

Amen.

Hallelujah. May it be Father, that we would give praise to you, our Savior, you our defender. In your name Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Well as you know as a church family we have been walking through Luke's letter, the book of Acts, and tracing the beginnings of this movement of these followers of Jesus, this Jesus who is our Savior and defender, and this movement of people following him. And we looked two weeks ago at what was going on with the miracles that were happening in the beginning of this movement. And we looked last week and addressed what was going on with some of the persecution that came to this movement as it began. And this morning we'll look at the next part of the story in Acts 4 verses 32 through chapter 5, verse 11. So I invite you to turn there, listen along or use the screens.

Listen along as we hear Luke's recording of the next part of this story, verse 32. He says all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but but they shared everything they had with great power. The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet. And it was distributed to anyone who who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, he sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles feet. 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 from 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 just to human beings, but to God.

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body and carried him out to be buried. After or about three hours later, his wife came in not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, tell me, is this the price that you and Ananias got for the land.

Yes, she said, that is the price. Peter said to her, how could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord? Listen, the feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out. Also, 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.

Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. So as we process this passage, first of all, you know, I wonder what thoughts are swirling through your mind as you listen to this passage. You know, the first. My reflex response is, I hear the first section and I think, wow, that's actually too good to be true. Every, you know, the church all sharing with one another.

And then I look at the second section with Ananias and Sapphira dying in judgment for what they did, and I think, ah, that's too terrible to be true. So neither of those I really have a category for I don't know what to do with. So I don't know how to apply it to my life. So I kind of move on. So I want to pause long enough at this passage not to just move on and, and to address some of these questions that this passage raises and then consider how we can apply it to our lives.

So here are the questions that I want to address with you. First of all is what does this teach us about a right relationship with our possessions? And secondly, why did Ananias and Sapphira have to die? So, first, what does this teach us about a right relationship with our possessions? The first thing I think about is how the superlatives initially confused me.

No one claimed their possessions as their own. They shared everything with each other. Really? Well, actually, no. When we slow down and take the passage in, we realize that Luke is using hyperbole here.

He's exaggerating to make a point. It's not meant to be taken literally. And as we slow down and realize that we know this is the case because of what he tells us about Ananias and Sapphira, who clearly prove that not everyone was sharing everything. So we've removed that obstacle. But the next one still that comes up is this.

How much of my possessions do I really need to. To share with others? So this question of how much of my possessions do I really need to share with others? The truth is, I probably ask this question with a mix of both earnestness and selfishness.

So I earnestly ask that question because I really do want to know how. How generous God wants me to be.

And I selfishly ask that question because I actually don't want to be any more generous than I need to be. Right? So let's look at this together. I want to mention three passages in the Bible that give us kind of an overall biblical framework for generosity. And then I want to take this passage that we're looking at and then ask how that speaks into how that fits into the overall framework of generosity.

So three quick passages that give us this overall framework for generosity. First is Leviticus 27, verse 30 and 32. And listen to God giving instruction to the Israelite people. He says, a tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord. It is holy to the Lord.

Every tithe of the herd and flock, every tenth animal that passes under the Lord, the shepherd's rod will be holy to the Lord. So he's clearly teaching the Israelite people to tithe from what they receive from the Lord. That's give a tenth of what they receive back for his work as an act of obedience and an act of worship. So we might read something like that in Leviticus. And we think, well, surely that was then, this is now.

It's different now. And we hear this interesting, subtle at first, but very clear teaching from Jesus in Matthew 23, verse 23. And he says, he's speaking to the Pharisees. He says, woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites, you give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin, but you have neglected the more Important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. Now listen to this.

You should have practiced the latter. So Jesus, in this very quick, subtle, but clear way, he is re emphasizing, yes, that which was taught in Leviticus about tithing, you should have practiced that Jesus is reinforcing. That still applies. And then he says, without neglecting the further. But the point being that Jesus reinforces that Old Testament teaching of tithing that's still in play for the believers at that time.

Then we look at passages like the letter of second Corinthians and we see Paul is gathering together the church to give gifts to the church in Jerusalem that is in need. And these gifts are over and above the tithes that they give. And they're collecting this money generously to give to those in need. So we have this overall framework of biblical generosity which is tithing out of obedience and worship and then giving generously to those in need, above and beyond that. And our question is, what does this passage add to that or how does it speak into that?

