

The Heavenly Vision Expressed in Ananias

We are going to start in our theme verse in Acts 26:19: ""Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,"

Acts 22:11-16: This is the first time Paul shares what happened. ""But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. "And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'"

Acts 9:10-17: "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, here am I, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

I Corinthians 15:3-10a: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; ..."

Let us pray:

Lord, we thank You for giving us the chance to be in Your presence tonight. And Lord, we know that the topic at hand is so near to Your heart. So, we pray that You will open Your Word to each one of us, to speaking and listening, and Lord, we bow our heads before You. Lord, we pray that You would remove all those things of the world and of men that have captured us. So, Lord, we

pray to see into Your heart tonight. Lord, we know that we are going to touch something huge which is the love of Christ for His church. So, we pray, Lord, that You would give us the capacity to hear and to understand what You are saying. Lord, we glorify You. We worship You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Brothers and sisters, by this time I think we now know that we have been about this topic of the heavenly vision and the whole counsel of God. And my part in this was to share on that heavenly vision expressed with impact and meaning in each individual believer. The central story of what we have been sharing about involves the conversion story of a genius love of a Pharisee while he was walking to Damascus, Saul. He had been persecuting the church; he had been chasing, hunting down Christians to death. And along the way to Damascus, as he was seeking his next batch of victims, a light shone on him and all those around him, and they fell, and he was struck blind. And in that moment, a voice came in the midday light, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" It was a personal message to him. The people around him, as he described it, could hear something, but they did not know what He was saying. But He was saying it to Saul, and Saul heard it and asked, "Who are You, Lord?" And we remember that the Lord told him: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." In this moment, something happened to the Man that broke him. He had been so certain of his teachings and of his training that as he began to hear the word of this Man Jesus coming to his heart, he might have given it a small opening to analyze, but as he thought about it, he began to realize that it is completely and entirely consistent with what he had read in the Old Testament.

So, because of that, as he opened it a little bit in his heart, suddenly he closed it because he could not possibly let it in. This vision was of such impact that had he let it in, he knew that the ambition of man and the trajectory of his life was entirely inconsistent if this message were to come into his heart and be planted and grew. So as a result, he did what he could do, which was to persecute the church. He thought: "Perhaps if I can destroy it, then who I want to be might survive." We know that when he came to this point, and the light shone down on him, he broke, and he bowed down and was blinded.

For the next three days he was blind, and those who were with him helped him walk to Damascus. They found a man named Judas, and he stayed in his house which was on Straight Street. And we shared yesterday that Straight Street was an interesting word for this street. It probably was just a straight street.

The Lord Jesus Is Alive in His Church

In Saul's blinded eyes, in the eyes of his heart, he looked down his field of vision, and what he began to see was how he had touched the church because the Lord had said, "You are persecuting Me." Saul well knew that the Lord had been crucified now for over five years, and he certainly had never laid a hand on Him in this way in these past five years. But the Lord told him, "You are persecuting Me." So, he began to realize that the Lord was alive, and He was alive in His church.

So, he began to think, and we pondered, how he might have persecuted the church. We shared that he wanted them to blaspheme Him, so he might have hunted them down. He might have suggested to them that if they stopped meeting together, then perhaps he could let them go. But what burned at his heart was that even when he threatened them with death, and he dragged them out and killed some in their presence, those who remained kept meeting, and they kept growing.

The Church Is the House of God

And in his mind's eye he could have seen, "Why do they keep meeting?" And he would have thought that was in the time of the Jews of old, those whom he had so admired and so loved, their whole life surrounded the tabernacle and the temple because they were the places where the glory of the Lord fell in their presence, and it was how they knew that they were home. And when they went through the wilderness, they did not know where to go, they looked up into the sky and they could see the cloud of glory and they would follow that cloud wherever it led them. And at night when it was cold, they realized that the fire was there to keep them warm and to cover them. So, the tabernacle was so important to them.

