



“Artificial Faith”

Act 5:1-16

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Anaheim Hills, CA | RockCC.com

19:02

Good Morning. Are you in the mood for a question? Here's the question. What are your favorite passages of scripture? What are your favorite passages of scripture? Maybe Psalm 23. Maybe Matthew 5:7, the Sermon on the Mount. Romans 8, Life in the Spirit, Heirs with Christ. 1 Corinthians 13, the Love Chapter. We come to a passage of today that is probably not on anybody's list of favorites. I remember the first time I read this passage. I think I was a teenager, and it scared me, and it still does. If this passage makes you uncomfortable this morning, you're in very good company because it terrified everybody in the new church, everybody in Jerusalem and everybody in the surrounding area that heard about it. So, with that, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

20:14

Father, as we open our Bible, we ask your Holy Spirit now to open our ears so we can hear your words, your voice of truth, and help us receive it and bring it into our hearts so it transforms us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen. If you'll please turn to Acts, chapter 5, verses 1 to 16. If you want to use the Bible under the chair in front of you, we're on page 1119. You know, in the first four chapters of the book of Acts, it's been like we've been riding this wonderful wave of excitement, right? We've seen the Holy Spirit perform amazing miracles to the apostles. Peter has been on fire with his sermons and the new church has grown by the thousands.

21:13

Not only has the church grown in numbers, but it has grown in the depth of the people's love for the Lord and for each other. The members of the new church were a family like RockCC. They worshiped together, prayed together, ate together, took communion together, and they gave their full attention to the teaching of God's word. Before we begin our passage in chapter 5, let's read together the end of chapter 4 to remind ourselves where we left off, because it flows directly into chapter 5. So let's read together Acts, chapter 4, starting at verse 32. *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. And with great power...*

22:13

...The apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great

grace was upon them all. 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 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. The believers in the new church were of one heart and one soul. They loved Jesus and each other so much that those who had property and houses sold them and they brought the money to lay at the apostles' feet.

23:10

So if anybody had a need in the church, the money was there to meet that need. All we see in the new church is this supernatural unselfishness. Until we arrive in chapter 5, which is our passage today, let's read verses 1 and 2 together. *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, 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.* Have you ever heard someone say they don't go to church because it's full of hypocrites? A hypocrite is someone who pretends to have faith they don't really have. A hypocrite puts on a false appearance of faith. The first church was certainly not full of hypocrites, but it did have at least two. And their names were Ananias and Sapphira.

24:21

Ananias and Sapphira were in this amazing church. They saw people in their church selling their lands and their houses and laying all the money at the feet of the apostles. They saw people completely surrendering themselves and their possessions to the Lord. They saw people doing what we just sang about this morning. All to Jesus I surrender all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him in his presence daily live. I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all. Did Ananias and Sapphira surrender all? No, they faked it. They faked it. They only pretended to surrender all so they would look good in the eyes of the apostles and the other members of the congregation. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property.

25:27

But instead of giving all the money to the Lord as they apparently had promised, they secretly agreed to keep back some of the proceeds for themselves. When Ananias brought his offering to the Lord and laid it at the feet of the apostles, did Ananias receive the praise and admiration he wanted? Let's read on verses 3 to 4. *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself, part of the proceeds of the land? 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."* Before we talk about Ananias, let's talk about Peter just for a second.

26:29

Peter's spiritual growth has been stunning in the book of Acts, hasn't it? The way the Lord transformed Peter means there is hope for all of us. Peter used to be the disciple of Jesus that usually jumped to the wrong conclusions, right? And he misread situations. But now Peter was full of the Holy Spirit, and he saw right through Ananias' deception. Peter could see that Ananias was not being led by the Holy Spirit. Ananias was being led by Satan. So, what exactly was Ananias' sin? It was not that he and his wife sold some land and kept some of the money for themselves. Peter made that painfully clear in verse 4, where Peter seemed exasperated. Peter seemed super frustrated with Ananias. Peter was like, Ananias, dude, why are you lying? It's so stupid. The land is yours to keep or sell.

27:43

The money you made from the sale of the land is yours to do whatever you want to do with it. So why in the world have you decided to turn your offering to God into a lie to God? Ananias' sin was that he lied about how much money he was giving to the Lord. But his deeper, even more devastating sin was his spiritual hypocrisy, his deceitfulness. Let's remind ourselves of what the Bible says about the right way to give to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 9 and verse 7. *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* Ananias could have, should have just come to the apostles and said, my wife and I sold a piece of property, and we want to give this part of it to the Lord.

