

The Church on the Move: Strange Grace

Acts 5:1-11 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 10 July 2022

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Do you have any stories of silliness or mischief from your childhood that you got in trouble for?

Worship: [Psalm 51](#) (Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God's invitation?)

Sermon Summary for [Acts 5:1-11](#) (Read aloud before reading the sermon summary.)

Our Father is the God of grace. As sinners who cannot save ourselves, our faith is grounded in the truth that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but so the world might be saved through Him ([John 3:16-17](#)). But what is grace? As Sinclair Ferguson wrote, *“In essence, it is Jesus Himself.”* And we are the church of grace, called – as those who have been blessed by God's unmerited favor – to extend this grace out into the world. But sometimes grace comes in very strange packages. Grace has come into the world and is spreading... but then there is this jarring account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They shun God's grace and receive swift judgment for it. Stories like this remind and warn us, “Don't go that way; there is another, grace-filled path for you.”

[This strange grace encourages us to put on the generosity of Jesus](#) // Just before this story, we hear that *“with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection, and great grace was upon them all”* ([Acts 4:33](#)). Generous, sacrificial care is being given to those in need. We all want to be generous like this. Generosity is a noble, admirable trait... yet it can be so difficult to embody. How do we adopt a generous lifestyle? By first taking to heart the generosity of God. In giving Jesus to us, He gave us His best. As this staggering generosity overwhelms us, we respond by giving generously, because we understand we have already received more than we ever could offer. Then we see generosity as an opportunity to engage in God's Kingdom work. Grace is up to the challenge; God will provide an overflow of it so we can spill it out of our lives in generosity ([2 Cor 9](#)).

[This strange grace urges us to live authentically before Jesus and His people](#) // It's easy to mistake Ananias and Sapphira's sin as being their stinginess. But beneath this was their attempt to be deceitful and lie to God. They wanted credit before God and man for being more generous and sacrificial than they truly were. There's certainly some level of arrogance (or foolishness) in believing they could fool God. Ultimately though, as NT Wright wrote, this act was them saying they didn't trust God to look after His world. Ananias and Sapphira wouldn't trust in the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work. But this is an opportunity for us: to be true, authentic and honest with ourselves. The grace of Christ invites us to the authenticity of confession before God and the confidence of forgiveness from Him. And the resulting meekness and honesty in us will be a light to the world.

[This strange grace gifts us the fear of God](#) // It's easy (and more comfortable) to ignore stories like this. Immediate, strong judgment from the Almighty can be terrifying. But ignoring such stories is akin to ignoring health problems or the warning light on a car: it's generally not a good strategy. What then is God doing here? At the time of this story, God's grace is breaking out into the world – His power on radical display. And God's swift judgment shows us that such repudiation and betrayal of that grace will not be tolerated. His people will not be marked by that. It's important to remember that God reacts this way only a handful of times throughout the Bible. He is ever patient with us. These stories therefore serve as strong reminders, urging us toward a healthy (and necessary) fear of the Lord. This begins with trusting His wisdom over our own. Then, it moves to acknowledging His holiness and power – that the judgment we deserve is not just temporal, but eternal. This fear produces overwhelming gratitude at our Father's staggering and continued grace. And it is grace that points us back to our Savior.

Discussion Questions *(You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.)*

This strange grace encourages us to put on the generosity of Jesus

- Reread [Acts 4:33-37](#) together. What stands about this story?
- What would it be like to live in a large community where all people's needs are taken care of (the sick, the poor, the needy, the broken-hearted)?
 - What makes this reality so hard to come by?
 - Why is this type of grace considered strange? If this is strange, what's normal?

This strange grace urges us to live authentically before Jesus and his people

- Biblical scholar, FF Bruce, noted, "an act of deceit interrupts the progress of God and his people." What was the heart behind Ananias and Sapphira's act? What did they hope to achieve?
 - What type of heart does God ask for from his children?
- What has helped you to be more generous? What gets in the way of generosity? What makes it difficult?
 - Are there areas of your life you feel pushed to be more generous?

This strange grace gifts us the fear of God

- What is your reaction to stories where God appears harshly judgmental? Does God acting this way conflict with the grace we see elsewhere in the Bible? How do you explain this to those who don't follow Christ?
 - Paul noted there's roughly ten occurrences of such strict judgment in the Bible. Though these can be difficult to read for some, those yearning for God's justice in the world might be wondering: Why aren't there more of these stories in the Bible? And why not more often in modern life?
- On the other hand, some would use this story to point to a ruthless, cruel God but in each of these stories God's radical grace is also on display? Where in this story is God's radical grace?
 - Where in your life are you seeing acts of radical grace – either from God to you or to others? Or: as an outpouring to others from your own understanding of God's grace to you?

Prayer

This week's Prayer Guide for personal or group use is [HERE](#).

Engage & Experience: Prayer & Gratitude

How have you grown in your prayer life this year? What role does gratitude have in your prayers? When have you been blessed by the prayers of others on your behalf? Take some time to reflect on what you may have learned about prayer this year and where you would still like to grow. Share with your group and leader(s).

Leaders: Please give pertinent feedback to the CG Team at community@pacificcrossroads.org.