And when Solomon finished the temple and they prayed for the first time, Solomon said, "When your people are defeated, and they look back at this place, and they pray for repentance, Lord, hear in heaven their prayer and forgive them." And I remember, it is so moving that we pray and maintain our course because sometimes on the journey, it is hard, but the house is where we would look when we need to repent, when we need to keep going. It is so important.

However, to the Jews in present time, they had forgotten; the temple had become a den of thieves. They came and went; they sold merchants. When they needed to make an offering, they would find the cheapest place, buy the cheapest sacrificial animal or whatever, and offered it up. It was easy and simple, but it did not impact their lives.

Saul saw that, and it must have burned in him. But here was a group of people who refused not to meet because they knew that the house of God is a dwelling place of the glory of God. "You can kill us, you can hunt us down, you can kill our family members, but we will still meet because this is the house of God. It is the dwelling place of the Most High." They would have remembered the Lord Jesus who said: "On this earth, the foxes have their holes, and the birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head." They could have said: "Here Lord, You have a place."

So, he wanted them to stop meeting because it was the mark of the continuing survival of this sect as he perceived them. But he could not snuff it out. As he looked down at the view finder, he saw in the Old Testament the church that he had touched. He could see into the future, a little bit dimly at this point, but the church is the house of God, and forever she will be the dwelling place of God's Messiah. He began to see it.

Then he may have charged them to turn in the other Christians. As he was hunting them down, he said, "If you turn them in, I might let you loose. Or if you let me know where the leaders are I will let you go." Of course, in historical persecution, if you strike down the leaders, then maybe the movement will die. And his own mentor, Gamaliel, had told them, "If there is nothing

here, once the leader dies, it should dissipate.” But it had been five years, and Jesus had been crucified and dead for five years, and yet they continued to grow. So, he hunted them down, for what he began to realize was that these people, even the ones whom they did not know, there was a loyalty and a binding together that he had never seen before.

The Pharisees were very used to being able to influence behavior, by a stern look here, a threat there, we are going to expel you from the synagogue. People would change their entire behavior just so the Pharisees were pleased with them. But these people were not that way. You could threaten them with anything; they would not turn one another in. And not only that, but when they struck the leaders, like they struck Stephen down, they still met. Why? Because he touched the church, that early church, and we are told that the church is the body of Christ, and the body of Christ has one Head, and that Head is not a mortal man. So, he could strike down all the heads, all the leaders, and we would still meet. Why? Because the church is the body of Christ, and we are all growing by that growth which is from God and growing up into the Head into a mature man. And as he looked down with his eyesight, he would have seen in the Old Testament those who followed the Lord so faithfully. There were those who waited for His will and His commandments. There were the angels and cherubim and those who waited for His instruction. And here we see a body waiting for her Head, ready to do anything at His command.

So, as he looked down the view finder and saw that back then all the Jews were going their own way. They did not know what they were doing anymore. And certainly, there was no connection with God, but he could not snuff these people out. They would keep on meeting, and they would keep on listening to the teachings of the apostles. He could not snuff them out.

The Church Is the Body of Christ

As he looked down further, he could see dimly that the church is the body of Christ, and we have one Head, and we are growing up into that Head. He asked them to deny their faith: “If you deny that you are a Christian, if you deny Jesus, I will set you free.” But they would not, and it says that he dragged men and women away. He likely cast them out to be stoned, and he cast his vote against them. He killed parents in front of their kids, but they kept growing, and they kept meeting. What was it about them? As he would have looked back to the Old Testament, he would have known that for so long God wanted a people of His own. He said, “I will write My laws into their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people.” For so long He wanted a people whom He could love, but in that day the Jews were going wherever they wanted; they had no one to follow, and they certainly loved themselves probably more than anything else.

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

But these people were willing to die rather than to deny the One whom they loved, and they could not explain it. And he looked past into the future, and he saw dimly that the church of God is the bride of Christ, and we are betrothed to Him. We belong to Him; He belongs to us. And he saw glimpses of this purpose and this vision, and he was broken, and he lay there in the dust with the light shining on him—broken.

