

June 30, 2013

Church Planting
The \$10,000,000 Challenge
Acts 5:1-10

Opening words: You know the story. I have told you several times. Jesus was executed on a Friday. Everyone thought it was over. However, everyone was wrong. It was just beginning. On Sunday morning a few women showed up at his tomb to pay their final respects. They made a discovery that changed the world. Jesus was alive! For forty days he walked the face of this world in his resurrected state. During that sacred time period, he did two things. First, he proved his was a bodily resurrection. In other words, he wasn't a ghost. Second, he taught about the Kingdom of God. As he ascended in heaven, Jesus ascended into heaven and entrusted the ministry to the disciples. On their own, the task of evangelizing the world seemed impossible, but when the Holy Spirit arrived everything seemed possible. The church was created and the divine helper was changing lives. For example, on a single day 3,000 people claimed the name of Jesus and were saved. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching's, the fellowship and to worship. The apostles were changing too. They were learning how to trust the Holy Spirit. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Peter healed a man who had been crippled from birth. For this act of kindness, Peter and John were arrested and interrogated by the Sanhedrin. Upon their release the church prayed. That leads us to today.

The text for today reveals a problem in the early church. The situation revolves around a man named Ananias. He and his wife, Sapphira, were keeping the custom of the early church. They had sold a piece of property and gave the profit to the church to help those who were in need. However, this time not all the money is given. Ananias and Sapphira keep some of the money for themselves. That proved to be a deadly mistake. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Acts 5:1-10. I have called this entire sermon series *Church Planting*. I have called this message, *The \$10,000,000 Challenge*.

Acts 5:1-10 ¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² 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.

³ 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? ⁴ 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."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ 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."

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

What would you do for \$10,000,000? That was the question James Patterson and Peter Kim asked countless Americans. Their findings found their way into a 1991 book called *The Day America Told the Truth*. What would you do for \$10,000,000? According to them two-thirds of Americans would do at least one of these things:

- 25% of the individuals polled said they would abandon their family.
- 23% of the individuals polled said they would become prostitutes for a week.
- 16% of the people polled said they would give up their American citizenship.
- 16% of the people polled said they would leave their spouse
- 10% said of the people polled said they would withhold testimony to enable a murderer go free.
- 7% of the people polled said they would murder a stranger
- 3% of the people polled said they would put up their children for adoption

Those findings came in 1991. How much uglier do you think those findings would be today? Those findings tell me two things. First, there is a surplus of desperate people in our land. Money seems to have a death grip on us. Second, there is a shortage of integrity in our land. What would you do for \$10,000,000? How many people do you know of true integrity? Do the people in your life question your integrity? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves in the fifth chapter of Acts. To say the least it is an unusual piece of scripture. It is a difficult piece of scripture to understand. A couple in the early church, Ananias and Sapphira, sell a piece of land and give money to the church. How can giving money to the church be a bad thing? I will be honest with you. I have never rejected a church donation of any size. However, they gave to the church and for their act of generosity they died. I am shocked every time I read this story. I am not alone. We are told in verse eleven the whole church was shocked. But, what is this shocking story trying to tell us? What is this shocking story trying to teach us? I have wrestled with this story and I am convinced of one thing. That fact that money is involved blinds us to the divine truth. The story has nothing to do with money or stewardship. However, the story has everything to do with integrity. It warns us about being a hypocrite.

Let us look at the story together. The couple, Ananias and Sapphira, pretended they gave it all. In verse seven Sapphira said they surrendered all the profit from the sale of the land to the church. There is no other way to say it. They lied. They lied because they wanted false praise. They wanted that applause from the crowd. They wanted that pat on the back from the church. The point is not the money. They could have kept all the money. They could have kept part of the money. After all, it was their money. No one would have blamed them. Life has always been expensive. The problem is they pretended to be something they weren't. Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites and the church will not tolerate hypocrites. There is no harsher punishment than death. Do the people in your life consider you a hypocrite? Do the people in your life consider you a person of integrity?

Today, I want to take the high road. I don't want to hypocrisy. I want to talk about integrity. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be a person of integrity. You must be a person of high moral and professional standards. Listen to what I am about to say. Your integrity will not save your soul. After all, we are only saved by the precious blood of Jesus. However, your integrity will enhance your witness. Our world has a surplus of hypocrites; our world has a shortage of integrity. If you want to be a person of integrity then there are three things you need to remember. It is those three things I want to look at today. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**" What would you do for \$10,000,000?

Be Honest

Years before Abraham Lincoln entered politics he lived in a New Salem, Illinois. He had a variety of jobs. He once worked in a general store. One day a guy came in and purchased a few items. Once the transaction was complete Lincoln discovered he had short changed the customer. It was only a few cents so he tried to find him after work. It was only then that he discovered that the customer lived 17 miles out of town. Lincoln walked the enter way. As the story of that experienced spread Lincoln was given the name "Honest Abe." Do the people in your life consider you honest? Before you answer, consider the fact that honesty is such an elusive thing.

