



## **Sent - Part 5**

### **Sent Authentically**

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Last week, **Sent - Part 4**, the first miracle performed by the apostles was recorded, and they continued to boldly preach the Gospel in the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish religious authorities arrested Peter and John, demanding they halt their preaching. When the mission and message of Jesus Christ goes forward, it will be met with opposition. Christians are called to meet this opposition with boldness of heart and clarity of mission.

This week, we still study Acts 4:32-5:11. The early church is stronger than ever following Peter and John's release, but amid this seemingly perfect congregation, we encounter our first problem with someone *within* the Body. As we will soon see, there are two paths for the Christian represented within this passage. The first is Ananias, who walked a path of hypocrisy, reluctance, and ultimately death. The second is Barnabas, who walked a path of authenticity, surrender, and ultimately life.

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## **BELONG**

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
- What is something the group can be praying about?
- What is something the group can praise this week?
  
- Have you ever met a hypocrite? What don't you like about them?
- Does the Church ever feel hypocritical to you? How so?
- Before reading, what does it mean to you to be an authentic Christian?

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## BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

### Acts 4:32-5:11 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." <sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." <sup>10</sup> Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the

young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement” according to the text, is introduced to the reader for the first time in this passage. Barnabas will later lead a very important ministry in the early church, his name being mentioned at least twenty-five times throughout the book of Acts and another five times in the Epistles. For now, however, he is to be understood as a generous giver, one who Ananias and Sapphira will envy. Considering the context, you might think this passage is about tithing or giving to the church. Although these are certainly considerations from the text, there is something bigger going on here. Luke is providing an example to follow and an example to avoid concerning the totality of the Christian life, not just giving. Barnabas represents true authentic Christian living and Ananias the reverse.

## **Two Paths**

### **1. Hypocrisy, Reluctance, and Death**

In a way, this passage authenticates the Word of God as being true; if I were editing the story of the early church to make Christianity seem perfect, I surely would have left this part out! Yet Luke leaves it in because it really did happen, and the story acts as an encouragement as well as a warning.

First, we look to Ananias and Sapphira. They represent people who have not really changed on the inside through becoming satisfied with all God has for them in Christ. Rather, they want a place in the church where they can be clearly seen and praised for their works, but they are reluctant to give up everything as others have. For this reason, Ananias and Sapphira only give to the church part of the proceeds from the sale of their land, not the full amount. Considering the incredible acts of generosity recorded up to this point, whereby people gave up *all* their possessions, it should strike the reader as odd that Ananias only gave *some*.

The story is told in a bit of a strange way. The text says Ananias held back from the church part of the proceeds from his land and Peter confronts Ananias about it, but at first glance there doesn't appear to have been any wrongdoing. Thus far, the generosity of the first Christians has been entirely voluntary. If Ananias doesn't want to give the full amount for his land, there is nothing to suggest he must. In fact, Peter somewhat makes this point in his reply, noting that the land was owned by Ananias before the sale, and the proceeds he received were also equally his to do with as he pleased.

However, the sin committed becomes clear as you read on. Peter asks Ananias' wife, Sapphira, if the amount the church received was the full amount the land was sold for, and she replies yes. The issue here is Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about how much they sold the land for so they could pocket the rest for themselves.

Ananias and Sapphira could best be understood as hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, that one does not really possess. Based on the story, they seem to model this for us very clearly. Ananias and Sapphira had the appearance of righteousness, but in reality, they were frauds. They wanted to be recognized like Barnabas, but they aren't willing to do what God is calling them to do. Instead, they are comfortable faking it and hoping others won't notice. They wanted the glory without the sacrifice.

"Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not." – **George MacDonald**

What is described next is not a case of early church discipline. Peter says that Ananias had not only lied to the church, but had lied to the Holy Spirit Himself. For this reason, both Ananias and Sapphira drop dead right where they stand. God's personal judgment is passed in this moment as a stunning warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later.

The folly of Ananias and Sapphira mirrors that of the Pharisees who Jesus rebuked.

Matthew 23:25-26 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

That's what true faith means – an authentic change of your heart so that your acts of love are free – they are what you want to do, not what you feel obliged to do.

## **2. Authenticity, Surrender, and Life**

The world is looking for authenticity from a church that embraces and lives out the Gospel. Without this, the message is clouded, even if that message is grounded in truth. Barnabas represents the person who is satisfied with everything God has for him in

Christ. Because of his sincere heart that seeks to please God, Barnabas gladly gives up everything he owns to help the cause of the early church. This is the kind of heart that Jesus desires of us; not one that puts on a show for all to see, but one that genuinely wants to serve Him and others.

Barnabas' part of the story is not lengthy. Compared to Ananias and Sapphira, Barnabas is just a blip in the narrative, but that's because the authentic Christian isn't trying to be noticed.

The authentic Christian doesn't seek praise or recognition but is content to be a part of the story God is telling rather than the focus. Our fear should be living our entire life without purpose, being about ourselves and missing out on the grace and abundant life of Christ.

We let things like fame or clout cloud our judgment instead of seeking first to advance and protect the message and ministry. Trusting in God means holding the things of this world more loosely and holding onto Him more tightly. It involves full surrender, the likes of which are talked about in the Psalms.

Psalm 51:16-17 (ESV)

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

This kind of heart leads to surrender and obedience. In the end, life might not be pretty or glamorous on this earth, but we will have our eternal reward secured.

To be like Barnabas, sometimes we need to ask for help. We often wait too long before we ask for help, but the early church was built upon the radical interdependence of its members. For us, this involves forming relationships with others built around following Jesus, and these can admittedly be hard to find, but they are absolutely necessary to the Christian walk. We need authentic Christ-centered relationships to walk through difficult times with us.

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## BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Do you find the punishment for Ananias and Sapphira's sin too extreme? Why did God judge them in this way?
- Of the two paths, what path do you seem to go down most often? The path of Ananias or the path of Barnabas?
  - What is an area in your life where you are being hypocritical?
  - What is an area in your life where you are being authentic?
- What do you think caused Ananias and Sapphira to walk down the path they chose? How can those pitfalls be avoided?
- Based on the passage, what does it mean to lie to the Holy Spirit? How is this different from lying to regular people? Why is it so serious?