*DEVOTIONAL*

November 20 - 25

*“Testing the Spirit”*

**Monday, November 20 Acts 4:32-37**

 *“He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles”*

 This passage introduces us to one of the most admirable personalities of the New Testament. His name was Joseph and he was a Levite from Cyprus. The Levites were descendants of the tribe of Levi who assisted and served the priesthood in the sanctuary, distributed the tithes to the needy, and taught and interpreted the verdicts of the law. His experience of Christ’s love motivated him to sell his land, presumably in Cyprus, and give all the proceeds to the apostles for the support and work of the early church’s mission.

 That, along with the nobility of spirit the Holy Spirit developed within him, prompted the apostles to give him a new name. Just as God had given a new name to individuals in the Old Testament, so Joseph is made Barnabas which means “son of encouragement.” We meet Barnabas often as we move through Acts. We find him helping, encouraging, affirming, uplifting, and claiming the best for people. He was Paul’s missionary companion; and, he believed in Mark when he became a missionary drop-out.

*That you, Lord, for those in my life who bring me encouragement. Amen.*

**Tuesday, November 21 Acts 5:1-11**

*“You have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord”*

 While Barnabas’ new name was an affirmation of his new nature, Ananias and Sapphira’s names were a contradiction of their old, sinful nature. The Hebrew form of Ananias means “God is gracious,” and Sapphira means “beautiful.” There was nothing gracious about what Ananias did nor anything beautiful about Sapphira’s cooperation in the lying pretense of loyalty to the Lord and his church. What, then, was so wrong with what they did?

 The problem was that they *pretended* to give all the proceeds of the sale of the property. No one had said that they had to give everything. In fact, Peter states directly that they were free to do as they wished with the money. The sin was not in giving only a part of the sale; the sin was in giving deceptively. They lied to the church, and in so doing they “tested” the Holy Spirit, that is, they called into question whether the Spirit was able to protect the church from deception. Would the Spirit ignore the sin and thus allow it to bring the disease of corrupt practices to damage the fellowship of believers, or would the Spirit act? The Spirit acted!

*May all my dealings with your church, Lord, be honest and truthful. Amen.*

**Wednesday, November 22 Acts 5:12-16**

*“Meanwhile, the apostles were performing many miracles”*

 The church which resulted from being committed to honesty and truthfulness in their relationship with God and with each other exhibited the power of God. First, it was a supernatural church. Signs and wonders were done. Signs are an outward evidence of the inner working of the power of the Lord in a person or situation. It tells us the Spirit is at work. And wonders are signs which cause one to be gripped by awe. Something beyond human ability was operative in the life and ministry of the church.

 Second, it was a respected and growing church. One the one hand, the people in general were reluctant to get too close to these mysterious and powerful Christians, though they did hold them in high regard. On the other hand, those who believed the message, which included the reality of sin and the necessity of confession (honesty and truthfulness) in order to receive God’s forgiveness, were brought into the fellowship. Again, this was not due to human effort but to the work of the Spirit in people’s hearts.

*Work through your church today, Holy Spirit, and bring people to Christ. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

November 20 - 25

*“Testing the Spirit”*

**Thursday, November 23 Acts 5:17-25**

*“Give the people this message of life”*

 The angel told the apostles that they were being released miraculously for a specific purpose – the only purpose of a Christian communicator. They had been on target with a singular, unswerving emphasis on Christ and the abundant life in him. Christ the Life had empowered their preaching and brought tremendous results. Now the heavenly messenger said, in substance, “You have been on the mark. Don’t change. It’s working. Now I am setting you free of this prison so you can get back to communicating Life.”

 Life in Christ, and his life in us, is the only hope we have that our time in this world, and our eternal destiny, will have any meaning whatsoever. The word “life” is used thirty-six times in the New Testament. It is a synonym for the Lord himself. The Apostle John, who was among those released from the prison that day, was to know difficulties and imprisonment again, but the Lord of Life sustained him. Nearing the conclusion of his long life of ministry in the power of the Lord, he wrote, “In him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of the world.”

*My life is in you, Lord, and you hold it secure in this world and the next. Amen.*

**Friday, November 24 Acts 5:26-32**

*“We are witnesses of these things”*

 The guards could not explain what had happened. They were confounded. The members of the Sanhedrin expressed further consternation. What was happening? They could not silence the apostles or keep them in prison. What could they do? The apostles’ popularity among the people precluded the possibility of doing what they had done to Jesus of Nazareth. The leaders were cornered and they knew it. There was nothing to do at that point but bring the apostles back before them for further threatening and warning.

 When they did Peter spoke again, emphasizing the same three points he had used before: (1) he and the apostles must obey God and not men – including the Sanhedrin; (2) Jesus Christ is God’s Messiah and he’s alive; and, (3) he is living in us. Peter claims that he and his fellow apostles are witnesses to the life of Christ in them, a life made possible by his death and resurrection. Peter also insists that the Holy Spirit is a witness, for the Spirit’s witness is given through believers in whom the Spirit lives.

*May I be a witness of your life in me, Lord, even in the face of opposition. Amen.*

**Saturday, November 25 Acts 5:33-42**

*“The high council was furious”*

 The fury and wish for capital punishment of the Sanhedrin is tempered by the comments of Gamaliel. He was the greatest teacher of his era and was considered the embodiment of Pharisaism. The apostles’ miracles and escape from prison presumably made him suspect that God might indeed be blessing this new movement. Therefore he advocates caution and restraint. He is confident that God will sovereignly show in history whether this movement is of him or not. Gamaliel feared that by opposing it, they may be opposing God himself. This advice persuades the Sanhedrin to drop their intentions of capital punishment, but it does not prevent a sound flogging of the apostles.

 Incredibly, the apostles rejoice over their flogging, because “they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” Their disgrace was an indicator of their worth; their dishonor before men brought them honor before God. Thus, their suffering allowed them to demonstrate their loyalty to Christ, and this brought them joy.

*When I am brought down for proclaiming your name, Lord, you lift up. Amen.*