

Ananias - A One Talent Christian

This morning we will talk about the man who led Paul to Christ, the man who is responsible for the salvation of Paul. We will begin in:

Acts 9:10-19: "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias."

And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.'

Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.'

But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake'

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus."

We will spend most of the time on chapter 9, but I would like to read one more verse in the same book.

Acts 22:12: "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there."

Let's pray:

Lord, I pray that we will not just passively listen to what You have to say, but will also remember that long ago You have planned for our lives. And You still have the same desire to have all of us work with You if we will pay attention to the little things in life and get ourselves ready before You call our name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the early chapters of Acts, we see that the Holy Spirit had the freedom to work through the apostles. Later, God send Philip, a deacon, to lead an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. If I can use the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, then we can consider the apostles and the deacons as the five and two talents' servants.

In chapter 9 the Holy Spirit is about to show us that God can also use one talent servants. I believe God is addressing a large audience simply because there are more of us—the one talent servants—according to chapter 1 of I Corinthians. Sometimes God's grace shines brighter through the one talent vessels. The parable of the talents also implies that to whom much is given, much is required.

My children were seven years apart. When the older one reached middle school age, the younger one was still in kindergarten. Every morning I asked them if they were ready for school. To the older one it meant if she had finished her homework. To the younger one it meant if he had tied his shoelaces. Both children had an equal chance in pleasing their earthly father. Similarly, all God's children have an equal chance in pleasing their heavenly Father even though our talent may be limited to tying the shoelaces. God still rewards many one talent servants for being good and faithful over a few things, and this morning we will look at the one talent servant who had such a desire to please the heavenly Father.

Saul

But before we get into the text let me give you a little background. Beginning from chapter 8 of Acts persecution against the church had

broken out in Jerusalem. All the believers, except for the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and Saul was doing much damage to the church. Saul was going from house to house hunting down the followers of Christ and putting them in prison.

In chapter 9 we find Saul on his way to Damascus with the intention of destroying that church as well. When he was close to Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a bright light. And Jesus asked him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul was struck blind and was told to go to Damascus and wait for further instructions. At that time, Saul did not know God had chosen him to be God’s representative before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. But God wanted him to be God’s representative. But wait; somebody had to lead him to Christ first. So whom shall we send? The Lord had spotted a disciple who was available, ready and willing to run God’s errands, and his name is Ananias.

Ananias, A Certain Disciple

Some of us here may ask, “Ananias, Who?” There are three people named Ananias in the Bible, two of them are from Jerusalem, and this one is a resident of Damascus. Ananias first appeared on the stage in verse 10:

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

Here Ananias was introduced as a “certain disciple.” That is all the information we are given. So what does “a certain disciple” mean? It simply means that this disciple is not an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, an elder, a deacon or a Sunday School teacher. He is none of the above. In plain language the Bible is telling us that Ananias is an ordinary one talent servant like some of us.

Sometimes we have had summer students from the governor’s school working in our lab. These are the high school students who have not had

the opportunity of holding a regular full time job. But their resume already looked very impressive.

So what is Ananias' qualification? What is his achievement? It is only one line long, "a certain disciple." If Saul had postponed his trip to Damascus until after chapter 11 of Acts, then probably Ananias would be introduced as "a certain Christian." Ananias lived a simple life, hidden in obscurity. However, the Lord knew all about him. I believe the Lord used Ananias here for at least two reasons. First, it is a reminder that like Ananias we are all well equipped to serve the Lord. The Lord has equipped us because He still believes that we are teachable. Second, it is to motivate us to start paying attention to the little things in life and getting ourselves prepared to serve Him to the eternal of His blessings.

Please note that the Lord is not here trying to recruit Ananias, and then send him to some special training program, getting him ready for the upcoming assignment.

Ananias had a desire to please the heavenly Father by putting God's Word in his daily walk. In other words, Ananias remained faithful every day amidst the unexciting ordinary life of Damascus. He was always ready whenever the Lord called his name. The Lord could use him right away without delay. And like Ananias we, too, have the desire to serve the Lord, but we must get ourselves prepared before the Lord calls our name.

Ananias had a good relationship with the Lord. When the Lord called Ananias, unlike Saul, who asked the question: "Who are You, Lord?", Ananias knew right away it was the Lord and quickly took his position as a servant. When the Lord talked, Ananias listened. When Ananias talked the Lord also listened. Even when he was making a protest, Ananias could be frank with the Lord, and the Lord patiently listened.