28:52

What a joyful blessing that would have been for them. But instead, Ananias lied. And who did he lie to. It's there in the text? He did not lie to the apostles, and he did not lie to the church. Peter said, you have not lied to us, you have lied to God. This description of sin should send a cold chill through our bodies. Ananias' sin, your sin, my sin, every sin we commit is no small matter because every sin we commit is against God. We need to let that sink in deeply, don't we? And not forget it. Every sin we commit is a sin against God. When Peter confronted Ananias with his sin, what did Ananias have to say for himself? Did Ananias admit it or deny it? He didn't say anything. Why? Let's Read on. Verses 5 to 6.

30:13

When Ananias heard these words, the words of Peter, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. Before Ananias could say a word, he fell down and died. And great fear filled everyone that heard about it. I should think so. I should think so. What if just a few minutes ago, during our time offering, you saw a man of our church drop some money in the basket and then you saw one of our pastors rebuke him and the man dropped dead on the spot? How would you be feeling when they brought the offering basket to you? We've seen lots of fun miracles in the Book of Acts, but this is a terrifying miracle.

31:15

And it reminds us and it shows us beyond a shadow of a doubt that our loving Lord is also our holy and righteous judge. Let's turn to Hebrews, chapter 12. It'll be on the screen. Verses 28 to 29. *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is just a sweet man upstairs.* Is that what it says? *Our God is a consuming fire.* God is absolutely, perfectly loving, patient, kind and merciful. But our God is not to be trifled with. He's not to be disrespected, ignored or taken for granted. God must be the focal point of our lives. He must be worshiped with awe and reverence. Awe. That word, awe means with admiration, with wonder and the utmost respect. And what does reverence mean?

32:37

Reverence means to worship God with holy fear. Jesus talked about holy fear. Let's read what Jesus himself said to us in Luke chapter 12. Jesus said, *I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.* Yes, *I tell you, fear him!* Who has the power to kill and cast into hell? Jesus does, because he is God, and he has all authority and power to judge the living and the dead. Let's look at John 5:22. Jesus speaking again. Says, *For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.*

33:45

It is much more pleasant to think about Jesus saving souls than it is to think about Jesus casting people into hell. But our passage today and the word of God always tells us the truth

about ourselves and about our God, even if it's difficult to hear sometimes. So, the Bible tells us everyone has an appointment with death. And after death, everyone has an appointment with Jesus. That appointment is for judgment. That appointment is to be cast into hell or welcomed into heaven. How can we know for sure we will go to heaven? Well, we need to be sure. We have put our total faith in Jesus before we show up for that appointment.

34:49

When we have put our wholehearted faith in Jesus, then Jesus our judge, is also Jesus our Savior, who is the only one with the power and the authority to save us from hell and bring us into heaven. Here's the question you may have been wondering, did Ananias go to hell or heaven? We're not told. But the text worries me that Ananias did not go to heaven. I even talked to Pastor Drew about this. We compared notes. Remember chapter 4 that we read together? It ended by introducing Barnabas as an example of someone with real faith that sold his land and gave all the proceeds to the Lord. Then the very next sentence says, but in comparison to Barnabas, but a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira only pretended to give all the proceeds of their land sale to the Lord.

35:58

The Bible compares and contrasts Barnabas with Ananias. Barnabas was a believer with real faith. Ananias was a hypocrite with phony faith. Jesus talked about false faith in another very scary passage of Scripture. Let's turn, while we're at it, let's turn to Matthew chapter 7, Sermon on the Mount, verses 21 to 23, to see what Jesus said about false faith. Jesus said, *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, the day of judgment, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."* Yeah. Whoa.

37:09

Jesus said, there will be many hypocrites that stand before him in judgment. They will be men and women who claimed to be Christians. They will have done Christian things, even impressive Christian things. But Jesus will know they did their Christian things for selfish reasons, like Ananias did. Jesus will know these people never gave their whole hearts to him. So, Jesus will send them away to the place that is not heaven. I am so sorry Ananias chose to fake his faith instead of just turning to Jesus in real faith. Maybe Ananias thought he would have time to truly trust in Jesus later on. He was dead wrong. Remember what Peter said in chapter 3 when he talked to a huge crowd sinners that had rejected Jesus and called for his crucifixion? Let's look back at Acts 3:19.

