

**Theme:** As You Are Going: The Church on Mission

**Message:** Fragile? – Acts 5:1-16

**Aim:** God will protect His Church because we are His instrument.

**Intro:** In the TV movie “Christmas Story,” the father of the main character entered a contest in the local newspaper & won the grand prize, which was an interesting lamp. The mother in the story didn’t like the lamp, but the father thought it wonderful. When the package was delivered, the box it was in had stamped upon it the word pronounced “Fra-gi-le” by the father, who said, “Oh, it must be Italian!” The word, of course, was “fragile,” meaning, “easily broken or damaged; delicate & vulnerable.” That which is fragile must be handled carefully & protected. A vase might be clumsily handled & even tossed around but a VASE is delicately placed in a special location. How it’s handled depends on the worth placed upon it. Theme: As you are going: the church on mission. The young Church in Acts was mushrooming; they were seeing the hand of God moving among them; they loved each other; they shared the gospel; God was blessing. But we can see that Church was also fragile in some ways & needed God’s protection. Acts 5:1-16 [READ]. Right away we might logically ask, **Why is Acts 5:1-11 even in the Bible?** Things were going so well! But Luke (under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration) was keeping it real. These new believers were redeemed & being taught & sanctified. They were justified by God & righteous in His sight, but not perfect in practice by a long shot – like you/me. Can imagine how this scenario developed. Barnabas & others sold property & gave proceeds to the apostles to distribute to those in need, of which there were many, displaced because of their faith. Everyone appreciated what these disciples had done & lauded them. Ananias & Sapphira saw that & wanted some. They did a good thing in that they sold some property & gave money to the apostles to distribute to those in need. What they did wrong was to misrepresent what they gave as the whole amount received for the property sold. Now, the proceeds were theirs to do w/as they wanted, & they were kind in giving some; but they kept back some for themselves (their prerogative), yet they were saying they gave the whole amount of the sale, seemingly seeking to make themselves look better in the eyes of others. David

Gudzik points out that “The ancient Greek word for kept back is *nosphizomai*, which means “to misappropriate.” The same word was used of Achan’s theft in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Joshua 7:21). The only other time *nosphizomai* is used in the New Testament, it means to steal (Titus 2:10).” When Ananias brought what they were giving to the apostles, his deception was revealed to Peter by the Holy Spirit. Peter confronted Ananias w/his sinful scheme. Note that Peter 1<sup>st</sup> said that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit & then said, “You have not lied to man but to God.” This is a clear statement of the deity of the Holy Spirit – not an it but a He, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity. When Ananias heard those words, he fell down & died, & was taken out & buried! 3 hours later Sapphira came in & Peter asked her if what Ananias has said was the price was true (was not) & she said “yes, that’s what we sold the property for.” Peter: “Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” She was clearly complicit w/her husband’s deception. Then Sapphira fell down & died & was carried out & buried! Wow! Seems a bit harsh, doesn’t it? Can certainly understand Luke’s statement in vs5 & 11 that “Great fear came upon all who heard of it...the whole church &...all who heard of these things.” Why would God do such a thing? I) **The Young Church was fragile**. They had great strengths & wonderful things happening but also, because people were involved, there were weaknesses. It’s possible that there were tares sown in among the wheat, that some were not true believers. Some would say that applied to Ananias & Sapphira - not true believers but unbelievers pretending to follow Christ. John Calvin was of the opinion that Ananias & Sapphira’s sin included “contempt for God, sacrilegious defrauding, vanity & ambition, lack of faith, & hypocrisy.” But I think it’s possible they were believers but still immature & weak. Such weakness leads to bad decisions – selfish, sinful ones, like Ananias & Sapphira made. And bad decisions are contagious. They can adversely affect the church & would have hurt the young church. The church was vulnerable & Satan, who had already lost w/the whole crucifixion/resurrection thing & knew he couldn’t defeat God by taking out Christ, thought he might be able to stop God’s work in/thru the Church. So, God

took out Ananias & Sapphira! F.F. Bruce also referred to Achan in the OT: “The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God.” That put everyone on notice that following Jesus is no small, insignificant thing. Sin in the camp will hurt the Church & does not escape God’s notice. We might wonder why God hasn’t done more of the cleansing of the Church throughout history & today. But He is the Sovereign Lord. Understand, II) **Every local church is fragile**. This local church is fragile. We have strengths & weaknesses. What does the future hold? Bears consideration & prayer. And, of course, all of us sin. Are we really that different from Ananias & Sapphira? Sin must be dealt with thru honest, humble confession & repentance & commitment & consecration – on a daily basis. The Lord’s Supper affords us that opportunity but it can/should be practiced every day. Don’t let sin fester or be ignored. Your life & mine are integral to the life of the Church & each of us needs to see it. How we live matters. We must each, by God the Holy Spirit’s aid, keep in step w/Him & be about His business. And we must faithfully hold each other up in prayer. Know that III) **God has & will protect His Church**. Note Luke’s summary statement (we’ve already seen several) in vs12-16. Signs & wonders regularly done by the people (not just the apostles). All together. Highly esteemed. More than ever believers were added to the Lord – multitudes of men & women. The Holy Spirit was so much at work that even if Peter’s shadow fell upon someone, they would be healed. Yes, the Church was fragile & vulnerable, but also precious & valuable to God, not by any merit of its own, but by the price paid by Christ & the plan God had set in place. The early Church, tho fragile, was strong because God protected it. Jesus said, “I will build My Church & the gates of Hades (the grave, the power of Satan, other religions) will not prevail against it.” This church (which is us the people) & all the Church throughout the world, however preyed upon & hated will prevail because God is our Protector. We are precious & valuable to Him because He purchased us & because He wants to use us, by design. We are His instrument, the channels of His grace, the funnels of His love to the world. We have the message to tell, a Savior to

share. The Church has always been God's plan to reach the world. There's no plan B. Just as God did what was necessary to protect His young Church, so He will do all that is necessary to protect His Church today. Maybe you are fragile, each of us are. But you, in Christ, are precious & valuable to God. Give yourself away to Him. Commit to be His instrument, as you are going, day by day.