

Fear of God

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Preacher: Bernard Yee

[0 : 00] Good morning. So for those of you who don't know me, I'm Bernard. I'm one of the members here at Watermark.

And thank you, Christina, and thank you, Betty, for reading. It was more uplifting than the Tim Burton edition of what we saw.

If you've been with us for the last few weeks, you would know we're going through the Book of Acts. And one of the things that we've been tracking is the growth of the early church in the Book of Acts. And what we've seen in the first four chapters is really the church growing and growing and growing. And then in chapter four from last week, what we saw was a threat.

With the growth of the church, there was also some opposition. But one of the key things behind the entire growth of the church was we were introduced to the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 01] And to be honest, I had a bit of a struggle myself trying to understand the Holy Spirit. What's the role? Okay? I mean, we know, you know, we kind of know God's role in creation and kind of put everything in place.

And we know Christ's role to become man and to die on the cross. But why do we need the Holy Spirit? What's with the third leg? You know? So one of the things, and it's key to understand the Holy Spirit as we go through Acts.

And one of the things that helped me was J.I. Packer is a British-Canadian theologian. And he explained it this way. And he called it, what he explained is the floodlight ministry.

So floodlights, you know, the lights that kind of light up buildings. So this is what he wrote. I remember walking to a church one evening, one winter evening, to preach on the words, He shall glorify me.

Seeing the building floodlit as I turn the corner and realizing, this is exactly the illustration I needed for my message.

[2 : 07] When floodlighting is well done, the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them. You're not, in fact, supposed to see where the light is coming from.

What you're meant to see is the building on which the floodlight is trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not have been seen for darkness or to maximize the dignity by throwing all of its detail into relief so that you can see it properly.

This perfectly illustrates the Spirit's new covenant role. He is, so to speak, the hidden floodlight for our Savior. So let us just start with a prayer.

Lord, we just ask you, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would just come amongst us this morning. It would shine a light on this message from Acts 4 and 5 on the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

And Lord, we just ask you that you'd be able to show us what you want us to take away today. So last week, if you remember, Chris gave a really quite good summary of the first seven chapters of Acts.

[3 : 20] Basically, what he said is, chapter 1 to 4, we saw, chapter 1 to 3, we saw the early church growing. You see things like there was 1,000 new converts.

There was 3,000 new converts. And then chapter 3, there was 5,000 new converts. So basically, it's just growing in the thousands, okay? Now, chapter 4 last week, you saw was an introduction of some opposition.

Where there's growth, often there's opposition. And what chapter 4 to 7 tells us is really Luke, the author of Acts, warning us about the oppositions that the early church faced.

And the reason he told us about this is because we are going to face similar oppositions as the church grows, as we go into ministry and as you spread the gospel.

So what we saw is initially in chapter 4, the threat was external to the church.

[4 : 25] They were kind of the high priests and the establishment and the high priest's family and basically the Jewish authorities that didn't like seeing this new fledgling faith coming aboard and then actually people leaving them to go to become Christians.

Now, what we see in chapter 5 is something quite different. So maybe we can go to the next slide, the table of content. Maybe I should move over here a little bit.

What we see here in chapter 5 is, so what I want to go through today is in four sections. One is the sharing community. We just want to start and explain it at the end of chapter 4 what that looks like. And then the second is the threat from within. And then I'm going to talk about the sin beneath our sins and then the ultimate Barnabas.

So let's move straight into the sharing community. What we see in that latter half of chapter 4 is a new radical community. You heard Marissa talking about one of the things that she appreciated most about Watermark was the community that we emphasize on.

[5 : 37] So what we saw was a young, faithful community that lived out its faith in a very authentic way. And what it did was it shared a lot of things.

Now, when you originally read this passage and you say, well, you know, people sold fields and gave to the poor, the first thing that came into mind is, is this like communism, right?

I mean, it's kind of like, sounds like something Lenin and Marx kind of thought up, right? Actually, if you just read a little bit into it, it is not, okay?

And I want to just explain that because some people just have this misconception. Firstly, the people who sold the properties and the land and gave, they did it by choice, okay?

If you read your communist history, there's not a lot of choice involved, okay? So generally, what happens in a communist state is the state owns everything, okay?

[6 : 39] They, you don't, there's no private property, okay? The state owns everything and then you work a job and you get a salary, okay? What we see here in Acts is people still own properties, okay?

