

ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON SUBJECT

“THOU SHALT NOT LIE”

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 5:1-11.

OTHER SCRIPTURES: GEN. 3:1-6; JOSH. 7:1-21; I SAM. 15:1-28; MT. 23:1-33.

MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 5:11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

INTRODUCTION:

In chapter 3 of Acts, we learned of the great miracle of the healing of the lame man. In chapter 4, we witnessed the miracle that empowered the church to confront the opposition to the gospel and boldly declare the word of the Lord. These miracles had a great impact on the effort of the new and fragile structure of the church with its mission of carrying the gospel to the world.

Now in chapter 5, we are confronted with another miracle, one which required just as much power of God to accomplish, but one we rather not have repeated. This miracle involves judgment upon one of the deepest sins of the human will: lying and deceit. It is an unpleasant lesson to study but it holds an important truth for the church as well as the individual Christian.

Ananias and Sapphira had property and, like other Christians sold it, but they brought only part of its value to the apostles. At the close of chapter 4, we learned of others who were selling property and giving the proceeds to the church. Ananias and Sapphira gave only part of the proceeds from their sale to the church. That would have been perfectly okay if they had not decided between themselves to lie about the gift. They kept back part of the proceeds but conspired between themselves to lie about it by telling that they had given all of its value. They both were smitten dead, and buried.

While we study this lesson and its fearful results, we must remember that lying and deceit are not limited to our handling of money, but to the entire realm of life. This lesson should teach us that lying and deceitfulness is an intolerable act towards God. This is a very stunning incident before a very young and growing church. The message of the church is being violently opposed by outside interests so it does not need a festering sore of inside trouble. On the surface, what Ananias and Sapphira did may not seem grievous, but being deceitful and covering it up by lying is exactly how sin entered the human family in the Garden of Eden. For that same gross element of appearing good, but inwardly, knowingly and willfully being deceitful about it would not be tolerated by God. Whether or not it brings immediate wrath and judgment from God upon such flawed and corrupt character, or whether it is delayed, it is still a gross violation of a professed relationship with God that will destroy it.

NOTE: For the scriptures for this lesson, I have included examples from other instances in the Bible in order to adequately illustrate the seriousness of the lesson. However, I am only going to write in the scriptures from Acts 5:1-11, along with the comments for Friday. I suggest that you review the other scripture references as noted.

DAILY SCRIPTURES AND THOUGHTS

MONDAY.—GEN. 3:1-6. MAN’S TROUBLES STARTED WITH LYING. God had told Adam that if he partook of the forbidden fruit he would die. But the “serpent” twisted this truth completely out of its direct meaning and value to life. The immediate result was a broken relationship with God followed by a sense of guilt, resulting in separation from God and finally death. Lying before God is serious business. All of the sin, sorrow, corruption, war, hate, deceit and lusts in this world have come directly from the lie told in the garden and the attempt to cover it up. Lies and deceit are the cornerstone of sin and death.

TUESDAY. JOSH. 7:1-26. ACHAN’S TRESPASS. Another lesson on the corruption fostered by lies and deceit comes from Achan’s trespass. Israel had just rejoiced at the fall of the walls of Jericho. In their second battle at a little place called Ai, they were soundly defeated. Something was wrong! After much anxiety and soul searching, Joshua was led to seek out the perpetrator of their defeat. He found that no one had denounced God and the promise of the land of Canaan. Then he discovered something more hidden and sinister. Achan had seen in the rubble of Jericho a Babylonish garment and some gold and silver. He admitted to coveting it, when God had told them not to touch it, and he was hiding it in the floor of his tent. (He thought no one would know). He was pretending not to have done any wrong. He was lying in his heart and this resulted in his being stoned to death. Israel was then able to win the battle of Ai easily.

WEDNESDAY. — I SAM. 15:1-28. SAUL WAS REJECTED FOR DISOBEDIENCE AND LYING. In this story Saul is given specific instructions to completely destroy the Amalekites, including their flocks. Saul indeed defeated the Amalekites, but he took king Agag as prisoner and “some of the best of the sheep and oxen” to make a “sacrifice to the Lord”. What on earth could be wrong with that, one might ask? Only one thing, it was not what God had commanded him to do. After the battle Saul met Samuel and declared, “I have performed the commandment of the Lord”. To which Samuel replied: “what meaneth then this bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen which I hear? Saul had deception in his heart and from that spoke lies to Samuel. The result of this hypocrisy and lies was that Saul’s lineage was rejected from the throne of Israel. This shows us that sometimes our actions may appear to be good before God, but in violating his word our actions condemn us for being deceptive.