Further Instructions of the Heavenly Vision on the Battlefield

But what is so wonderful is that this heavenly vision which came into his heart, the Lord was not done teaching Saul about Himself. Because one of the things that the Lord is so good at is bringing what is in heaven down to earth. He brings what is in His heart and equips His people on the battlefield. Even with this extraordinary vision that He had deposited into the heart of Saul, He gave him further instructions. We read later that he is told that what you have seen and what you will continually be shown, you need to write it down and teach it to others. He was to teach it to the Jews and to the Gentiles. So, in that moment, what we learn is that this vision is not just for the elite; this vision is for all those who have been saved. The Lord's intention was to bring it to a place where Saul could see it on the battlefield, and he could have that context as he wrote it down.

So, the Lord had a plan, and it involved a man named Ananias. Now something else had happened at that point, and it is a marvelous thing. When Saul struck the body of Christ, he struck Christ, but something else happened.

I remember once, I like to try and fix things in my house, and usually after I fail, we have to have a professional come and fix it. But I remember one time I was trying to work on an electrical outlet, and I got zapped. And if you have ever done that, you feel like your heart skipped a beat, and you could not breathe. You just feel fried for a moment. You almost blow back a little bit. And I think what happened to Saul that day was that he did see this, but there was also a holy frying that happened to him in that moment. He touched something of such significance that it was immense. It was so large, and it had a sort of gravitational effect that it caused everything to revolve around him. Remember, the Lord said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord responded, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." There was something in there that was very special. Saul had begun to harm the love of Christ for His church. It is immense; it is the governing force for everything that He is doing. And it is so large that everything revolves around it, and he had touched it. And I think that it had left an impression on him. Because as we read into all his coming books, as he talked about this particular topic, there was a sort of glow of that love in everything he wrote. It is so large that it blinded him; it crushed him, it annihilated him, and the vision and that love are entirely connected: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. The ones whom you have harmed are of Me, and I love them." And it is so substantial and weighty that it knocked him down, and it so severely impacted him, and he was led into town.

The Lord Jesus Sent Ananias with Instructions

But on the other side of town, the early church was growing. And as our brothers have mentioned, they were growing with an authenticity and a purity even though they did not have all the books that Saul would end up writing. They did not have any of those things, but they were alive, and they were experiencing the leading and the presence of the Holy Spirit. They were growing under the cover of the love of God, and they were submitting one to another. They were holding things in common, and they were listening to the will of God. It was so marvelous, and among them was this man Ananias.

Now Ananias was a member of the body of Christ on the battlefield. We do not know very much about him, but we know that he was listening. And when the Lord called him, He called him by name, "Ananias." I do not know what he was doing, but suddenly he looked up and said, "Here I am, Lord." And He gave him instructions: "There is a man named Saul, and he has been struck blind. He is on Straight Street; You should go. He has seen in a vision that a man named Ananias, who is you, will go and lay hands on him so he can see again."

Ananias goes but not before he tells the Lord, because he had this kind of relationship, "Lord, I know this man. He has caused great harm to Your people in Jerusalem." Nevertheless, he goes, and when he gets to Straight Street, he goes to see Saul. By this point, Saul was a broken man. He was blind and bowed, he had not eaten or drunk anything for three days, and he was dehydrated. Ananias looked at him, and the Lord caused him to see him as precious. But then he came to him, called out his name, laid his hands on him, and Saul could see. The amazing thing for Saul was that for three days he had been thinking about all the things that had happened. He had been thinking about the church in all her glory, and how he had touched her, how the church had impacted him in this way, and he saw the Old Testament in a different way. Then when his eyes were opened, the first person from the church whom he saw was Ananias.