38:27

Peter, talking to this massive crowd of sinners, said, *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.* Completely erased. If Ananias had repented of his sin and given his heart to Jesus, his sin would have been blotted out. It would have been completely forgiven. But Ananias ran out of time before he could do that. We never know. We never know how much time we have to get things right with God. The best decision we can make in our whole lives, the best decision you and I can ever make in our whole lives is to repent of our sins now and put our faith in Jesus now. And when we do, we have this incredible promise of God. Romans 8:1. This incredible promise of God. Look at that. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

39:38

No condemnation. This is the greatest news in the whole world. If you are trusting in Jesus today, you have nothing to fear on Judgment Day. When you stand before Jesus as a sinner saved by real faith. Jesus will not say to you, I never knew you. No, Jesus will say, I have always known you. Since before the foundation of the world I've known you. And I've already

prepared a special place with me for you now welcome to everlasting joy. Okay, probably should return to our text. Let's go back to Acts chapter 5 and it's been a while. Let's reread verses 5 to 6 to remember where we were hours ago. *When Ananias heard these words of Peter, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.*

40:46

The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. In case anyone thinks that poor old Ananias merely fainted, well, he got buried, so he was definitely deceased. The Jewish custom was to bury the dead on the same day the person dies. So, Ananias was wrapped up in grave clothes and buried immediately. You know, when I read this, I feel sorry for Ananias. But how would you like to be one of these young men of the church that was given this painful assignment to go bury Ananias. Ananias lied to God and died. What happened to his wife? We haven't forgotten about her. Let's go, verse 7. *After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* In ancient Judaism, there were various settings where men and women were kept separate.

41:55

So this must have been one of those situations. Ananias came alone with his offering. Then, about three hours later, after the young men had probably had time to bury him, Sapphira, his wife, was invited to come in and come before the apostles. It's interesting, isn't it, that no one from the church ran to tell Sapphira what happened to her husband. It seemed like everybody in the church was in shock and probably nobody wanted to get near this couple. When Sapphira entered the room, she had no idea what had happened to her husband. She was probably looking forward to a warm reception from the apostles. Verse 8. *And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much."* Peter asked Sapphira, did you? And the word you here is plural.

43:05

So he said, did you means, did you and your husband sell your land for this amount of money? And then Peter named the amount of money that Ananias had offered to the Lord. Sapphira stuck to the lying script that she and her husband had rehearsed. So, she said, yep, that's it. That's the full price we received. All right. That's it right there. Verses 9 to 11. How do you think this is going to go? *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." Immediately, she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.*

43:57

When the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. Peter said, Sapphira, why did you and your husband decide it was a good idea to see if you could deceive the Lord, the Holy Spirit of God? Look over at the door. Do you see those young men coming in? They just buried your husband, and now they're coming to carry you out too. And we see immediately Sapphira died, and she fell at Peter's feet. And I wonder, do you think she fell on the offering that her husband Ananias had left at Peter's feet just a few hours before. Verse 11 repeats the fact that great fear came upon everyone. When the Bible repeats something, it's for emphasis.

45:05

So we all need to understand that all the believers in the church and all of the unbelievers outside the church were terrified when they heard about what God did through Peter to a couple of hypocrites. How should we feel right now? Now that we've heard these things this morning, how should we feel? Should we shrug it off and say, well, that was a long time ago, let's just close our Bibles and have a nice day. Or should we fear? Should we fear that there could be some hypocrisy hiding inside us? Maybe our faith is not as real as we pretend it to

be. Maybe we have secret sins we need to repent of now, not later. Maybe we've taken the Lord for granted and forgotten he is an all-consuming fire.

46:18

Years after the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the believers in the church at Philippi. Let's look at one verse from Philippians 2:12. Paul wrote, *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed (the word of God), so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with...* a casual attitude, is that what it says? *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* These words on the screen are not directed to everyone. They are directed only to believers. They are directed only to the people Paul calls beloved, to the people of God who are already saved through faith in Jesus. Jesus did all the work on the cross to save us. Jesus did all the work on the cross to save us. But each believer has work to do.

47:25

You and I have work to do. Not to earn our salvation, but to live out our salvation. That is our work. We need to live out our salvation. Our obedience, our obedience to the Lord proves we're not hypocrites. Our obedience to the Lord proves our faith is real. If we say Jesus is our Lord, we need to live like it. Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. We need to actively, constantly pursue obedience to Jesus. And not just when we're here at church, but even more so when we're away from church. Obeying Jesus must be the highest priority of our life. This is what real faith looks like. So we need to seriously ask ourselves, with fear and trembling, is this what my faith looks like? Is this what your faith looks like? What does fear and trembling mean really?

