

Honorable Giving

Now a man named 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. 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 to men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. (Act 5:1-6 NIV)

Over the last few times I have spoken to you we have looked at the Acts of the apostles in the early church. Jonny last week has also talked to us about giving. We have heard how in the early church some disciples sold their possessions to share with all in need.

Ananias and Sapphira sold their "land" and brought part (but not all) of the proceeds which they laid at the apostles feet. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with it. Peter even told him he could have done whatever he wanted with it: "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? " (Acts 5:4)

Paul in his epistle to the church in Corinth says "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver". (2Co 9:7 NIV)

God does not demand that we give up our possession, that He has lent to us – however he does say: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mat 6:19-21 NIV)

and

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mat 19:21-23 NIV)

Then what was Ananias guilty of? - Lying to God. Ananias had claimed that what he brought in was the entire proceeds from the sale. He thought he was lying to men, but Peter corrected him: "You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:4)

Why would Ananias make that claim? - He may have been jealous of and trying to copy Jesus, who in the Acts 4 is recorded selling his land and giving his entire proceeds to the church, and he had been named the "Son of Encouragement" by the apostles

If Ananias had simply brought in some money for the needs of others, he would have been fine and probably praised. But Ananias had wanted more, to be known as someone who had at least matched Jesus' devotion. His motivation wasn't to please God and help people, at least not purely, but (also) to glorify himself, while being led by greed to hold back some money, and by Satan to lie.

Ananias wife Sapphira agreed with this deception and when challenged shortly after this also lied and was also struck dead.

It was not Peter who killed Ananias and Sapphira – he simply prophesied what would happen, it was God that struck them down; we need to remember that God is all powerful, He is loving but also requires justice and if we challenge Him, it will go badly for us

We don't know the values of the land sold by Joses and Ananias and Sapphira. It's possible that Ananias and Sapphira's land was much larger and they had brought in more money than the entire proceeds from the sale of Joses' land. But the amount isn't what God cares about, since everything in the universe is His, and He just wants to see how we treat and what we do with what He has entrusted to our care. Joses brought in God's money to God out of a true desire to serve Him and fellow Christians, and was praised. Ananias and Sapphira brought in "their" money to be praised by men, out of pride, and were struck dead.

Think about why do you give "your" money, skills and time to God? Is it to please Him or to look good before others.

Jonny reminded us of the poor widow who put two very small copper coins, in a collection and that Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." (Mar 12:41-44 NIV)

If you love God, give to him of yourself, but only do it if it is for Him, otherwise it is meaningless, but if it is for Him you will be blessed. As Jonny said, this is not the American doctrine of giving to receive, because then it's not for Him truly, it's just to receive, but if you give for His sake, then blessings will follow.