Saul Saw Christ in Ananias

I do not know how Ananias looked, but I think when Saul opened his eyes and looked at him, probably Ananias was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He saw Christ in a person, in the church, and he touched something there. For the first time he had experienced that where two are gathered in His name, there am I in their midst. And it was an amazing moment, because I do not know that there was anything so extraordinary about Ananias. However, he was the one whom the Lord sent as the representative of His church.

And what is great is that you and I are Ananias, and there is nothing all that fantastic truthfully, except maybe in the world's eyes, of anyone of us, but we are representatives of the church of the living God, and it is a wonderful thing.

So, he opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was Ananias. So, in this dual learning, he was seeing these extraordinary things in the heavens, and when the Lord was done, he opened his eyes and Saul said, "What am I going to see?" It was Ananias, but the Lord wanted him to learn that the heavenly vision is real life, and it is here on the battlefield in which we are engaged. So, this is part of what the Lord was teaching him, not only that extraordinary vision, but to couple it with seeing Christ in a brother. It was really wonderful.

In their interaction what we begin to see is what the Lord was trying to teach both as they went forward.

In Acts 9 and Acts 22, we will go through some of the things that the two of them experienced as brothers.

In Acts 9:17 we find that Ananias went to Straight Street, and he saw Saul: "And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laid his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord

Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

His Sovereignty in His Church Through the Holy Spirit

The first thing that we would like to highlight about life in the church is that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Now I think that by the Lord's wisdom He has already covered this topic so wonderfully. My brothers have shared in such a wonderful way. We would just like to read one thing from my notes from this morning.

Why did the early church in those days have such a glorious expression? It was because the Holy Spirit was sovereign in their midst. The Holy Spirit was such a part of their lives. They all moved and existed together governed by the Holy Spirit's leading. They had a living walk with Him where they went, what they ate, how they shared with one another, and how they experienced struggles together. It was all driven by the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives. The picture that we were given of Psalm 133 that the Holy Spirit, the anointing oil, which poured down onto the head of Aaron and then down onto his body, all the way down to the hem. It was experienced in real time for these saints. They knew who their Head was. It was the Lord Jesus, and He was alive, and the anointing that came down upon the Lord Jesus came down onto His body. They lived by that anointing, and it was so real to them and all their interactions.

They did not have the rules; they did not know Ephesians chapters 2-5. They had not heard these things that we have spoken of, and as our brother shared there was something in their hearts of life that instinctively moved forward in this way, governed by the leading of the Holy Spirit. It was so important to them. All of it was so authentic; it was pure, it was real. The Holy Spirit taught them how to submit to one another. He was a part of their lives, and they knew Him. So when Ananias came, the Lord had already given him instructions to cause Saul's eyes to see, and when he came, he also told him, "The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you because the operator, the grower of the heavenly vision is the Holy Spirit." And without the Holy Spirit, the church has no way forward, and it was one of the first things that Saul learned when his brother came to see him was that the Holy Spirit, and His sovereignty is in our midst.

Suffer For the Sake of the Name of the Lord

Then the second thing that happened and I do not know that both sides knew this at the time, but Ananias knew it. When Ananias was giving the Lord his reason: "I am not really sure I want to go," but he obeyed, he was faithful. The last thing the Lord said to him before he departed was in Verse 16 of chapter 9: The Lord said to Ananias, "for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

In the early church, in the body of Christ, in the house of God, it is known that there will be suffering for us to grow. The suffering was so known to them. Some of them may have even experienced it through Saul, but it was something that moved Ananias. He was thinking of Saul, and the Lord told him that he was going to suffer much for His namesake, and Ananias knew then, and he saw his brother as precious. Suffering in this world is part of the growing of the house of

God. In the church sometimes we feel that it is okay if we suffer, and we are thankful because the Lord causes our hearts to grow, to be willing to suffer for His name.