48:38

It means fear and trembling. It means you and I are accountable to Almighty God. We can fool each other, but we cannot fool the Lord. Jesus died. He paid the worst possible price to save us. We must never take him and our salvation for granted. Obeying Jesus must be the highest priority of our life. Is it yours? Is it mine? Read on. I'm getting too preachy now, aren't I? Verses 12 to 13 gets a little happier here. *Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.* The apostles have continued to do all kinds of miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

49:44

And the church continued to meet together at Solomon's Portico in the temple. But we see the unbelievers in Jerusalem respected the church. Yeah, they respected the church, but they did not want to join the church because they were afraid of those deadly worship services. So, does this mean that the Lord's church stopped growing now? I mean, think about it. They suddenly had a really bad marketing message, right? Come to church, or if you lie, you're going to die. If you fake it, you won't make it. Yeah, I want to go to that church. Let's read to the end of our passage. *And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord,*

50:38

multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits and they were all healed. Church growth did not stop and it did not drop. It skyrocketed, man. While lots of unbelievers stayed away, there were lots of people, in fact, more than ever, people heard the gospel and they gladly put their faith in Jesus and wanted to join his church.

51:21

We also see that people brought their sick and put them on cots and mats and laid them in the street because they believed Peter had such divine power that if he walked by, maybe his shadow would just touch some of them and the shadow would heal them. The passage does not say that Peter's shadow actually healed anyone, but it does say people came from all over, from areas, and they brought their sick and they brought the demon possessed, and they were all healed by the apostles through the power of God. You know, as we come to the end of our passage, maybe this should be. Maybe this should be one of our favorite passages in the Bible.

52:04

It sure shows us the love and kindness of our Lord to clearly warn us to take him and our faith very seriously while we still have time. In the news today, in the news today, we hear about the potential danger of AI artificial intelligence. In our passage today, we've all heard about the very real and eternal danger of AF. Artificial faith. As a church family, we now have the wonderful opportunity to respond to this message, respond to our Lord through Communion. I'm going to read a passage of Scripture that we often turn to before we take communion, but this passage should speak with more clarity to us this morning after what we just learned about Ananias and Sapphira, who came before the Lord in an unworthy manner.

53:11

So let's read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 and see if these words maybe resonate a little more clearly today. Paul wrote, *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

53:55

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. When we take communion, we literally take into ourselves physical reminders of Jesus' crucifixion. The bread represents Jesus body that he gave for us on the cross. And the juice represents Jesus blood that washes us clean of all our sins. Jesus gave us the holy sacrament of communion so he would have this tangible way to remember who he is and what he did for us. On the cross, Jesus took what was ours and he gave us what was His. What did he take?

55:10

Jesus took all our sins on Himself. He took our guilt, he took our shame, and he took the full wrath of God we deserve on Himself. And what did Jesus give us? He gave us his sinlessness, his righteousness, and his full acceptance and fellowship with His Father in heaven forever. When we take communion in a minute, we are proclaiming our wholehearted gratitude to Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. But we have God's warning, don't we? We have God's warning that we need to make sure we do not take communion in an unworthy manner. What does that mean? It means we must not take communion with artificial faith. We must not dare take communion with artificial faith.

56:17

We just read in our passage in Corinthians, whoever eats the bread and drinks the juice of communion without truly trusting in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross eats and drinks the judgment of God, the wrath of God on themselves. We also read, each person must

examine himself or herself before he or she eats the bread and drinks the juice. This means we all, all of us, need to examine ourselves. We need to do a heart check. We need to check our hearts to make sure we don't have any unconfessed sin or any unsundered areas of disobedience to God in our life before, before we come and take communion this morning. This does not mean we need to be perfect before we take communion. It doesn't mean that at all. It means the opposite of that.

57:15

It means we need to see how imperfect we are and know how much we need Jesus. And then we are welcome at the Lord's table this morning and for all eternity. I'm going to close us in prayer in a moment, and then you can come get the elements. You can see we have tables at the front. There's a table also in the back. Make sure you take quiet time to prepare your heart and then take communion at your seat. Let's pray together. Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me, for us. Thank you for taking all my sins and all of our sins on yourself as the one and only sacrifice God will accept for our sins. Thank you that you died so I and we might live not only with the blessings of God today, which would be wonderful, but forever.

58:18

Thank you that because of your mighty work of salvation on that cross, when we put our faith in you, we have nothing to fear when we stand before you one day in judgment. So, Jesus, we love you. We know we don't deserve you, but we need you. And we thank you. And it's in the power of your saving name we pray. Amen.