

Generosity, Reputation and the Gospel **Acts 4:32-5:11**

In this passage Luke gives us a picture of the incredible community life the early church was experiencing, but things were far from rosy in the garden.

Letting Go and Holding On

Two things were going on in this community. Firstly, there was the ever-tightening bond of fellowship. But secondly there was a loosening grip on money. The two went hand-in-hand. An attitude of 'these possessions are mine' was being replaced by 'you, my friends, are mine.' And Luke gives Barnabas as a great example of this attitude.

The community Luke describes is one both Jews and Greeks aspired to. But in many ways, so do we: a world where poverty and greed are no more. Luke says that community could be found in the church.

How did they get there? It was through believing the gospel: the death and resurrection of Jesus. That he loved us so much that he gave himself for us. When we believe that it affects how we give ourselves to others. But also his resurrection tells us that we too will be raised, and resurrection day will be reward day. When we believe in the resurrection it alters the reward you are living for.

An Example Not to Follow

After Barnabas comes the bad example of Ananias and Sapphira. They did exactly what Barnabas did, sold a piece of land and gave it to the church, except they kept some back for themselves. And yet that is not why they are judged. They die because they lied: they tried to appear more generous than they really were, without the cost. What mattered to them was their reputation, their image. But Peter sees past the mask and the powers of darkness trying to destroy the church from the inside.

But why does God take this so seriously? Because if their behavior became the norm it would destroy all that the Spirit was doing in the church. Hypocrisy kills Christian witness, and spiritual superficiality kills true fellowship.

But this is deeply challenging to us, because none of us could claim to be better than them. We are all guilty of embracing this idol of image, of wanting to appear better than we really are. So what hope is there for us?

The Gospel and Your Reputation

What lies behind the need to appear better than we are? It's our deep insecurity. That we long to be loved and accepted, but we think that if people really knew us they would turn from us. So we put on a mask.

The good news of the gospel is that God sees you as you are, he lifts the mask and he loves you. To bring you to himself, he gave fully of himself. At the cross Jesus held nothing back. He let go of everything that he might take hold of you. When you understand his love for you it begins to change you: you become less like Ananias and Sapphira, and more like Barnabas.