

Title: A change of Heart

Text: Acts 4:32-37

INTRODUCTION:

I received the following e-mail the other day...

Isn't it strange how a 20 dollar bill seems like such a large amount when you donate it to church, but such a small amount when you go shopping?

Isn't it strange how 2 hours seem so long when you're at church, and how short they seem when you're watching a good movie?

Isn't it strange that you can't find a word to say when you're praying, but you have no trouble thinking what to talk about with a friend?

Isn't it strange how difficult and boring it is to read one chapter of the Bible, but how easy it is to read 100 pages of a popular novel?

Isn't it strange how everyone wants front-row-tickets to concerts or games, but they do whatever is possible to sit at the last row in Church?

Isn't it strange how we need to know about an event for Church 2-3 weeks before the day so we can include it in our agenda, but we can adjust it for other events in the last minute?

Isn't it strange how we believe everything that magazines and newspapers but we question the words in the Bible?

Isn't it strange how everyone wants a place in heaven, but they don't want to believe, do, or say anything to get there?

IT'S STRANGE ISN'T IT?

I believe that when one comes into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that a real transformation takes place.

2 Cor. 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

This was the experience of the believers of the first century church

This was the experience of the disciple Barnabas

And this should be our experience also

PRAYER

The first part of this text is often preached about, but it is really just the background for a story that takes place in chapter 5

I. The Background

Acts 4:32-37

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. [33] With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. [34] There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales [35] and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

[36] Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), [37] sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

What we see in this text is an example of two of the changes that take place when one believes in Jesus

The first is in relation to things

The second is in relation to people

We see this in Acts 4:32

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Faith in Christ creates a bond of love to people,

and it cuts the bond of love to things.

This text is a snapshot of a community of people whose hearts have been completely transformed by believing in Jesus.

They found themselves freely caring about people,

and freely selling land and houses and giving the money to the church for distribution to those with special needs.

What they found themselves doing is exactly what Jesus had said in Luke 12:32-33

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. [33] Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

THE STORY OF THESE CHANGES SETS THE STAGE FOR ANOTHER STORY

It is the story of Ananias and Sapphira .

But lets not get ahead of ourselves

We need to focus in on and introduce Barnabas

Who is BARNABAS?

The advocate of the new convert Paul (9:27),

Acts 9:27

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

And the shepherd of the new gentile converts in Antioch (11:22),

Acts 11:22

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

And the one trusted with relief for the poor (11:30),

Acts 11:30

This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

and the first partner of Paul on his missionary journeys (13:2),

Acts 13:2

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

and in Acts 15:37 we see Barnabas as the advocate for giving John Mark a second chance).

Our text calls Barnabas **Son of ENCOURAGEMENT**

He is one of the most mature, reliable, loveable leaders of the early church.

And right here in Acts 4:36-37 Luke shows us how Barnabas' trusted ministry began –

it began with a demonstrated freedom from the love of things, and a heart of love for the poor.

He sold his field and gave all the proceeds to the apostles.

In this story he stands for the way true faith in Christ creates a bond of love for people and **cuts a bond of love for things.**

NOW WE TURN TO

Ananias and Sapphira

They stand for the exact opposite, namely, people who have not really been changed on the inside by being satisfied with all that God is for them in Christ,

but who still want some place in the visible church.

We see there story in Act 5:1-11

II. The Story

Acts 5:1-11

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. [2] 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.

[3] 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? [4] 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 to men but to God."

[5] When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. [6] Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

[7] About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

[9] Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

[10] 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. [11] Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Ananias had sold a field and brought part of the proceeds to the Apostles

and he said that he brought all of it.

But He lied.

Peter response to Ananias is really quit interesting

He approaches the whole situation with the following rationale

Ananias, This is the way someone acts when there is some external control on them

What you see going on here is freedom.

These peoples generosity is coming from a heart of LOVE transformed by CHRIST

Peter says, What made you think of doing such a thing?

Acts 5:4

Didn't it belong to you before it was sold?

He is saying,

There aren't any church rules here that say you have to sell your property. .

Ananias, if people around you are saying: "My possessions are not mine any more,"

this is not because they have to say this.

It's because they want to say this.

