

## Part I

- Smarties!
  - have lots of Smarties to hand
  - get a few volunteers out; distribute them unfairly!
  - *how do you feel?*
- Redistribute them "fairly"
  - better?
  - *but, what if someone had come out of the house without any breakfast this morning, but someone else was really full... is what you've got in front of you fair?*
- Imagine a world where everyone needed one Smartie a day to stay alive!
  - imagine you each had Smarties, some loads, some just a few;
  - *what could you do with them?*
  - share them round - how make sure everyone got enough?
  - maybe we could make one person or group of people **responsible for seeing that everyone had enough?**
  - if you had more than you needed, you could give it to them!
- First Christians, because they care for each other, because they loved one another, because God showed them that helping each other was very important, they did this:
  - not with Smarties, but with food and money;
  - sometimes not everyone had enough;
  - so those with lots would give it to others; maybe those who owned a field would sell it and use the money to buy things that other people needed.
- **Give out Smarties - one to everyone, spares for later - reminder that God wants us to be just as generous and care for one another today!**

## Family Service

### Part II

- Read this passage and immediately start wondering about Ananias and Sapphira, but in a sense that is a distraction!
- for the core of what Luke wants us to emulate is in the first few verses at the end of chapter 4:
- These Christians were **one in heart and mind** - heading in the same direction
  - in particular, they cared practically for each others needs;
  - they were fellow travellers to heaven, and **this world's goods were only supplies for the journey!**
  - *airplane food and cutlery is only a pale imitation of the real thing - but funny those who make a habit of taking it! - as if there won't be better at the hotel you are going to!*
  - if I have, and you don't, and I know that what I have just now is only temporary and we both will have the real thing in eternity, then sharing really isn't a problem!
  - their attitudes were not selfish, but selfless
- This was a **result** of the Spirit's transforming work within them.
  - it wasn't the **principal goal**, but as they gave themselves to God they naturally gave themselves to each other.
  - their selflessness was a result of God making them new - **which is what they were preaching about** - and as such that selflessness bore witness to what they spoke of
- That's why we've got the section in v.33 about them preaching surrounded by the stuff about them sharing their possessions and selling houses or land.
- So we have a summary section, followed by two examples of this in practice, one positive and one negative:
  - positive one is simple, Barnabas, vs.36-37
  - more time is spent on the negative example, Ananias & Sapphira

### Satanic Counter Attack

- Through Acts we've seen the Spirit at work:
  - Pentecost, conversions, healing, power to speak for Christ, transformation in the life of the church....
- And we've also seen that the Spirit's work is opposed:
  - Satan does not let the Spirit work unhindered;
  - since the out-pouring of the Spirit at Pentecost we've seen **physical opposition** in the form of the overt persecution instigated by the Sanhedrin - Peter and John restrained from preaching by physical force, locked up in jail!
  - now in this passage we see **moral corruption** - Satan's attempt to spoil the Spirit's work from the inside out, rotting it like **fruit that looks good on the outside but inside has gone off**
  - and in a little while, in chapter 6 we'll have the serving at tables dispute, the attack of **distraction**
- These three tactics (**persecution, moral corruption and distraction**) are still Satan's tactics today:
  - **persecution**: vandalism, aggro from the jobs round about...
  - **moral corruption**: hypocrisy, saying we believe one thing but acting in a different way; **perhaps in the sexual sphere, perhaps in the area of money, of generosity or materialism, perhaps in the area of our relationships with others, forgiveness, patience, compassion...**
  - **distraction**: seeing keeping the minute book up to date as more important than speaking with our neighbour about Jesus? Arguing over the colour we should paint the church!

## Counter Attack Countered

- God's response here seems drastic!
  - it was Ananias' & Sapphira's own money - surely they could do with it what they wanted?
  - yes, **but** what they did was choose to **seek their own glory and not God's**;
  - they chose to seek a reputation for generosity to which they had no right, without the inconvenience of actually being generous!
  - they chose to believe that it doesn't matter what God thinks, it just matters what other people think.
- And that is a remarkably easy thing to slip into.
  - to say one thing and do another, to cover over failure or mixed motives with a lie
  - most of us will have done it at some point
- Here, in the earliest days of the church's life, that disease needed cut out before it could grow firm roots:
  - church was a tender plant, young, still learning - could easily have been stunted!
  - so God, like a good gardener, radically prunes the diseased branch!
- This sin - not the stealing, the lying to God:
  - this sin is serious
  - we should pay attention to our human consciences
  - and God chooses to act through the church; could have zapped Ananias & Sapphira all on his own, but he chose to involve Peter (church leadership) in the process; there is still a place for the church to exercise discipline, whatever the form, from time to time.

## Opposition Thwarted

- And so, with Satan's attack through moral corruption thwarted, again we have a summary of the life of the church:
  - a church where God's power is at work
  - a church where that power makes a difference in people's lives, healing, casting out demons - faith works!
  - a church whose integrity and closeness to God so shone out that outsiders didn't join them, felt uncomfortable, scared, even in awe of what was happening in their midst.
  - and a church where people were coming to faith all the time
- *May we likewise show a practical generosity to one another as we give the Holy Spirit full reign in our lives, may we see Satan's opposition thwarted, and see the kind of church we see here grow in our midst*