But in the early church there was something else that was precious, and it is still in the house. We understand and are willing for others to suffer for His namesake. It is not just that we suffer; it is that when we see our brothers and sisters, and they are precious to us and to Him, it is to know that we each will suffer for the sake of the house. And it is one of the ways by which we recognize the preciousness of each other. Obviously, suffering is not something that is easy for us, that we know on our own what it is to suffer. But in the house, for the dear saints He is worth suffering for, and we need to see each other as precious. Sometimes, suffering is allocated to someone whom you know if it came upon me, I could not bear it. But the Lord knows, and that which the body of Christ is not able to handle in one space, there might be another whom the Lord will raise up who is able to do it. So, when Ananias came upon him, he saw this curled up, helpless, blind, dehydrated, broken man, and there he was, the one whom the Lord knew that he would suffer much for the name of the Lord.

Sometimes it is hard to appreciate each other because the world highlights all these differences. But in the house, we have been captured, and we think of Him as worthy. We must see that each one of us is going to carry some burden for His name's sake, and for that reason, we need to hold one another as precious because it is for His glory, and Ananias saw that.

Allow the Young People to Suffer for the Name of the Lord

There is another space here, brothers and sisters that is of importance. That is, we need to allow our children and our young people to suffer for the sake of the name of the Lord. We live in a world where we try to protect them from everything, but when we do that, they will never know how much He is worth it. That suffering binds us all together. It is the common story of all of those who are seeing heavenly vision. It is worth living for; it is worth struggling for and doing what may not be easy for us or familiar, but He is so worth it.

Rejoice in Suffering on Behalf of His Body

Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

He called it a very special kind of suffering. He said, "They are suffering on behalf of His body which is the church. And he said, "It is a cause of rejoicing for me." This is a remarkable thing.

I may have shared this with some of you before, but there is a book that I like, and in the book there is the story about a boy named Ender, a Science fiction book, but there is one scene where Ender's rival, another young boy, and Ender, who has gone through all of this terrible tragedy. And the mother has gone through so much grief over her son, and his rival comes to Ender's mom and says to her, "Oh, but you have suffered, and all of the loss and all of the grief, how is it even worth it?" She said to him, "I have experienced something in my life that is worth suffering for." Then she tells him that grief is joy. And it means that those of us who live in a church, who are in the body of Christ, and have experienced the life of the Lord in one another, we have been honored and blessed to be exposed and to know and have life in something of such

worth that she is worth suffering for. There is joy in that, brothers, and sisters, because so few people can find that. But in the house of God Saul was saying: "The grief is the joy, and I rejoice in my sufferings on behalf of His body, which is the church." It was so important to him.

So here go back in time to when it was all starting. The Lord had already told Ananias, but Ananias did not tell Saul this part. But when Ananias walked in, and he laid eyes on this broken man, he knew that Saul was going to suffer more for us. For that reason, He is precious. This is a binding force in the house that is not in the world. The willingness, and the joy, and the drive to suffer for the house is so special.

Stand Side by Side – Bear Burden Together

The third thing is in Acts 22. Now when something is in Acts 22 and not in Acts 9, Paul is remembering. It is cool because when you read it, you begin to see the things that Paul remembered about the moment.

Acts 22:12-13a: "'And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said ..."

So, what he says here is not in the chapter 9 account. He says, remembering 29 years later, that Ananias came in, and I could not see but I could hear, and he came and stood next to me."

Now it is a small thing, but it is included in here. It is that he stood by my side. Now this phrase, as you read some of what Paul writes, is a very important phrase to Paul. At the end of his life In II Timothy chapter 4, he says, "When I needed Him, the Lord came and stood with me." He remembers that the Lord came and stood with him. When he recounts that in Acts 23:11, he says that the Lord came and stood with me that night. When he was fearful of his life, the Lord stood at his side: "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

