, the church, and in seeing the hypocrisy of Ananias and Zephira, you see some of yourself? You see how God judges that, how he protects his people, upholds his values and laws.

Do you see that and think I want to be part of that? I want the forgiveness on offer. I want this life transforming gospel to impact me. I know that I'm a hypocrite, I know I need forgiveness.

If that's you, run to the Lord God, run to him. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, his arms are open wide.

We have all fallen short. We're all hypocrites in some way or another. May I implore you, don't run away from him. Don't run from the living God.

It's too dangerous. And not for my benefit, but for your own sake. Please don't do that. run towards him.

[ 35 : 37 ] Today is a good day to turn to Christ. Because I said earlier, we won't face judgment if we do that.

The death that we see, that we deserve, he has suffered so that we might live, so that we can be forgiven from our hypocrisy.

today is a good day to turn to Christ. Let me pray. Loving Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for your goodness to us.

We thank you for your word, and we thank you that it confronts us in very real ways. But we know that without confrontation there can be no reconciliation.

And so we pray wherever we're at, we pray that you'd help us to think through what we've heard, what we've spoken about, what we've discussed. Be with us, Lord.

[ 36 : 51 ] And I pray that we would turn afresh, recommitting ourselves, our lives into your hands. We ask for your blessing upon us that as we go in this week, you would help us to serve you faithfully in all that we do, and that we would live lives wholly committed to you as our Lord and Saviour.

In Jesus' name, Amen.