

Cautionary Tales Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, November 27, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us! Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

Scripture abounds with cautionary tales meant to keep us from sin. In recent weeks we have noted...

1) Pharaoh

Pharaoh epitomized the sin of pride, being obstinate and “stiff-necked” against the rule of God. Of course, he would come to experience divine judgment for his rebellion, including the dismantling of his kingdom and the hardening of His heart before God. Be wary of pride and remember...

James 4:6b–7a (NIV)

6 . . . “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God.

2) Lot’s Wife

This nameless woman and wife of Lot was afforded mercy due to the intercession of her relative, Abraham. Yet, she simply could not leave Sodom without one last look, and she was turned into a pillar of salt in kind. She serves as a warning to those who are overly-tethered-to this sinful world and its desires...

1 John 2:15–17

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

3) The Hebrews of the Exodus

Those delivered from slavery in Egypt did a poor job showing any form of belief or gratitude upon their rescue! Rather, the Hebrews of the Exodus trafficked in the ongoing complaint and murmur against God, their leaders, and their circumstances. Such perished in the wilderness and warn us to be wary...

1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . . 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

4) Nadab and Abihu

These sons of Aaron were afforded great privilege, being both priests and partakers of His heavenly presence! However, they abandoned the appointed way of God for a way of their own making; carving a path to Him on their terms versus His. Their irreverence was met with fire, serving as a warning to all who would come to God via their own devices. Remember...

John 14:6

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

5) Gehazi

This servant of Elisha was afforded every opportunity to know and represent the Lord. However, this was not enough to satisfy the heart of Gehazi, as he was given to a spirit of greed. Ultimately, he paid a hefty price for his treachery and ill-gotten gain. Do not follow in his footsteps, but remember...

1 Timothy 6:10b

10 . . . the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

KEY 1 – Please feel free to review these sermons and their notes online at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

KEY 2 – This morning, let us conclude on with the following cautionary tales of Scripture (NT)...

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA

NOTE 1 – The Early Church must have been something to behold! Note it was characterized by the following....

Acts 2:42–47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Q. Who would love to be part of such a movement?

NOTE 2 – Of particular note, note the manifestation of their selfless and sacrificial love...

Acts 2:44–45

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

NOTE 3 – Such charity was not a one time, short-lived element. Rather, it is evidenced in latter times and texts!

CONSIDER...

Acts 4:32–37

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

NOTE 4 – What a glorious scene of God’s rich working in and through the hearts of His people. Of course, let us not get too excited! Humans have a terrible tendency to turn even the most glorious of scenes, such as this, into extreme cautionary tales. Consider what transpires next in the biblical record...

Acts 5:1–11

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With 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.

3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 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.”

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”

“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

9 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.”

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Q. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

A1. We could speak to their deception, as Scripture clearly does. Peter declares the following in v. 3–4 (Emphasis Mine): “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have **lied** to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 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.” His wife replicated this activity in v. 7–8.

A2. We could also speak to their hypocrisy. These two cloaked their secret deception(s) and inner corruption with an outward and false veneer of piety, compassion and generosity. Such is the very definition of hypocrisy!

A3. However, I posit that their movements were driven by a deeper and far more sinister compulsion—the compulsion for human praise and adulation! What made Ananias and Sapphira lie and act treacherously before God and men? I put forth it was the desire to be known and recognized; to receive human accolade(s)...

NOTE 5 – I am willing to be they saw the reception and celebration of figures like Barnabas and craved it...

Acts 4:36–37 to 5:1–2 (Emphasis Mine w/ No Break or Division)

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet. . . . Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, **also** sold a piece of property. 2 With 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.

NOTE 6 – It is tragic how we can turn good, God-honoring actions into vehicles for self-promotion and aggrandizement. Christ Himself warned against using religiosity unto such ends...

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others **to be seen by them**. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So when you **give** to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be **honored** by others. **Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.** 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

5 “And when you **pray**, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be **seen** by others. **Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.** 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

16 “When you **fast**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to **show others** they are fasting. **Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.** 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

KEY – Human praise is fleeting and such activities yield divine penalty in kind...

Q1. What was the end result of their treachery?

Q2. How were Ananias and Sapphira rewarded for their sin?

A. Death via judgment and burial! Not a great way to either start or end a service...

APP – Realize that our actions and activities always have underlying motivations, and God is concerned about those motivations. Beware the spirit of self-promotion and the inner-compulsion for human praise, as such elements can quickly poison your heart and yield terrible results in kind! Rather...

Psalm 139:23–24

23 Search me, God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my anxious thoughts.
 24 See if there is any offensive way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting.

HEROD AGRIPPA I

Let us continue our study with the cautionary tale of Herod Agrippa I (cf. Acts 12)...

NOTE 1 – Some historical context is necessary as we wade into these waters. There are several figures who bear the name “Herod” in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. Remember that “Herod” is less a formal name and more of a dynastic title. Consider the following...

1) Herod the Great

The first of the “Herods” is often known as Herod the Great. He features in the birth narrative of Christ and is commonly associated with the Christmas story. This Herod sought to discover the location of the Christ-child through the Magi, that he might kill Jesus and remove this potential threat to his power. Unable to locate the Christ-child, he slaughtered all the boys two-and-under in the vicinity of Bethlehem (cf. Matt. 2).

2) Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas (Antipater) was one of several sons of Herod the Great. This “Herod” ruled and reigned over Galilee and the region thereof during the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Christ Himself would stand trial before Herod Antipas prior to His eventual Crucifixion (cf. Luke 23). Perhaps most famously, this was the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded (cf. Matt. 14).

3) Herod Agrippa I

Herod Agrippa I (i.e., the focus of our opening point) was the grandson of Herod the Great. He came to preside over a portion of northern Palestine from A.D. 37–44. I want to read a selection of texts from Acts 12, wherein we discover the kind of man that Herod Agrippa I was and the eventual judgment he suffered at the hand of God...