They've been changed from the inside out by trusting in Jesus. They're free.

Then he goes on (v. 4b): And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?

In other words, nobody coerced you to bring any of your money in here.

If your heart doesn't tell you bring it, don't bring it.

What was wrong with Ananias and Sapphira?

LET ME SUGGEST FOUR THINGS.

1) THEY LOVED THEIR MONEY.

They made the sale, they looked at all that cash, and they couldn't bear the thought of giving it all away. So they kept some back (v. 2).

2) THEY WANTED TO LOOK MORE GENEROUS THAN THEY REALLY WERE.

They wanted the apostles to think that they were like Barnabas perhaps. They wanted external religious approval. They not only loved money, they loved the praise of men -- the two almost always go together

Luke 16:14-15

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. [15] He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

3) THEY LIED (vv. 3-4). To cover their covetousness and to give the impression of generosity they lied.

If you love possessions and you love the praise of men, your love for truth will dissolve into deception and fraud..

4) THEY DISCREDITED THE HOLY SPIRIT. Verse 3 says they lied to the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says they lied not to man but to God. Verse 9 says they tempted the Lord.

HOW IS THIS HARM THE REPUTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

One of three possible ways.

ONE IS THAT THEY MAY NOT HAVE EVEN BELIEVED THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS EVEN PRESENT IN THE CHURCH.

They may have simply functioned on a human level and never even thought about the real presence of the Spirit of the living God.

OR MAYBE THEY BELIEVED IN HIS PRESENCE IN SOME THEORETICAL WAY, BUT JUST DIDN'T THINK HE KNEW THE THOUGHTS OF THEIR MIND. OR THAT HE REALLY CARED.

He wasn't a person who knew things and felt things and acted in real ways--like making people die!

OR PERHAPS THEY THOUGHT HE WAS THERE AND REAL, BUT THAT HE WOULDN'T REALLY PUNISH THEM. Perhaps they had a view of grace that says, "No matter how devious and hypocritical you are, God always tolerates everything."

Could it be that the Holy Spirit is discredited in the church today.

Some people come to worship and operate totally on the human level, never even thinking about the living presence of God in this room.

Some come and have knowledge of his presence but don't really come to terms with the awesome fact that he hears every thought in their mind and sees every imagination of their heart.

And others come and convince themselves that the thoughts of the heart are not serious enough to forsake because grace always means tolerance.

In each of these three cases the Spirit is discredited and demeaned. Hebrews warns that it is possible to outrage the Spirit of grace

Hebrews 10:29

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

ANNAIANS AND SAPHIRA DROPPED DEAD WHEN THEY INSULTED THE HOLY SPIRIT

The reason they drop dead is not because this happens to all hypocrites.

The reason they drop dead is to give a warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later.

God means for his people to fear hypocrisy.

He means for us to be afraid of treating the Holy Spirit with contempt.

Notice at the end of verse 5, after Ananias had died: "And great fear came upon all who heard of it."

Then again in verse 11 after Sapphira died, "

And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

This is the lesson Luke wants us to get:

FAKING FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS A FEARFUL THING.

CONCLUSION

But let's end with our eyes fixed on Barnabas and not on Ananias.

HOW WAS HE DIFFERENT?

- He was different at every point.
- He did not love money and things.
- When he sold his field he did not dream about all the comforts and pleasures he was giving up.
- He revelled in the freedom of faith.
- He dreamed about the good that would be done with his gift and the glory it would bring to Jesus.
- He did not want to appear more generous than he was.
- He did not need the praise of men. He had the approval of God.
- What you saw was what you got. He was real.

- Therefore he did not lie.
- He loved the truth.
- He could be trusted.
- His integrity became legendary in the early church.
- And finally, he brought no reproach on the Holy Spirit.
- He knew that the Spirit was alive and real in the church.
- He knew that his every thought was open and laid bare before the Spirit of truth.
- And he knew that the gift of grace in his life was not the permission of God to keep on loving things,
 - but the power of God to start loving people.

Let's be like Barnabas and not Ananias.

Acknowledgment... John Piper's Notes were utilized in the formation of this message. Thanks John... Hope you get the Holy Ghost one day.