As you know, I have two daughters, Sarah and Anna. They are both remarkable young women in their own way. They are both completely different. They are both completely honest. Sarah leads with her heart; Anna leads with her brain. If you want to feel better about yourself then you talk to Sarah. If you need the absolute truth you talk to Anna. Several years ago, I was at home dressing for some activity. I walked downstairs and looked at Sarah and said to her, "How do I look?" Sarah answered, "You look great!" Just then Anna walked into the room. I asked her the same question, "How do I look?" She said, "Do you want me to be honest?" I said, "Yes!" (That wasn't the right answer.) Anna answered, "Your race is red. Your nose is big. Your hair is messed up. Your shirt is wrinkled. Your pants are too long and your shoes are old." She ended by saying, "You may want to consider a breath mint." I looked at Sarah and said, "Is she telling me the truth? Why didn't you tell me?" She said with a sheepish look on her face, "I didn't want

to hurt your feelings." Has anyone here ever told a white lie to protect someone's feeling? Has anyone here ever told a white lie to protect someone's feelings? I am not talking about feelings; I am talking about personal gain. Would you lie for some personal gain? Would you lie for \$10,000,000?

First, if you want to be a person of integrity then be honest. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with others. Be honest with God. In the scripture lesson for today Ananias lied. He wasn't honest. He didn't tell the truth. He didn't lie to protect his money. It was his money. He lied gain the popularity of the people. He lied to look generous. If you want to be a person of integrity then be honest. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Be True

Charles Swindoll tells the story about a man who bought two chicken dinners late one afternoon. The attendant at the fast food outlet, however, inadvertently gave him the proceeds from the day's business--a bucket of money (much of it cash) instead of fried chicken. The man didn't have a clue. It was only when he arrived at the picnic spot with his date that he opened the bag. It was at that moment they discovered the \$800. The man and his date did the honest thing. They put the money back into the bag and drove back to the restaurant. He walked in and handed the money filled bag to the manager. He said, "I think this is yours." Obviously, the manager was relieved and thrilled to death. He looked at the man and said, "Don't go anywhere. Let me call the newspaper. I'm going to have your picture put in the local paper. You must be the most honest man in this community." The man begged him not to call the newspaper. He point to his date and said, "This young woman isn't my wife. She is married to someone else. I am married to someone else. Our spouses don't need to know we are together." One can be honest and still not have integrity. If you want to be a person of integrity then you must be true. In other words, you must keep your word. Would you break your word for \$10,000,000?

Second, if you want to be a person of integrity then be true. In other words, keep your word. At some point in his life Ananias became a Christian. He believed the Gospel message and understood the power of the resurrection. He celebrated the fact he was going to heaven. He said the right things. The problem was he didn't do the right things. He didn't keep his word. He wasn't true. When was the last time you broke your word? If you want to be a person of integrity then be true. If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Be Loyal

A young man in the army confided to his padre that he never went about with another girl if he was within fifty miles of home, his loyalty went fifty miles. How far does your loyalty go? Would you break your loyalty for \$10,000,000?

Third and finally, if you want to be a person of integrity then keep your promises. In other words, be a loyal person. There is no way you can turn this story and tell me

Ananias was loyal. These were the early days of the church. Everything was new. Everyone was a charter member; everyone was a new member. It could not have been that long. Ananias had just accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He had just promised to live his life. That promise didn't last long. If you have ever sat near the death bed of a loved one then you understand loyalty. If you want to be a person of integrity then be loyal, keep your promises. If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

Look at the story with me one more time. Ananias was not a man of integrity. He was a hypocrite. His word meant nothing! He knew nothing about honesty! He knew nothing about being true! He knew nothing about loyalty! In the end, the only thing he brought to the people in his life was sadness. His wife died and his friends were filled with fear. Is there a hypocrite in the house? Is there a person of integrity in the house? What do you bring out in others?

I began this message with a blank piece of Paper. In my mind, I had the word integrity. As I looked at that blank piece of paper and wrote one word, George. Many of you know George. Some of you have known George for a long time. We haven't seen George in about a year. It is hard for him to get to church on his own and he is too proud to ask for help. I am no different from you. I have always considered him a great man of integrity. He was the spirit of this congregation for many years. No one can question his honesty or his loyalty. When George gave you his word, it was like signing a legal contract. Being tempted by \$10,000,000 would not have changed him. He was one of the first people I met at this church. He was actually the Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairman when I came to Western Reserve. Maybe it is for that reason I never want to disappoint him? Or, maybe I didn't want to disappoint him because he is such a great man of integrity? He brought the best out in me. Do you bring the best out in others? That is why people of integrity are so important. In our world, we need everyone to be at their best. H. Jackson Brown Jr. once said, "*Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring, and integrity, they think of you.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" What would you do for \$10,000,000?