

If you're just joining us, we're in a series in Acts entitled – *Unstoppable*. From inception, God has intended that His church would be an unstoppable force to carry His good news of God's love and Jesus sacrifice to the nations. Yet for this to occur, this movement can't be a movement of human ability/ingenuity, but a movement of the H.S.

Starting at Pentecost, after Jesus ascended, the H.S. descended to empower/launch the G.C. in/through His people – and all heaven broke loose. As we've already witnessed through the first four weeks – God was/is radically at work transforming lives in miraculous ways.

What you may've missed in this early story is the opposition the disciples were facing. It wasn't solely against flesh and blood, but as Eph. 6 tells us – *our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.*

Up to this point, the battle the early church was facing was primarily external in nature – and the enemy was losing. In Acts 4-5, Satan changes his tactics to the internal – and he chooses a man who was ripe for the picking. And he chose area of his life where we're all vulnerable – the area of generosity/money. (**Read Text**)

Before we go any further, let me clear the deck for this lesson – it's not directly about stewardship/money, but about the generosity of the H.S. and spiritual war we're engaged.

## I GENEROSITY and the Movement of the Spirit

*All the believers were one in heart/mind. No one claimed any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had...God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.*

**What's going on here!** As the H.S. was transforming lives – generosity, unity, and concern was abounding. Instead of selfish consumption that marks the nature of the flesh, the church was experiencing genuine care for one another; and people were giving of themselves selflessly.

They were giving b/c God was moving. They wanted to help each other and share the news of Christ. This reality is at the heart our tithes/offerings. It's not about Law, but the Spirit. It wasn't about a command – they were compelled by Christ.

*For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.*

Barnabas is an example of someone who God had blessed who was using his wealth to minister to others. He wasn't looking for a seat at the table, or giving so others would look at him w/ respect, He gave b/c he was compelled by the H.S. to minister to the church and share the Gospel.

Giving should always flow from a heart of gratitude b/c we're grateful for God's generosity to us – *b/c God so loved the world He gave us Jesus to die in our place to give us life.*

I think this is why Jesus said what he did in Matthew 6.

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

Don't live selfishly for your gain but invest your blessings into the things that count for eternity – God's mission.

*The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light w/in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

This statement is about **perspective**. If your focus is on your ambitions/desires instead of on God's will, then you're a prime candidate to succumb to the enemy's schemes

*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

Either God is your God or money will be your god – but it can't be both. And the god of money is a terrible master.

**Truth:** God asks us to give not b/c He needs the money but b/c we need Him – and He knows if we make money our god and our focus, then we'll miss out on His will/purpose of us knowing Him and participating in His best for our lives.

**Generosity is a choice of followship.** A willingness to give is evidence of a heart surrendered and intimate w/ God. **Meaning** – if you have a giving problem, it is b/c you have a relationship/trust issue w/ God – and you're being duped by the devil and may not even realize it.

Juxtaposed to Barnabas we hear about a 2<sup>nd</sup> couple whose motives were less than pure and whose hearts had been deceived by the enemy. Starting in ch. 5, we learn about a couple who fell prey to the wiles of the devil and the yearnings of the flesh.

## II STINGINESS and the Movement of Satan

*A man named Ananias, together w/ his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. W/ 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. Then Peter said, "Ananias how is it Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the H.S. and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 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." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About 3 hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." 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." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the church and all who heard about these events.*

*Notice Peter's words again – Ananias how is it Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the H.S...*

Ananias/Sapphira were believers gone astray. They fell prey to the concerns/ambitions of the flesh – just like we're capable of doing. Only in their case, the H.S. didn't let them get away w/ it as God revealed their treachery to Peter. Peter knew what they had done b/c the H.S. had revealed it to him. He also revealed that Satan was the instigator. Up to this point, Satan had been attacking the church externally, and since the church was growing, he changed his tactics. Instead of attacking outside-in, he was now attacking inside-out. He continues to do the same to us today.

One day, a congregation was sitting awaiting the service to begin when suddenly, in a flash of light, Satan appeared in front of them! Everyone began screaming and running for the exits trying to get away from the evil incarnate. Soon the church was empty except for one elderly cowboy who sat calmly in his pew w/out moving, seemingly oblivious to the fact that God's enemy was in his presence. So Satan asked, 'Do you know who I am?' The old cowboy replied, 'Yep, sure do...' 'Aren't you afraid of me?' Satan asked. 'Nope, sure ain't.' said the cowboy. 'Don't you realize I can kill you w/ one word?' asked Satan. 'Don't doubt it for a minute,' replied the man. 'Did you know I can cause you profound, horrifying agony for all eternity?' Satan persisted. 'Yep,' the man replied calmly. 'And you're still not afraid?' asked Satan. 'Nope,' said the old cowboy. More than a little perturbed, Satan asked, 'Why aren't you afraid of me?' The old man replied, 'B/c I've been married to your sister for 48 yrs.'