And people still own private, so private property was still very relevant, but people gave and sold property voluntarily, okay?

And then we actually saw a little bit later on that it talks about an individual's name is Barnabas and it kind of uplifts Barnabas as their example.

Now, you wouldn't put somebody up as an example unless they did something voluntarily, right? I mean, you wouldn't say, well, here's a good example, I've confiscated your land.

Well, that's not an example, okay? The fact here is in the early church, people voluntarily sold property to cover the needs for the poor.

[7 : 38] So what they actually did is they truly owned their possessions and their possessions didn't own them, okay? So what I want to talk a little bit about is how does this community work?

And I just put a few bullet points there. A couple of things that in the later half of chapter 4 it talks about, the community was devoted to Scripture.

It came together and studied the Scripture together. It was devoted to fellowship, okay? They met together, not just on the night that their CG met, they met together throughout the week.

They broke bread together, they ate together, they also shared communion together, and then they prayed together. And I think that's a critical point that we continue to hear, emphasize again and again.

And then they were generous with one another. But that generosity was really just an outliving of how the Holy Spirit was changing them, okay? So this is exactly the model we're trying to create within Watermark in the community group.

[8 : 45] So if you kind of think, well, where did Watermark get the idea of the community group from? It's right here in Acts 4, okay? So this is exactly the model.

And you say, well, that's fine, and probably in the first century Palestine everything was like that. You know, this is Hong Kong 2017.

It's different. We have a complex environment. Things are harder now than it was in the first century in Jerusalem. Not really. And firstly, this sharing community was radical in the first century Palestine.

We know that because when the Romans first tried to basically squash the Christian faith, we have actually a letter from the Emperor Julian, okay, who was the last Roman Emperor, stating his frustration.

And this is what he wrote to his governors. Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of those Christians as their charity to strangers.

[9 : 53] Those Galileans provided not only for their own poor, but they provided for ours as well. So one of the things that helped spread the Christian faith was really the generosity, how they were able to share.

And this was so shocking to the Roman Empire. So, you know, you may think, well, okay, once again, thanks, Bernard, and thanks for the history lesson.

But, you know, we live in Hong Kong. 2017, it can't happen. This is not a realistic thing. I want to share with you just a little experience both Angie and I had recently in our own community group. So a little bit of a shout-out to Breaking Bread community group. So about a month ago, just kind of just before the Easter break, we wanted to, we as a family, wanted to take our younger two children for a holiday in Taiwan.

We had one small problem, and our oldest daughter, Abigail, was studying for exams, and therefore we couldn't leave her at home by herself because there would be no study happening otherwise.

[11 : 11] So, anyway, so we said, okay, we've got a bit of a problem. We can't go away, yet, so what can we do?

So we sent a WhatsApp out to our community group, and we said, look, we have this problem. We want to go away. We want to give Abigail some time to study.

Can anybody help out? I swear, within an hour, this other chat starts up. Okay, you know there's activity with millennials when a new chat group gets formed.

Okay, and within an hour, they had devised a schedule of different people who will be staying at our place with Abby, looking after her, and ensuring she studies.

But, and this was a work week. This was not the holiday week. This was the work week before Easter, okay? So, you know, I know we talk about giving, and we immediately think it's financial, it's money.

[12 : 23] But you know what? One thing that we all have the same amount of is time. And this was just a really touching thing. And I just want to give a shout out to our community group that they were able to just come together, and they were able to share, give up, rearrange their work schedules, so that they were able to come up and be with Abby, and we were able to go to Taiwan.

So, let's move to Chapter 5, our couple, Ananias and Zephira. I don't know why in Tim Burton-type cartoons, evil people always dress in pinstripes, if you ever noticed.

Dark grey pinstripes, so never wear pinstripes. So, one of the things, what we've seen up until now, as I said, the threat to the Christian community was from the outside.

High priests, and there was the authority, Jewish authorities, and so forth. What we see here is something quite different. And Ananias and Zephira, Luke wanted to warn us that threats to the Christian community is not just going to come from the outside, but actually the greatest threat are from the inside.

Okay? And this was the first time we've seen this. And I don't know about you, if you've been in churches for a little bit, could be in Hong Kong, could be in Canada, could be in Australia, it doesn't matter where it is.