Verse 32 says this. All of the believers were one in heart and mind. So to be one in heart and mind. That's reminding us of what Luke wrote in 2:42 when he said they were devoted to fellowship. And you might remember that the word

fellowship is translated from the Greek word koinonia, which is close association.

It's emphasizing what is held in common and it's involving generous sharing. Luke has those two very aspects in mind in verses 32 through 35, that which they hold in common and generous sharing. So let's first just examine what is it that they hold in common? Their eyes are fixed. Their faith is placed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verse 33 says with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their eyes are fixed on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And God's grace is so powerfully at work in them. I love this simple connection. Where do we find grace when our eyes are fixed on the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Then that opens up this grace to be so powerfully working in us. This deep held commonality for the early church, eyes fixed on Jesus. That's what defines a follower of Jesus. It's not my occupation, it's not my spouse, not my kids, not my accomplishments, not my interest. Its eyes fixed on Jesus.

This deeply held commonality for the early church led New Testament writers to understand this community that they had as one family or one body. It's. It's interesting as I've been leaning in to try to understand this metaphor. A little more deeply this week, I've been helped to, in my understanding of my own relationship with my possessions as I think about. Okay, for the body metaphor. If we are one body, then it's true then that this.

You can fill in the blank. Let's say this Bible that I have, this Bible is no more or less belonging to my hand than it does to my foot or my leg or my eyes. This Bible belongs to this body, this person. Right. So.

Or I think about the family metaphor. Amanda and I are married. So when we become family, when I'm family with my wife, we become one. So the house I live in is no more or less my house. Then it doesn't belong more or less to me than it does to her.

This house is ours. The stuff in it is ours. Now, I'm sure there's some things in it that belong specifically to me more than Amanda. Like perhaps an iPad. There was a season where I had an iPad and Amanda didn't have an iPad.

It was my iPad. Right. Well, when I wasn't using my iPad, did Amanda have complete access to it? Of course. Because even though it was my iPad, it was.

It was ours. So scripture teaches that when Amanda and I got married, we became one. We are family. And do you know what we do as family? We share basically everything.

Not because someone told us to, not because we're trying to impress somebody. We share basically everything because we're family. We're one. That's what family does. That's what a body does.

So when the church is really living like family or like one body, they share basically everything. So as our eyes are fixed on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find such deep commonality with others whose eyes are fixed on the resurrection of Jesus Christ that our relationship with our possessions moves from this tight fist. It's mine. I need it for my comfort and my security to this open handed, it's ours for the use of this body, this family. Lord, use this to build up your church as you see fit.

So then we ask the question, well, sharing everything. I mean, Brentley, if we lived like that, think of all the misuses that would happen. I mean people who have needs, taking advantage of those with resources, people with resources, judging and looking down upon those with needs. Arrogance grows, deceit comes in. And so goes the complex reality of life in a broken world.

As soon as Luke describes this beautiful picture of the church sharing all their possessions, he steps right into describing how deceit creeps in with Ananias and Sapphira. But before we leave this first question, I want to summarize where we've landed and then we'll get to Ananias and Sapphira. So what does this teach us about a right relationship with our possessions? We hold them loosely and wait for God's nudge as to how to use them and building up the church. I think of the way that many of you do that in so many ways, specifically some of you with your financial gifts above and

beyond your tithing.

The Lord has brought in lots of financial resources and instead of holding onto it tight fisted, you allow tens of thousands of dollars to be shared and given back to this church family for the use of God's work in this place. That's a significant blessing and a sweet way in which you are living out the application of this passage. You know, I think also some of you with your homes, you could just keep your home. It's my space for my comfort and my things. But you view your home with an open hand and you invite people into your home, you share your home with them.

Some of you own an extra home, a vacation home. And I see the way that you view that home with an open hand and you use that to encourage the body and share beyond for your own purposes. I see some of you who own businesses and how you could just keep your business and your resources and your profit to yourself. But you look at your business open handed and you find ways that the resources in your business can be shared with to bless the body. I think it's good for us to reflect as we receive this challenge for us to think about, okay, what, what of our possessions are we holding on to tightly?

What of our possessions are we unwilling to, to share with the family, the body, the church? Or we can think about it on the positive side and say, what do you have that could be an amazing asset to God's work in his church, in his body, in this family of which you are a part. I love thinking both about the ways that you have shared your resources and the ways that we could continue to share to share our resources. So then the second question, this hard needling question is this. Why did Ananias and Sapphira have to die first?