Acts 12:1–3

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

Q. What do we begin to see herein?

A1. We begin to see the type of man that Herod Agrippa I was. He was evidently adversarial to the early Church. Verse 1 clearly states that he “arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.” He was clearly no friend to the people of God...

A2. In fact, the text notes that Herod Agrippa I had “James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword” (v. 2a). This may seem like a passing text, but this is the record of the first apostolic martyr (i.e., the first of the Twelve to be killed for their faith).

A3. We should also note that this Herod was a political opportunist. When he came to discover that these actions pleased the Jews (v. 3a), he took steps to seize Peter as well (i.e., though Peter would be miraculously rescued through the power of God).

NOTE 2 – In light of these details let us read on...

Acts 12:19b–24

19 . . . Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. 20 He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply. 21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” 23 Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

Q. What was the sin of Herod?

A1. Generally, we could speak re. his human pride. Much like Pharaoh, Herod serves as a warning to the proud...

Proverbs 16:18

18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Matthew 23:12a

12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled . . .

A2. Specifically, let us consider the particular expression of his pride: namely, self-exaltation and/or elevation! If the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was the desire for human praise, Herod shows us what happens when we accept and revel in the glory that belongs alone to the Lord...

NOTE 3 – It is a foolish thing to overly-believe your own press, deeming yourself to be a “god.” In this age of self-love and narcissism, this will be a hard lesson for a great many to swallow. Remember that you are but a mortal and there is but One God—and He does not share His glory...

Isaiah 42:8

8 “I am the Lord; that is my name!

I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.”

Q. What was the end result of his spiritual hubris?

A. The text indicates he was “eaten by worms” (v. 23)

QUOTE – “According to Josephus, Herod Agrippa I was immediately incapacitated by a severe pain his stomach; the pain lingered for five days before he died. The book of Acts tells us that the cause of death was worms (i.e., parasites, probably) directly from the hand of God.”

ELYMAS THE SORCERER

I would like to conclude this with the figure of Elymas (a.k.a. Bar-Jesus)...

NOTE 1 – We first encounter this man in the Book of Acts. Consider the following selection...

Acts 13:6–7

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

NOTE 2 – Herein, Paul is on his First Missionary Journey. Through prayer, fasting and divine leading, the church at Antioch had selected Barnabas and Saul (i.e., Paul) to be sent out as missionaries (cf. Acts 13). With them also was John Mark. On their journey they traveled to Cyprus, Barnabas’s home island. When they arrived in Paphos, the western port and capital of the island, they were invited to meet with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who was Romans governor of the region.

NOTE 3 – The Bible tells us that Sergius Paulus was both intelligent AND inquisitive re: the Word of God (v. 7b). Among his attendants, however, was Bar-Jesus, a man who made a living in magic. He was acclaimed a prophet of God; his name meaning “son of Joshua” or “son of the Savior.” In v. 8 he is called Elymas, which means “magician” or “sorcerer.” Keep in mind that it was common for Jews to have more than one name, and Luke, the author, deemed it important to include both in the account.

NOTE 4 – While Barnabas and Paul were visiting Sergius Paulus, Bar-Jesus intervened! This sorcerer, who likely feared losing his position with the proconsul, began to oppose the gospel message being shared by Paul and Barnabas. In fact, it is penned that Elymas tried to turn Sergius Paulus “from the faith”...

Acts 13:7b–8

7 . . . The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

Q. What was the sin of this sorcerer?

A1. Certainly we could speak of his sorcery. However...

A2. His deeper crime was opposition to the Gospel (i.e., hindrance)...

NOTE 5 – Of all the crimes we can commit against God and man, this is among the most heinous. Consider what God has given to secure salvation for those who might believe. Now consider how He feels when an individual assumes an adversarial stance and works against the salvation of his beloved children! To stand in the way of the advancement of the Gospel warrants the wrath of God...

Romans 1:18

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness . . .

NOTE 6 – This is precisely what we see in the case of Elymas the Sorcerer.

Q. What penalty did Elymas face accordingly?

Acts 13:9–11

9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

NOTE 7 – The word-play herein (i.e., calling this man whose name means “son of the Savior” to “child of the devil) would not have been lost on Sergius Paulus! How many supposed saviors are actually devils in disguise, working to hinder, oppose and subvert that advancement of the gospel?

KEY – To the many in this world who stand in opposition to the Gospel (e.g., political leaders, professors, false-faith leaders, etc.) beware! You play a dangerous game. To the many seated in church pews, cloaked in religiosity, who hinder the lost from receiving Christ Jesus, beware...

Matthew 23:4, 13a, c

4 “They [i.e., Pharisees and Sadducees] tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. . . . 13 “Woe to you . . . hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”

Q1. To what degree do your words and witness hinder the promotion of the Gospel?

Q2. To what degree do your words and witness work to advance its proliferation and spread?

Let us be faithful and effective witnesses versus stones of stumbling for those who do not yet know Him!

SUMMATIONS

Throughout this multi-segment series we have taken a long, hard look at some extreme cautionary tales. Each serves us an example concerning what NOT to do, so let us steer clear of the footsteps of Pharaoh, Lot’s wife, the Hebrews of the Exodus, Nadab and Abihu, Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, Herod Agrippa I, Elymas the Sorcerer and beyond! Let us prefer the good ways of the Lord—ways that lead unto life abundant and eternal...

James 1:22

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org

NOTE 2 – Feel free to participate in our “beyond-Sunday” ministries (MM, WM, CYC, Study)

NOTE 3 – “Potluck Supper” TODAY immediately following the service. God bless us as we fellowship!

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.