This was a very important phrase to him. It was Someone coming along side to stand with him. The Lord Himself told His disciples that you are those who have stood by Me in My trials. There is an imagery and a meaning here of bearing burdens together. What you are bearing is not just yours; we will bear them together. Spiritually and sometimes physically, we bear and share the burdens together because all of us who are alive and living know that life can be hard, and when we have a heart for the Lord, serving sometimes is weight-bearing, and certainly the opposition to the Lord's work is always weight-bearing, and none of us can stand on our own. But spiritually, the Lord stands with us when we are not able, and spiritually, the house of God bears one another's burdens (Galatians 6). We need to carry one another, and one of the wonderful things in the house and the work of the Holy Spirit, is that the Holy Spirit causes us to take our eyes off of ourselves and to look around and be observant of the burdens that are our dear brothers and sisters are carrying. It is a hallmark feature of the church. So, he remembered it, and stood side by side with me.

In Hebrews 10:32-33 the author writes: "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so

treated.” And if anyone has the NIV, you have already read: “... at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.”

What we see in this little, short verse is that in the house of God, there are burdens to be born and sufferings that we endure. Some of the sufferings are because they come upon us, and some of the sufferings that we experience are because we stand side by side with our brothers and sisters, upon whom those burdens come down. This is the nature of life in the heavenly vision, that we are together for His burdens, for the sake of His house, and to suffer on behalf of His body which is the church. *The sufferings on behalf of His body which is the church.* These are really marvelous.

We read, II Corinthians 12:9: “... My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” ...” It is describing the sufferings that come from bearing the burdens in the body. It is specifically to that we suffer for the sake of the house, and there is overwhelming grace to carry us through if those burdens are objectively defined to us or if they are objectively defined to our brother. There is suffering in those spaces because we are standing with one another. This is the life of the body of Christ that when one suffers, we all suffer for the sake of the sufferings of the body of Christ. So, this is another lesson that he remembered. I do not know if Saul thought, “What is the next step going to be? I do not know, but the Lord sent Ananias, my brother, and he stood next to me.” He remembered him; it was really fantastic.

Laying Hands – I Am You, You Are Me

The fourth is Acts 9:17a: “And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him”

We would like to share in this next section Ananias laying his hands on Saul. Now he was laying hands on him in order to heal him, and this was a direct instruction from the Lord. The Lord told him, “You are going to go and lay hands on him to heal him.” But what it speaks to is the fact that he was going to heal him from close, not from a distance. He could have very well healed him from afar. Have you ever noticed that Dana could make these really cool sounds that really sound like the real thing? Ananias was not just going to heal him from a distance; he was going to draw near. The Lord could certainly have healed him without Ananias having to go; that is nothing to the Lord. But the Lord’s instruction was, “Draw near and lay your hands upon him.” It was important, so he obeyed.

The laying hands was no doubt for healing, but we also know that Saul knew the Old Testament, and in the Old Testament the laying on hands was a representation of identification that, “I am with you.” And it is even more than that. It is, “I am you, and you are me.”

Of course, we remember when the Old Testament burnt offering was brought, and we would bring our burnt offering, family by family, present them to the priest, and we would put our hands on his head because what we were suggesting was this offering is taking my place. He is not only for me, but he is in my place, and I am claiming him as me.

It is a very special identification, and of course, we think about our precious Lord Jesus. When He was crucified on the cross for our sakes, in our heart of hearts, spiritually, we needed to claim

Him as ours, to lay our hands to say that He is dying for me, and that I am in Him. So, there is this meaning of laying hands.

Then of course, we remember when the lepers were healed, and the Lord would call them to Him, and He would lay hands on them to heal them. It was not just to say, "I am going to heal you, but I am with you, and you are with Me." So, this left an imprint in Saul's heart, and we read in Ephesians chapter 3, "I am the least of all saints." And we read in I Corinthians chapter 15, he said, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He was suggesting now that he really knew, and it was not fake. He knew that there was something coming upon him of which he was not worthy. Then there came this Christ in the form of a brother, who laid his hands on him, and said, "You and I are one." It was a wonderful moment.

