

ACTS CH 4-5

Read Acts 4:32–5:11. This raises lots of questions for us. What is so serious about this sin? Why would God do this? Is God really like this? Did this really happen?

There is much debate about this story. Why does Luke include it? It appears to portray God in a bad light. God smiting people as some angry vengeful God. Why put this in the story of the early church?

Answer to this is that if this happened it would be hard to leave out. You would kind of remember this. Imagine coming to church and seeing two people you know drop dead due to their answers to a simple question. (we actually don't know the context of this or what kind of gathering it was) Luke does not give direct commentary on this. He just says this happened and this was the impact

There are basically two schools of thought about this.

One. Minority view. This passage does not say that God killed them. They dropped dead from the shock of being confronted with their deceit - Sapphire maybe from hearing her husband had died. Peter was not acting in a godly way we he confronted them. He publicly humiliated them, was being judgmental with no compassion and gave them no chance to repent. Jesus said if someone sins, go to them privately. This couple dropped dead due to the shame of it. There is a story from the States of a pastor who was accused of adultery from 30 years ago. Under threat of it being exposed he confessed to the church. But it is all too much, and he drops dead of a heart attack. They say this is what happened here.

The point of the story is that we are not to act in such a manner. Peter got this horribly wrong. To interpret this story as God's judgment is denial of the gospel. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus came not to condemn but to save. To be terrified of God is not what Christianity is about. There is no other account in the New Testament of such action. Judas stole off Jesus and was not struck down. The adulterous woman that Jesus dealt with in John was given much compassion. Others in the New Testament church sinned and did not get this.

2. The second school of thought is that this was not a coincidence. This is the more traditional view. This in some way was an act of God despite it being really hard to understand. But the words used here for "drop dead" are only ever used for divine judgement in the NT. The word "held back" is a link to the OT sin of Achan who kept some of the spoils of war when told not to, and was condemned

by God to death. (Joshua 6:18-19, Ch 7) It is a similar story at the beginning of the Israelite community, just as this is the beginning of the church community. This event happened as a reminder that God is a holy God. Just as there was great healing and miracles, but with God's power is also God's judgement.

Within this school of thought is a couple of other options. 1 is that Ananias and sapphire were not Christians, and were trying to fraudulently get into a position of influence in the church. God was protecting the church. 2. Ananias and Sapphire were Christians and are in heaven. But God wanted to warn the early church around the seriousness of sin.

Lets imagine this happened in our church. Last Sunday two people in our church dropped dead in response to a simple question. We have just had the funeral this week for them. (Imagine the poor pastor having to take the funeral.) Your children are traumatized and asking you all kinds of questions about God that you don't know how to answer. You are traumatized because you really liked the couple and also know you are sinners. You are deeply shaken.

Here is my question. Would be at church today? The result for the early church was one of fear. V 5, 9

Regardless of what you make of the story, the result was fear. And this idea we see in other passages in acts But also in the rest of the NT. See Acts 9:31, 19:17;

The word used for fear can have two meanings. Fear as in scared. Fear as in awe. I suspect both meanings are in play. There is funny sort of contradiction at the end of the passage. V 12-16 No one dared to join the believers as they met. And yet on the other hand it says that people daily were being saved. So it seems this event had two impacts

For some, it is like. We are staying away from those crazy guys. I am not going to have my sins exposed publicly. I don't want to have anything to do with a God like that. For others it makes them profoundly aware of their need for God. They know they need the saving grace of God. And as they respond to the powerful love of God.

Think for a minute about someone who love the sea. Love being out on the ocean. Wind in their hair. Sea salt. Maybe it sailing. Surfing. Swimming. They want to spend as much time as they can out on the sea. But a person who loves the sea, should also have a very strong respect, fear even for the sea. They know the sea is far more powerful than they are. They know that if they



disrespect the power of the sea, that could easily be the end of their life. They love the sea, but they know to show it the utmost respect. One rip, one rogue wave, one storm and they could be in serious trouble. They don't get angry at the sea if the sea cuts up rough. They don't blame the sea if someone they know loses their life in it. The sea by its very nature is incredibly powerful. As well as inspiring and jaw droppingly beautiful. Their love of the sea is not diminished by their awe and respect of the sea,. For some though their fear of the sea means they avoid it altogether.

You could use the same idea for someone who loves climbing the mountains. They love it but they know that a moment of disrespect could be the end of them. My point is awe respect, even fear, and the love of God are not incompatible. There is a healthy tension here. Read Romans 8:15–17, NLT. We are invited into an intimate relationship with a God of love and mercy, but who also a holy powerful God.

Regardless of which commentary you take on this story, these 3 reminders are true.

Reminder of the seriousness of sin For all the love and grace and mercy we see in Jesus, he is also quite blunt about sin. Sin hurts others. There is no private sin. Sin is an insult to God. Deeply offends God who is pure and holy Read Phil 2:12

Sin is what took Jesus to the cross. It is so serious that the only thing that could deal with it was Jesus dying in our place. That show the seriousness of sin. Sin is not like a speeding And getting a ticket. Sin is a rebellion against the creator of the universe, the one who knows every star by name.

Reminder of the place of awe and reverence The Bible says because of Jesus death we can come into the very throne room of God. But what makes this so amazing is because of the nature of God. All powerful. Mind blowing out of this world beyond description. It is such a privilege because we could never approach God on our own.

I love the description that says that church grew stronger as the believers lived in fear of the Lord. Not fear as in scared. Fear as in healthy respect. Acts 9:31

Do we want this church to grow stronger? How did it grow stronger? The lived in fear of the Lord. That is they were profoundly aware of who God is. That God, by the fact that he created us and loves us, and died for deserves all worship, praise. And obedience. They were profoundly aware of who God is. God was not a tack on to their

busy lives. He was not a bit of a hobby that one indulged in on ones day off.

They did not have people joining the church because it was a nice community to be part of. They did not have pew sitters. They stayed away petrified. The ones who came were those who recognized who God was, and what he had done for them. His grace and mercy towards them. These were ones who turned away from the practices they knew were wrong and sinful. Acts 19:17 Heb 12:8

Reminder of the fact that one day every sin will be exposed by God. Oen commentator said this about this passage. Just as a miracle of healing is a snapshot of the coming kingdom in all it's fullness, bought forward into this life. So this is a snapshot of judgement to come bought forward into this life. Does not happen very often, but sometime it does. The fact is we are all going to die and be judged. All our actions will be exposed.

Paul says some will be with God, but they will scrape in as it were, as their actions are exposed. Hypocrisy, and lying, masking wearing is shown for what it is. I personally thing A and S were believers, are in heaven. Many Christians, probably all of us, have committed far worse sins than this. God does not smite, us them dead. Jesus died for our sins and as we believe in him, our sins, past, present and future have been erased. we are saved, we become children of God. But sometimes God works in ways we struggle with as he reveals his power.

Read 1 John 4:16-19

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What are the biggest issues you have with this passage?

Would this put you off coming to church if it happened at Central? Why or why not?

Do you prefer commentary 1 or 2? Why?

Do we have an appropriate level of "fear of the Lord?" Do we take sin too lightly?

What would Central be like if we were growing stronger as we lived in fear of the Lord? (Acts 9:31) Be specific. What would be different from now?

How do you hold the tension between intimacy with God as his child and passages like Hebrew 12:8?

What is your take away from this message?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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