

Text: Acts 5.29  
St Stephen's

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Sat/Sun

## Satan Pushes Back

**Rule of your life of faith:** Whenever you make progress, Satan pushes back. You can count on it...

Acts 1-3: Jesus raised, ascends, Spirit poured out, thousands come to faith... great signs, miracles, wonders... thousands more come to faith...

Acts 4-6: we see Satan push back. Pentecost leads to persecution!

**His three strategies...** The three strategies are still used today! But Luke is not just concerned with uncovering Satan's strategies. He is also concerned with showing us how Satan was overcome.

### 1) Corruption: Acts 5.1-11

*a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

Acts 5:1-2 (RSV)

Back in chapter 4 We had heard of Barnabas, who had sold a field that he owned, and laid the money at the Apostle's feet. It was **sacrificial giving**, used to support the poor in the church and to further the gospel. It was wonderful, **stunning generosity**. This was a businessman who sold off a company and gave away the proceeds. It was like the woman who broke the alabaster jar of expensive perfume over the feet of Jesus. It was sacrificial giving for the sake of God's work.

Then we are told in ch 5 that it happened again... a married man, **Ananias with his wife Sapphira** sold.. laid the proceeds at the Apostle's feet... but conspired together to 'keep back' some of the funds.

*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back 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? How is it that you have contrived*

*this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

Acts 5:3-4 (RSV)

At first **you wonder what the problem was**. And you have to look carefully to see it. The problem was **not a matter of generosity**, but of **deceit**. Peter clearly says that the property was theirs and the proceeds were theirs to dispose of or keep as they wished. But what evidently happened was that **they told people** that they sold the property and gave everything to the church, **when they actually held back** a significant portion. The problem was not in making a decision to give some and keep some, the problem was in **lying** about it.

John Stott says, *"They wanted the credit and prestige for sacrificial generosity without the inconvenience of it. In order to gain a reputation for which they had no right, they told a brazen lie."*

As Peter says, "You have lied not to men, but to God..."

**Notice what Peter did here.** When he found out about this matter, Peter didn't hide it, didn't avoid it, but **confronted it**. Peter knew that falsehood destroys fellowship. And he knew that lying to God's people in God's presence is lying to God himself.

Notice what God did here. **God removed them...**

*When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.*

Acts 5:5 (RSV)

*And great fear came upon all who heard of it.*

I will be that is true!

Have you ever heard people complain about **hypocrites in the church**? People who pretend to be one way and are actually something different? At home. Or at work? People really hate that.

Bp Stanway telling Bec and I when we were thinking of going to East Africa to teach. *"The Africans will stand outside your windows and watch... just stand and watch. Often they will be there early in the*

*morning. Or as dusk falls. Because they know that what matters most is not what you preach but how you live. If they like what they see, they will listen to your words.*

*And when you preach, they will not listen to you, but they will look at your wife – to see if she is listening to you. If she is listening to you, then they will listen to you.”*

Well, we didn't accept that call...

The **East African Revival** has a phrase, - they called it '**walking in the light**', meaning bring your whole life into God's light. No hidden rooms. No secret sins. They called it 'living in a house without ceiling or walls' – living **transparently before God and people**.

That is how God heals our darkness.

### **Result:**

*And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women... Acts 5:14 (RSV)*

People love authenticity, honesty, transparency.

## **2) Persecution: Acts 5.17-42**

*But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison.*

Acts 5:17-18 (RSV)

This was the **second strategy of Satan**. And it was their second arrest. They were getting a record!

That night an angel released them and told them to go back to the Temple and preach the gospel. So they did. So they were arrested again and dragged in and examined. Peter's response to it all was to the point.

*But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29 (RSV)*

Wouldn't you? If you were arrested for witnessing and thrown in jail and an angel got you out and told you to get back to it, wouldn't you?

**The principle** here is important. **God's authority trumps human authority.**

Remember that the Bible has a very **high view of human authority.** 'The authorities that exist have been established by God, Paul wrote the Romans. So submit to them.

But there is **the exception.** When the authorities – be they of the state or of religion – tell you **to do** one thing and God has told you to do another. When they tell you **to believe** one thing and God has told you to believe another. Do what God tells you. Go with God.

We are in just that kind of situation in **the Episcopal Church.** We are being asked to bless behavior that God calls sin. We can't do it. We must trust God, believe God, obey God. No matter what the cost.

Look what happened to the Apostles...

*they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:40-41 (RSV)*

The beating was certainly severe. 40 lashes minus one. Their backs would have been badly bleeding, shredded. And here they are rejoicing! Because they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name. Say the phrase, '**for the name...**'

They **held Jesus in such awe that they hardly uttered his name.**

"For the name..."

Of the one who suffered for me...

Of the one who loves me...

Of the one who has chosen me...

Of the one who reigns...

Everyone has something, someone **so precious** to them, that you will bear any cost, risk any danger, give any amount, to honor him and serve him. There is a dishonor that brings honor. A disgrace that brings grace. Suffering hardship for the sake of your testimony to Jesus is an honor.

For the name...

**Result:**

*And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42 (RSV)*

**3) Distraction: Acts 6.1-7**

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.*

Acts 6:1 (RSV)

Distraction was the **third strategy of Satan**. Say '**murmured...**' Ever been in a church that has a lot of murmuring going on? It happens in the best of churches. The problem was that there were **many widows** in the church, and the church was taking care of them. That was wonderful – but the problem came when the Christian widows who were Greek in culture were being neglected while the Christian widows who were of Hebrew background were being cared for. That was the problem.

That problem led to **another problem**. The **Apostles were expected to handle it**. And it took a lot of time. So they were **distracted** from their primary calling to bring the Word of God to the church. They were distracted from their primary calling.

I think this is **Satan's most effective strategy, to distract you** from your primary calling in life. And if your primary calling is to bring the word of God to God's people, and you get distracted, then people don't get fed, people don't grow, people's faith doesn't get strengthened. So it was a **double problem**.

You can get distracted today by competing loyalties, by overcrowding

your life, **by good things that don't leave room for the greatest thing.** By pleasures and hobbies and houses. By jobs and careers and opportunities. We live in a very distracting culture. Then all of a sudden, you read the bible less, listen to God less, pray less. Your faith begins to seep away. You lose the keen edge of faith.

I heard a man say it like this recently: *"Run around, run down, run away."* That's what happens when you get distracted...

Here's what they did...

*And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty." Acts 6:2-3 (RSV)*

They **gave away ministry**, important ministry, so they could be dedicated to their ministry, their important ministry, of the word of God.

**Satan loves to distract you** from what God has called you to. Especially **distract you from God's word.** Don't let Satan distract you.

**Result:**

*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7 (RSV)*

**Think for a moment about Satan's strategies.** Which one has been most effective with you? With your small group. Satan is not very inventive. His strategies don't change.

- Corruption and hypocrisy. Bring that hypocrisy into the presence of Jesus. Live honestly.
- Harassment and persecution. Bear that harassment for the name of Jesus. Count it joy...
- Distraction and diversion. Let that distraction go for the word of Jesus. For the name. For the name...