Really, what it symbolizes in the laying on of hands is that we are one. This is a core part of the heavenly vision. Oneness: we are one. And it is for us to know that I have laid my hands on the Lord Jesus; He is mine and I am His. And I am in Him and He is in me. He is the substance of my life. And a brother or a sister has also laid their hands on the Lord Jesus, and He is the substance and the fulness of their life. And what we begin to see is that we are brought together, and we are one. We all remember when the Lord Jesus was leaving this earth and His last prayer. He prayed continuously with such passion and fire in His heart that they might be one as We are one; He was praying to His Father. This was so important to his heart because he came and laid his hands on him. We are together, and it left an impression on our brother's heart.

This testimony is a light in the world because as we know the governance of the world is about separating, it is about tearing down, it is about highlighting every difference that is supposedly insurmountable or as our brother shared earlier, impossible. But what we know there is, as our brother shared, nothing impossible with Him. So, the testimony of the world is all different, impossible, cannot be done. But here what we see is the persecutor of the church, and the ones who are persecuted even further, the Jews, the Gentiles, and every different type of person, whether introverts and extraverts, all these people are on different sides of whatever isle you choose to pick. In the house of God, we are one because in us there is the substance of the Lord Jesus who is our life. And if we would ever suggest that there is a power on this earth to separate the life of Christ and the love of God, it does not exist. So, what we need to know is that the oneness is a great testimony in the world. And we must be watchful of the work of the devil these days, and this is why we need the Holy Spirit so much to humble us and to cut these portions out of our personas.

Later in Paul's life, he describes others in these ways. He said, "They are my fellow soldier, they are my fellow bond servant, they are my fellow prisoner." That is to suggest that we are one. We are together on the battlefield, we are together in His service, we are, though physically chained, together spiritually, loosening for His work in this world. We are one, and in the oneness is the life. It is so important.

We Are Family

In Acts 9:17a: "And Ananias ..., and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul,"

Objectively, “Brother Saul” is a very special term. When you look back before this, I could not find any place where someone called another man, brother so and so. I am sure they were saying this one to another at the time in the early church, but for sure Saul had never heard it before. And this man comes to him and says, “Brother Saul;” it was very special. Paul knew who he was. I think he may have felt that he was an impostor right in his space. But what Ananias was starting to see was not just that he was ordered to go there. But Ananias came to his side and was telling him, “We are now in the same family, you, and me. We are in the same household.” It is very special. Remember in John chapter 20 when the Lord said for the first time after His resurrection that which had never been said before, “Go to My brothers, and tell them I am going to My Father and your Father.” It was for the first time that we were not in different families, that we genuinely had come together into the family or the household of God.

I remember many years ago I was listening to our Brother Kaung sharing about this topic in Mandarin, and my Mandarin is awful. I remember when he said this, “In Mandarin it is called Ja which is the house. It is not a Ja, he said, “It is a Jatin; it is not a house; it is a family.” I heard it, and it was so impactful. It is not just a house; it is a family. So, he was telling Saul, we are a family. We have the same Father, and it is the new designation between the two of us. It comes from the life within, and it comes from being a son, and there is a preciousness in that.

The other part that was so wonderful is that this term he used was not in the Lord’s instructions. The Lord had not told him to use this word. When he came, he just used it. It was one of those instinctual things that our brother said yesterday, “that it was just the right word.” “What would I call him? Just call him Brother Saul.”

It is a little bit like when someone without the specific instruction of the Lord has the Holy Spirit of the Lord shining in them, and something happens not even under commandment. It is like when David thought of the house of God as he was laying there, and he said, “I am living in this paneled house, and the ark is resting in tent. I am going to build a house for the ark.” It just came from the inside of a heart that was in tune with the desires of the Lord. So, Ananias called him Brother Saul. It just seemed right, and it was. And Saul remembered him, very impactfully. But it is the designation in the house of God. It is the opposite of what Cain had said: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” But here what we see in the fulness of time that in the church, yes, that is who we are. That is how we align one to another.