I think we often minimize the work of Satan in the events of our day – and while I don't believe there's a demon behind every bush or that the devil makes us do it – I do understand Satan is alive and well and at work.

**Yet there are countless people who don't believe there's a spiritual war or that Satan exists.**

- 61% of U.S. thinks Satan isn't real but a symbol of evil
- 17% of Catholics believe Satan exists

Satan is an ancient/treacherous foe who was present in Eden to deceive Adam/Eve and has been terrorizing humanity ever since. No matter how spiritual you are, you're mistaken if you think he's quaking in his boots at the sight of you.

So just who is Satan? Ezekiel 28 gives us some insight.

*You had everything going for you. You were in Eden, God's garden. You were dressed in splendor, your robe studded w/ jewels: Carnelian, peridot, and moonstone, beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and...emerald, all in settings of gold. A robe was prepared for you the same day you were created. You were the anointed cherub placed on the mountain of God. You strolled in magnificence among the stones of fire. From the day of your creation you were sheer perfection... and then imperfection and evil were detected in you. In much buying and selling you turned violent, you sinned! I threw you,*

*disgraced, off the mountain of God. I threw you out – you, the anointed angel-cherub. No more strolling among the gems of fire for you! Your beauty went to your head. You corrupted wisdom by using it to get worldly fame. I threw you to the ground, sent you sprawling before an audience of kings and let them gloat over your demise. Ez. 28:12f*

At the dawn of creation, Satan was the highest ranking of all God's angelic beings – **Lucifer** (shining one). He was God's greatest creation – a flawless diamond – perfect in his being and exalted in position. He was the anointed Cherub responsible for covering the mercy seat and the Ark of the Covenant. His job was to protect God's holiness. So God gave him access to His holy mountain and enabled Him to walk w/ Him. Yet b/c of his pride/thirst for power, Satan rebelled, forcing God to throw him from His presence.

In the fall, God gave Satan a short lease to operate – and he has masterfully manipulated the lost and the saved in his attempt to thwart the work of God and the move of the H.S.

**How does the devil operate?** Some people think that once we become Christians, the devil doesn't bother us anymore, but that's not true. When we're lost, he's trying to keep us from believing, but once we begin to follow Christ – he puts a target on our backs to silence our witness.

*The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy... Jn. 10:10*



Satan's goal is simple. He wants to prevent/pervert people being saved. He wants to discredit/disable a believer's witness. He wants to fluster/frustrate the will of God.

He looks for any tendency/crack in our lives to deceive and distort the truth of God in our lives. **His ultimate objective is to get us to honor him and serve his kingdom.**

Blessed are those who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend even an hour once a week w/ other Christians – they're my best workers. Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expect to be thanked – I can use them. Blessed are the touchy who stop going to church – they're my missionaries. Blessed are the trouble makers – they shall be called my children. Blessed are the complainers – I'm all ears to them. Blessed are those who are bored w/ the minister's mannerisms/mistakes – for they get nothing out of his sermons. Blessed is the church member who expects to be invited to his own church – for he is a part of the problem instead of the solution. Blessed are those who gossip – for they shall cause strife/divisions that please me. Blessed are those who are easily offended – for they will soon get angry and quit. Blessed are those who don't give an offering to carry on God's work – for in stealing from God you steal for me. Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother and sister – for he shall be w/ me forever. Blessed are you who, when you read this, think it is about other people and not yourself – I've got you!

His favorite tactic is fear – fear of failure, rejection, lose. Fear we won't have enough and God want show up.

Fear is the belief that Satan's plans are better than God's plans – while faith (antidote) is the belief that God's plans are better than the enemy's plans.

This isn't to say we're helpless. If we're "in Christ," we can stand our ground. **We can be victors instead of victims.**

*You're of God, little children, and you've overcome them, b/c greater is the One in you than he who is in the world.*

*Be sober-minded and alert. Your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8.*

**In other words** – to combat the enemy, we must be awake and vigilant to the spiritual battle around us and embrace and live out of God's power abiding in us.

**Bottomline** – if we want to participate in the movement of the H.S. through God's church – then we need to be alert to devil's schemes who wages both an external/internal campaigns on God's people to prevent God's mission from being accomplished.