Ananias' Assignment

Verse 11-12 talks about Ananias' assignment. Let's look at it again:

“So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’”

The Lord wanted Ananias to go as God’s representative and meet Saul. Ananias’ response can be found in Verses 13-14.

“Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind and all who call on Your name.’”

Ananias was reluctant to accept the assignment, but it was not without reason. He had heard enough bad things about Saul, and here he is informing the Lord with the latest news on Saul just in case the Lord had missed some details. This is the Saul who had turned followers of Christ into martyrs, and his presence in Damascus put all the believers’ lives there in jeopardy. “And Lord, You want me to confront Saul? Why must a lamb walk into the mouth of the lion? Besides, what will happen to my family?”

Ananias’ story began with, “Here I am, Lord, send me.” His willingness was to do anything that the Lord called him to do, that is until things began to feel a little uncomfortable. The moment the Lord asked him to pray for and minister to Saul, Ananias became understandably nervous. And he changed his tune. “God, God!” Isn’t it interesting that we always manage to reason with God and enlighten Him on how things are supposed to be, as if the Lord does not know better. But I am glad that Luke, the author of Acts, recorded this portion of the conversation on the reluctance and fear of Ananias to face Saul. It reveals that Ananias is not perfect. He does not have that unwavering faith in the Lord. He is just made of the same stuff that you and I are made of. Or is it a hint that we still have hope? If I were Ananias I would try to talk God out of it. I would say to Him, “Excuse me, Lord, did I hear You say, ‘Saul is now blind’? We

have prayer meetings at our fellowship on Wednesdays. I will go and report to the brothers and sisters that God has already answered our prayers. Since Saul is blind he cannot see Christians like us now. That means he can no longer arrest believers on the street, but then why should we bother to restore his eyesight? The Lord assured Ananias in verse 15-16.

“Ananias, it is alright for you to go because Saul is now my chosen vessel.” Would Ananias understand that this Saul, the terrorist, the archenemy of the church is now a chosen vessel? Not likely. Nevertheless, Ananias was willing to comply this time. “Lord, if You say it is okay for me to go, I will go. I will forgive Saul.” He willingly obeyed in order to convert Saul. It is just pure trust, courage and obedience, and this is the man God uses; one who is ready and willing. As God’s representative of forgiveness, Ananias must demonstrate first his own forgiveness of Saul. Anyone who walks on this street that is called Straight must leave the anger and bitterness behind. So Ananias went and paid Saul a visit.

Verse 17: “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”

Christ’s Love

Ananias’ Christian love is seen in his attitude towards Saul. He welcomed Saul with an affectionate greeting and called him “Brother Saul.” Moreover he put his hands on Saul, a gracious act. Saul was going to put his hands of vengeance on all the believers. Now Ananias put his hands of mercy and forgiveness on Saul. There is no trace of resentment for the entire period of Ananias’ visit. Since Saul was blind he cannot see expression on Ananias’ face. Therefore, Ananias had to communicate with him through his touch and with his voice. As a matter of fact, words from Ananias must have brought much comfort for the ears of the blind

man. How he must have perked up! “This visitor whom I have seen in my vision, sent by Jesus to heal my blindness, does not sound arrogant, and self-important at all. If anything he sounds like my friend.” If Ananias’ Christian love is revealed in his attitude towards Saul, Ananias’ loyalty is seen in his attitude towards the Lord Jesus. After saluting Saul, Ananias immediately identified his position as a servant: “The Lord Jesus has sent me.” It shows his discretion and devotion—a very humble man.

Ananias did not begin explaining who and what he is. He is content to remain as the faithful, anonymous messenger of his Master. Let’s continue on.

Verse 18-19: “Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.”

We read that Saul spent some days with the disciples of Damascus. This leads to another point about Ananias’ visit. Together they had demonstrated an act of acceptance of Saul. What an incredible turn of events. The one who came to capture all believers is now captivated by them. At the same time, Saul or Paul learned a new insight. That is in church life not only do we need big brothers, we also need small brothers. God used Ananias to help Paul into a new life. Just ask Paul who healed his blindness. At this time Ananias disappeared from the story, and we never hear from him again. Ananias seemed to play a small part in the drama of Paul’s conversion. God had used Ananias to further His purpose, that is God’s purpose in launching the career of Paul. It was the little act of Ananias’ obedience that made it possible to have a great harvest for the kingdom.