THURSDAY. — MT. 23:1-36. “SCRIBES, PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES”. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were the very epitome of lying and deceit and they were the most religious people of his day. The Lord soundly condemned them and their entire aura or religious deceit and hypocrisy. They made the outside of the platter clean but within were full of extortion and excess. They were like whited sepulchers without but within were full of dead men’s bones. They appeared righteous outwardly but within were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. To look at them and listen to their pious speech, you got the

impression that they were good, God-fearing people. However they were filled with lies and deceit, and the Lord told them so. Their piety was a sanctimonious cover for hearts that were completely given to religious pride and deceit. They had so forsaken and rejected the truth of God and his word, that all their inward thoughts, desires and purposes were based upon lies and hypocrisy. Their “house”, Jesus said, was left unto them desolate.

FRIDAY – ACTS 5:1-11. ANANIAS AND SAPHIRA AGREED TO LIE.

SCRIPTURE.

V1. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2. And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. 3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4. Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him. 7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8. And Peter answered unto her, tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, yea, for so much. 9. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. 11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

COMMENTS.

You may search diligently to find more egregious causes as to why Ananias and Sapphira were so suddenly smitten with death because they withheld some of their money from the church. You probably won’t find any, nor is more reason necessary. To “lie to the Holy Ghost” is an intolerable sin in God’s sight, even if no one in the world knows about it or is directly affected by it. There may indeed be other causes in their lives that contributed to their actions, but it is not necessary to have a catalog of sins to bring down total condemnation and death upon them. A single sin does not exist alone; it will grow a crop. Judas betrayed Christ, but we also know that he had a selfish spirit as well, with no telling what else. It should also be noted that the sin of this lesson is not about withholding money from the church, though that can be wrong. It is about deceit and lying about it, and for that matter about anything else in life. Pretending before God, the church and the world that you are something that you are not, but are being deceitful about it is patently wrong and must be repented of.

Is there any wonder that fear came upon all the people when this took place. That was probably part of its purpose: to cause them, and us, to realize the gravity and importance of having a “conscience void of offence before God”. Whatever Ananias and Sapphira had in the Lord, including future opportunities, they permanently lost by their lying and deceit. “THOU SHALT NOT LIE”.

SUMMARY.

This is, to say the least, a fearful lesson and cause for continual soul-searching. Never let it be thought that God is “just waiting” to catch us in some mistake so that he can pour out his wrath and judgment upon us. To the contrary, God is looking for reasons to show us mercy and forgiveness. But in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, they had agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. This, it seems, was a pattern of their conduct, and not just an innocent mistake. They knew and intended to lie and be deceitful about it. Throughout the Bible, when men have cunningly used deceit in the conduct of their lives before God, it was always manifest; sometimes immediately and sometimes it may take a life time. It was with Adam, though he and Eve tried to cover their sin with fig leaves. Joseph’s brothers thought they had covered up their sin and they lied to Jacob about it. Achan hid his sin in the floor of his tent and a lot of people hide their wrongs in their home. David no doubt thought that no one would find out his sin with Bathsheba. The Pharisees, Judas and all others sought to cover their sin. God truly does look on the heart, whether for good or evil.

The history of God’s people is infiltrated with countless instances where people have “posed” as something or someone they were not. Great religious leaders are legendary for their sins and their attempt to cover them up. So also is the rank and file of those who profess faith in Christ. That profession, in so many cases, stands before God with intentional deceit, lies and hypocrisy in the heart, pretending to be or do what God knows is not true and honest. Honesty is not only the best policy it is the only policy with God. Every profession, service, excuse, action, word and desire which is pursued with deliberate and conscious knowledge of their half heartedness and pretension is an affront to God.

May the realization of this cause us to cry out with the Psalmist: Search me O God, see if there be any wicked way in me; cleanse me from every (deceitful) sin and set me free.

QUESTIONS

1. Was the death of Ananias and Sapphira caused by some natural, physical condition or was it an act of God?
2. Discuss the reasons for the swiftness and completeness of their judgment.
3. Discuss other examples of deceit and lying, with their results.
4. What lessons can we learn from this?