We might think, well, what did they do wrong? This was a fabulously generous gift they gave. Probably no, definitely more generous than any one gift that I've given to the church. Probably more generous than, you know, a financial gift that many of us have given the church. So what did they do wrong?

And the answer we find in verse two, Luke points out that There was deceit involved. They were making this gift look like something that it wasn't. He further clarifies in verses three and four that they were lying to the Spirit and to the church, and they were following Satan. So then what was the result of this lying to the Spirit, lying to the church, following Satan, and the result was Ananias and Sapphira received from God instantaneous death as justice for their wrongdoing. Now, that makes my heart beat fast.

I don't know about you, but I mean, we see in verse 11, I mean, this was the response of the Church as well. Fear seized the whole church. So let's be honest, it doesn't matter whether we believe that this was right or wrong. If the consequence was instantaneous death caused by a holy God, that is terrifying. So some people might dismiss this and chalk it up to evidence that, well, God is not good.

But I want to pause on that long enough to point out that if this happened, I can't simply walk away and say, well, this shows that God's mean, so I'm going to ignore him. If this happened, either God is mean and he can kill us instantly, or God is just and he can kill us instantly. Either way, that's terrifying and we need to pause on it and then do something with it. Right. So Ananias and Sapphira, they lied to God, they lied to his people, and they followed the direction of Satan.

The question then is, does this rebellion deserve death? And we say, well, yes, well, kind of. But instantaneous death or it's just hard to palate. Right. And then I think of a passage that I know, Romans 6:23 says, for the wages of sin is death.

Okay, but instantaneous death for a lie, I mean, man, that's difficult. But man, that's clear. The only palatable answer I find comes when I look at the broader scope of Scripture. I see the rest of that. Romans 6:23, verse, for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Okay, that's hopeful. John 3:16. For God so loves the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish. That's hopeful. But have everlasting life.

So, yes, this rebellion deserves death according to Scripture. And yes, praise God, there's some kind of a way out for us who hear this. So the scope of Scripture shows me a few times when God judges instantaneously. And I see in Scripture

several times when he seems overly harsh. True.

And while I've not found a palatable and direct answer to each of those tragedies. If I'm honest, I have to acknowledge that those things come in the midst of a larger story that overwhelmingly presents God as one who pursues his people with love and long suffering patience. It's true that in a few situations disobedience is met with swift justice. But in all situations repentance is met with forgiveness. I don't want to lose that.

Yes, I'm going to repeat that. Yes, sometimes disobedience is met with swift justice, and that's confusing. But in all situations, repentance is met with forgiveness. I'm reading this and many of you are reading this great Lent devotional by Charles Martin called *It is Finished*. And one of my favorite things he writes is this.

He says, there is more mercy in Jesus than sin in us. There's more mercy in Jesus than sin in us. God pursues his people with love and long suffering patience. He ends up taking on the punishment, a very seemingly a very serious, seemingly harsh punishment, prolonged, agonizing punishment of death on the cross that sinners deserve. And by grace he invites sinners to place faith in him so that that punishment can take the place of theirs and they can live at peace with him and they can help bring his peace to the world.

There is more mercy in Jesus than sin in us.

The instant judgment of Ananias and Sapphira reminds me that God is not to be tested. So it's right for me to reflect, for us to reflect and consider. How am I testing God right now? How am I being deceitful with him or his people? How am I following Satan into temptation?

This passage, it warns against disobedience. It calls us to fix our eyes on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it invites us to experience the grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And remember, as your eyes are fixed on Jesus Christ, you experience an openness with others, a oneness with others whose eyes are fixed on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And your grip on your things, your possessions, will be loosened as you share with your body, your family.

I want us to sit with just these two questions and application points and even have some conversation with the Lord about them. And then the praise and worship team will come and close us in a moment. But these two things I want you to consider. Is this the challenge to open your hands, to be ready to release your possessions, your skills, your time, as God directs you by his spirit for the use of his work in his kingdom? I wonder what wonderful things God can do through the resources that he has shared with us that are meant to be shared with others.

And secondly, when we sin, repent and receive God's merciful forgiveness every time.

Father, we hold these challenges before you. We hold this teaching in Scripture before you. And we take a moment now to have a conversation with you about our possessions and to have a conversation with you about our sin. Father, hear these prayers.