Andrew

Another example of a one talent servant in the Bible is Andrew who was one of Jesus’ earliest disciples. We do not see any record of Andrew’s

activity in the first three gospels, but John's gospel has recorded three instances that relates to his one talent, mainly his ability in bringing people to Christ. Like Ananias, Andrew seemed to play a small part in people's lives, but the impact was huge. For example, we say that evangelism starts at home. So Andrew brought his brother, Simon, who was later called Peter, to Jesus. Andrew had no idea that in a few years Peter, the fisherman, would become a preacher leading 3,000 and 5,000 people to Christ.

Another time, after a long teaching session at some desolate place, Jesus wanted His disciples to feed the hungry crowd. It was Andrew who brought the two fish and five loaves of bread from a little boy to Jesus. Andrew had no idea that the food put into Jesus' hands, Who blessed it, broke it and multiplied the two fishes and five loaves of bread, would feed 5,000 hungry men.

On another occasion, a group of Greek people approached Philip and requested to see Jesus. Philip told them to please wait: "I know just the one who is an expert in bringing people to Jesus." So Philip went out and found Andrew, and Andrew and Philip brought the Greek people to Jesus. They did not know that the gospel had now reached the Gentiles.

Edward Kimball, Dwight Moody, Wilbur Chapman, Mordecai Ham, Billy Graham

Some of you have already heard the story of Mr. Edward Kimball. He was a humble Sunday School teacher for a bunch of hyper active teenagers. These troublesome boys cared little about God and religion, but there was one boy in particular who was full of mischief. Mr Kimball had doubts thought that one day this boy would become a Christian, and the boy's name is Dwight L. Moody. Anyway, Mr. Kimbel kept after the boys in his Sunday School class. One day he was making his rounds, and he came to the shoe store where Mr. Moody was working. He hesitated even at the last minute whether to go in or not, but he finally pushed himself to go in. Mr. Kimball could not remember the exact words he said

to Mr. Moody nor could Mr. Moody remember. But whatever happened on that day, Mr. Moody was ready to give himself to Christ, and he went on to become a great evangelist. But the story did not stop here.

Mr. Moody was responsible for the salvation of Wilbur Chapman, who became an evangelist, reaching and touching lives in the thousands. One of them was a professional baseball player named Billy Sunday, who became a pastor, and his ministry impacted the life of Mordecai Ham who became a traveling evangelist. He was given credit for leading a young man named Billy Graham to Christ. As you know, Billy Graham was an evangelist, and his Gospel Tent perhaps has touched the most number of people on record.

All of these chains of events go back to the humble Sunday School teacher, Mr. Kimball, who persisted in the hard work of evangelizing the difficult youth. Mr. Kimball's name is merely a footnote in history, but in that the legacy is huge. Perhaps the Gospel Tent is not a modern day tool to spread the gospel; therefore, God is looking for more people like Ananias to spread the gospel and make disciples on a one to one basis.

Brothers and sisters, let's dedicate ourselves to the Lord and start paying attention to the little things in life. The world is watching us. We may be Mr. Nobody, but we can all make an honest effort to be a good testimony for the Lord. Remember, that not everybody can be Paul, but everybody can be Ananias.

I missed a paragraph here, other than Acts 9, there was little written about Ananias. Only Paul made the reference to it in chapter 22. As Paul remembers it, Ananias, a devout man is well spoken of by all the Jewish residents in Damascus, and here we are given a chance to see Ananias' discreteness. We know Ananias had the heart to please the Lord, and there is something about this ordinary disciple. He chose to live a godly life by paying attention to the little things in life, the little things that you and I can also do. In other words, Ananias sought to glorify the Lord by living a consecrated life.

There was no incentive or reason for the Jewish neighbors to say good things about Ananias, who was a disciple of Jesus. But it is not a small thing to have your character praised by another party who is strongly different from you. A good reputation such as Ananias had cannot be earned in days or weeks; it takes a long time to build. Apparently, Ananias, a native of Damascus, had been closely watched by his neighbors, people whom he worked with, and people whom he had transactions of business for years. Ananias lived an exemplary life, and “such people are living sermons.” In a sense, he is a Mr. Nobody, but in the far above sense, he is a good ambassador of heaven because he is careful about the little things in life. It becomes a good testimony for the Lord. Here we are reminded again that not everybody can be Paul, but everyone can be Ananias.

I pray that our abilities, though they may be limited, with God’s help and blessing every one of us here can be used as an Ananias in God’s kingdom.

Let’s pray:

Lord, I pray that all of us are hearing Your pleading for us to join Your winning team while there is still opportunity. Who would want to end up on the losing team? Lord, thank You for Your words of encouragement. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.