[13 : 48] You kind of know, one of the deep, kind of, not-so-secret secrets is internal church politics is kind of ugly.

Okay? Somebody once said, there are only two things you never want to see. One is how sausage is made. The other is how a church operates. Okay?

And there's some truth to that, right? Because it's kind of, sometimes you see the ugliest things that happen within internal church conflicts.

And what Luke is trying to tell us here is, be careful. There's threats within a church. Okay? Now, just to give you an example, one of the common things is, I would say, C.S. Lewis kind of warned us in Screwtape Letters, he said, one of the things that the enemy or the devil will always want to do is make you dissatisfied with something at church.

Okay? So if you read Screwtape Letters, this is what he said. He kind of said, after you start going to church, and then at some point you say, maybe I don't like the song, I don't like the worship music, or I don't like the sermon.

[15 : 06] Okay? So, I don't like the sermon. Not this one. I just don't like the sermon. In general. You know, how they preach, I don't like it. I don't like the style.

I don't like the kids program. Okay? So what the enemy wants to do is make you into a discerning consumer within the church. Okay?

If you look at the book of Acts, you don't see a discerning consumer within that community. Okay? You see a community of people that are looking to find ways to serve one another.

Okay? Now, with Ananias and Sapphira, another threat, another internal threat is happening. So, let me just recap the story. You saw that they sold a field, okay, and they took some money.

They took the money to the apostles, but they didn't take all of the money. They took some of the money, and they kind of kept some themselves. So, what was the problem?

[16:07] Peter, obviously, had a session with them to say, Ananias, separately, Ananias, why have you done this?

So, what was the thing that they're being judged on? Okay? Now, firstly, I do want to kind of touch up on this point. We are not very comfortable with judgment.

In 2017, we don't like the God of judgment or the God of anger. Okay? We think the God of judgment, the God of anger, kind of belongs in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, in our time, 2017, we like the God of love, the God of compassion, a very progressive God, of God of forgiveness.

We kind of like that. And we have this misconception a little bit that judgment and anger is the opposite of love. I just want to clear up that point.

Judgment and anger is not the opposite of love. Hate is the opposite of love. And the ultimate form of hate is indifference. Okay? So, judgment and anger is not the opposite of love.

[17:14] Hate is the opposite of love. And the ultimate form of hate is indifference. Let me just give an example. Just think about somebody you love. Okay? Could be your spouse.

Could be your children, and if you have children. It could be a really good friend. And think for a moment that there's some bad influences is ruining his or her life.

Okay? So, maybe a bad crowd, maybe some bad friends. I just... just leading them astray down the wrong path.

Okay? Now, are you going to say, well, I'm not going to make judgment. You know, you know, my best friend is hanging out with the wrong crowd and just going off the rails, but I don't want to make judgment.

Okay? The fact here is you're not going to say that. You're going to make a judgment, and then you may get angry. In fact, you should get angry if something bad is ripping a loved one's life apart.

[18:18] Okay? So, the fact here is, in fact, if you don't get angry and you don't make any judgment, there's probably a good grounds to question, do you actually love that person?

Right? Does that make sense? You know, do you actually love that person? You have to make a judgment, and you have to get angry if something bad is happening. This is exactly what God was doing in this passage.

Okay? God saw the early church was being threatened by a very serious threat in the form of Ananias and Sapphira.

Okay? In fact, you know, he would call it a clear and present danger to the early church, and God acted to eliminate that threat, and he also wanted to warn the future generation like us that this threat could also ruin your community, Now, what was the threat?

Okay? In the first reading of the story of Ananias and Sapphira, you may think, well, it's greed. You know, it's greed. They kind of, you know, they wanted to give some, but they didn't want to give.

[19:28] And I would firstly argue, I don't think it's greed. Okay? They, firstly remember, the giving was voluntary. If they were really greedy for money, they didn't have to give any, but they actually did give some money.

Okay? So, I would argue, I don't think it's the greed of money. It may be greed for something else. I'll come back to that. Okay? So, this, what Peter actually told us in, in, um, chapter five, verse four, is, you lied not to man, but you lied to God.

So, there was clearly an integrity issue. Okay? So, it was an integrity issue. So, the word integrity came from a Latin root word, integer.