Prophetic Word of God

Finally, in Acts 22:13-16, this is the instruction that he brought to Saul.

“... 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'”

And Ananias brings a word from God. If we read I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 it speaks of the church, that there are many members but one body that the central governing is the love of God

and that we should have the Word of God alive and living in our midst, a prophetic word from every direction.

Sometimes when we think of prophecy, we think that it is like telling the future. When we are growing, we think about it that way. We read the prophets, and they always seem to be telling the future. But really what it means is that we are bringing a word that is from the Lord into the church. So, what happened here was that Ananias literally brought a word that he had heard from God to Saul. And it was the transmitting of that message to him.

It reminds us again of what we shared briefly yesterday in Matthew 10 that before the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them, "What you hear in the dark, speak in the light." So, what is happening is that the starting point of all the things that he would do, and the ministries and the interactions with brothers and sisters, there is a source, a starting point, a seed, a life where it comes from. There is a prophetic word in the midst of the church that is of such importance that it is the weight bearing component of every meeting place. The cornerstone is Christ, who is everything, and the teachings and the Scriptures would form the foundation upon which everything would be built.

So, what we see here is that in Ananias we see in the body of Christ that we are to be in the Word, and the Word is to be a part of our communications and interactions. The Word is to cut into you and I and humble us like Him, that we would always be active and alive forward and backward. Sometimes it would be a sharp elbow because we are not listening. At other times it would encourage us and lift us up. But it is to be a part of everything we do. May we never stray from the house of God, from under the heavenly vision away from the Word because the Word is so important. It was the power in how they lived, making it alive in their hearts. The Holy Spirit was working, and they were sharing, and they were living the life that indwelt them.

Conclusion

So, what we see is that an individual believer came to Saul, and they became brothers. The two gathered together, and Saul was in their midst, speaking and encouraging. He was breaking down, and he was building up. It really was seeing the life of the heavenly vision in just two people, one totally broken and one whose name appears for a brief moment in history, and then is lost to the kingdom of God. But that moment is so precious because it was heavenly, and it remained heavenly. It came down so we could touch it, see it, and feel it.

Finally, Acts 22:26, Ananias tells Saul: "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." And it is such a wonderful moment because from that day forward the Lord would continue to expand the heavenly vision in Paul's eyes until he wrote it down, so we could read it and struggle with it, and ask what this means. But know too that it is something worth struggling for, to search and find and understand. And as we go forward in our life, I think that the Lord will continue to show each one of us, and my great hope is that there would be those who have sixty or seventy years even to study this and have it become real in their hearts. You should ask questions and think that there is Someone worth living for, and the Lord worth serving. We are with you, and we will pray for you, but go on; He is so worth it.

Let us pray:

Lord, we glorify Your name, and we thank You for Your grace and Your heart for us. Lord, we pray that we will hold so precious the things that You hold precious. And Lord, give us strength and courage to fight for those things, and to labor for those things. Lord, we put our household into Your hands, from the youngest to the oldest, that altogether we would live before You, and that Your light would shine on us every day. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

The Heavenly Vision Expressed in Ananias.....	1
Introduction	2
The Lord Jesus Is Alive in His Church	2
The Church Is the House of God	3
The Church Is the Body of Christ	4
The Church Is the Bride of Christ	4
Further Instructions of the Heavenly Vision on the Battlefield	5
The Lord Jesus Sent Ananias with Instructions.....	5
Saul Saw Christ in Ananias	6
His Sovereignty in His Church Through the Holy Spirit.....	7
Suffer For the Sake of the Name of the Lord	7
Allow the Young People to Suffer for the Name of the Lord	8
Rejoice in Suffering on Behalf of His Body.....	8
Stand Side by Side – Bear Burden Together.....	9
Laying Hands – I Am You, You Are Me	10
We Are Family	11
Prophetic Word of God	12
Conclusion.....	13

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