Okay? Those of you who are math majors or science majors, you know what an integer is. Integer is a whole number. In fact, those of you who got through grade five math should also know what an integer is, because if you don't, that, there's a slight problem.

Anyway, an integer is a whole number versus a fraction. Okay? So, what does integrity mean? Integrity mean there's a wholeness. Okay?

[20 : 43] The external is in line with your internal. So, there's wholeness. It's not a fraction. Okay? There's no fracturing. There's no disintegration.

There's a consistency. Okay? That's what integrity means. Now, in Ananias and Sapphira, when they died and it was disturbing and, you know, even the cartoon was a little scary, when they died, when Peter questioned them, what we are actually seeing is the external reflection of what's already happened to them internally.

It's the external reflection of what's actually happened to them internally. There's been fracturing internally. And what God is showing us is when they died, there was an external disintegration of themselves, but it had already happened within them.

And what Luke, the author of Acts, wanted to warn us against is be careful. There's great danger in nurturing sin in our hearts. Okay?

Now, that's something that we're also not comfortable with in 2017. Sin is a virus. I know there are lots of medical professionals within here.

[21 : 59] Okay? And you know, a virus doesn't stay dormant. It may take some time, but it doesn't stay passive. At a point in time, the virus will break out and it will consume you.

Okay? I think C.S. Lewis puts it best. And you heard it in the little cartoon that Anunnites and Sapphira was unhappy that Barnabas got all the recognition and they were grumbling.

Okay? And they're brewing about it. And this is how C.S. Lewis put it. Hell begins with a grumbling mood. Always complaining. Always blaming others.

But you are still distinct from it. You may not even, you may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there will come a day when you can no longer.

Then there will not, there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just to grumble itself going on forever like a machine.

[23 : 04] This is not a question of God sending us to hell. In each of us, there is something growing which will be hell unless it is nipped in the bud. Okay?

In each of us, there is something growing which will be hell unless it is nipped in the bud. Okay? So, what we see in the story of Ananias and Sapphira is this sin is harboring within each of us.

Okay? And we've got to be careful. We don't go and nurture that sin. I don't know how many of you and I've certainly been guilty. Somebody's wronged me or somebody's said something.

I've kind of nurtured that grudge. Okay? Just kind of fed it over time. And you know what? It just grows bigger and bigger and bigger until it consumes us.

And Luke wanted to share with us this is serious business. This is cancer. This is not just some little petty thing. If you don't deal with those sins in our hearts, it will consume us.

[24 : 07] Okay? So, now, we have a bit of a problem with Ananias and Sapphira because we said it wasn't greed but it was an integrity issue but there's a bit of Ananias and Sapphira in each of us.

Okay? Now, there's something a little bit deeper. What is behind the integrity issue? Is it just lying, lying, you know, lie, lie, pants on fire? No. It's not just a lying issue.

It's not just an integrity issue. Something drove them to lie. What do you think drove them to lie?

And this is something I think we need to take away from the passage because I think within each of us there's that desire to lie like Ananias and Sapphira.

Why did they lie? They wanted the respect of the community that they were in. They saw Barnabas was well respected, you know, kind of thrown into the air and celebrated and they wanted that respect.

Basically, what the root of why they lied was they saw that Christ, what Christ did for them was not enough. They needed something else.

[25 : 23] They needed something else other than Christ's salvation. They needed the respect of the group that they were in. Christ put it in a really powerful way last week and he said we want to be important in the eyes of those who are important.

Okay? So we all want that. We all desire that and you know, I think nobody put it better than a famous 20th century American playwright Arthur Miller once said in his play *After the Fall* his character was kind of having a tough time and he said for many years I looked at life like a case at law.

It was a series of proofs. When you're young you want to prove how brave you are or how smart what a good lover then a good father finally how wise and powerful.

So we all want to feel we're good enough and Ananias and Sophia also wanted to feel they were good enough and they were willing to go and sell the land and lied about it to try to gather the recognition of the group that they were part of part of the early church.

Now in 2017 in Hong Kong what does that look like? You know what? We strive for financial success so that we may have enough money make us feel better about ourselves.

[26 : 51] We strive to nurture our talents so we can be adored. We strive to get our life in control so we can be in control of our lives.

We strive to be strong so that when tough things and challenges come to us we know how to deal with it. Now C.S. Lewis is probably one of the best known theologians and philosophers that came out of England but there's one other that I greatly respect and it's a group of philosophers named that you may know of called Coldplay.

So Chris Martin my favorite Coldplay song is something just like this. Some of you may know it some of you may not. I want to sing it but I will spare you from it.

But the opening lines of what Chris Martin wrote in the Coldplay song is I've been reading books of old the legends and the myths Achilles and his gold Hercules and his gifts Spider-Man's control and Batman with his fists and clearly I don't see myself up on that list.

Now at one level it's about a young man trying to ask and to date this girl and he feels like he doesn't have any of the qualities the girl is looking for.

[28 : 20] Okay he's not rich he doesn't have Achilles gold he is not talented he hasn't got the gifts of Hercules he's not in control of his life you know like Spider-Man and he's not strong like Batman but as you go down to that list you look at Achilles and his goal okay we all desire to be adored in wealth Hercules and his gift we desire to be talented Spider-Man's control look we all know Peter Parker has got control issues but so have we and Batman and his fists we all want to be strong so we can face anything that comes before us and the final line there is and clearly I don't see myself up on that list I think those are the same words Arthur Miller used you know I don't measure up all these things that I feel like I have to be to be okay to be justified but I don't measure up so

I don't know about you I know Chris Martin is describing me okay but if you get a chance you know jump on Spotify later on and have listeners watch the video on YouTube because it comes through quite clearly what he's trying to describe so just to wrap up now on this on what we want to talk about today what we saw was Barnabas was put as an example of how we should be of how we should sacrifice our lives our possessions and our time for others and Ananias and Sapphira the warning of how we shouldn't be and we should look out for it but what made what gave Barnabas the power to put aside his own needs his own insecurities his own fears and be able to sell the land and give to those that are in need well two months prior to this incident on a hill on Calvary Christ died Christ who was supposed to be the ultimate superhero to free the Jewish people from the Roman occupation he died on a cross he was crucified but three days later he rose again and after that for 40 days up until the Pentecost he was with the disciples he was with this early church community teaching this early church community why he had to die you know Christ was meant to be the ultimate superhero but if you look at the superheroes we know of like Achilles Hercules Spider-Man Batman what do you see in common okay what you see in common is their superhero or their superpowers made them invincible right Hercules you probably have a picture of Brad Pitt right now from Troy but they were invincible the reason they were invincible is because they were superheroes okay but what we saw in Christ was a very different kind of superhero okay he wasn't invincible in fact he became man so he was vulnerable so he was killable why did he have to do that because if he came in strength to deal with sin we would have to die because the sin is within us we are the perpetrator of the sin and if he came in strength we would not be able to survive the reason why he had to be killable is because his superhero act was to swap places with us to substitute for our to carry our sins and

Barnabas understood that Barnabas saw that and what Barnabas was able to do is he saw every day what Christ did for him on the cross how Christ substituted for his place on the cross and little by little he was able to sacrifice he was able to sacrifice by selling his land he was able to sacrifice by really giving up his career and following Paul to take the gospel into the new world in fact ultimately it's not in the Bible but the historians believe Barnabas was martyred at the end of his life following Christ his superhero into the ultimate sacrifice so how do we do that how do we become a

follower in Barnabas footstep I think the key here is do we take time in our community do we take time ourselves to look up on that cross and really understand each day what did Christ do for us on that cross how he substituted and he stayed on that cross he became vulnerable he became killable so that we are able to start sacrificing so in closing I think I just want to say the way to achieve and the way to head down the road where Barnabas is is we've got to aim for heaven and you get the earth thrown in but if you aim for the earth you get neither one so let us pray Lord we just want to give you thanks we give you thanks that the apostle Luke was able to pen the book of Acts Lord that you warn us that there are dangers within there are dangers not only within the church but within our hearts that we are so hungry for recognition Lord that sometimes we are willing to compromise our integrity for it and Lord but we don't need to do that for you have already done that you've already given us the ultimate recognition by dying on the cross for us that we are able to be free from that continuous striving that we are so easily caught in in Hong [34 : 53] Kong in 2017 Lord we just thank you for the Holy Spirit that is able to shine a light upon your word that we can see what you have done for us and Lord that let us internalize that each day that we may be able to start sacrificing for those that are around us all this we lift up to you Lord in the name of our Lord Jesus Amen to you you you