



World Christian Fellowship

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Ananias.

Three men by the name of Ananias appear in the Bible, and each plays a role in the New Testament book of Acts.

A common name among Jews, Ananias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Hananiah and means "*God has been gracious.*"

The first Ananias is featured in a dramatic episode that took place in the early Jerusalem church in Acts 5 and his wife Sapphira.

Second Ananias appears in the book of Acts Chapter 9 whom we are going to look in detail today.

Third Ananias in the Bible was high priest in Jerusalem during much of Paul's early ministry. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ananias was appointed by **Herod Agrippa II** in approximately **AD 48**. Known for his harshness and cruelty, Ananias appears in **Acts 23** during Paul's trial in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin council.

Enraged by Paul's defence, Ananias ordered him to be struck on the mouth (**Acts 23:1–2**).

Acts 9:17, *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."*

There are three accounts in the New Testament of what it is like for a human being to be in the presence of the glory of the Lord.

- The transfiguration (**Matthew 17**)
- The vision of the exalted Lord given to John (**Revelation 1**)
- The story of Saul on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9**)

They all have one thing in common.

- At the transfiguration, "they fell on their faces and were terrified" (**Matthew 17:6**).
- In the book of Revelation, John says, "I fell at his feet as though dead" (**Revelation 1:17**).
- Here on the road to Damascus we see Saul "falling to the ground" (**Acts 9:4**).

But I want you to notice something else that these three stories have in common.

Matthew 17:6-7, *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." ⁸When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

Christ lifts them up and they have nothing to fear in the presence of God. This is what the risen Lord Jesus Christ is able to do for all who put their trust in him. He allows you to stand without fear in the presence of a holy God.

You find exactly the same thing in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:17-18, *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying ¹⁷to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*

And you find the same thing here on the road to Damascus. Saul of Tarsus has seen the unveiled glory of the Lord, and he is down in the dust, but he hears the voice of the Son of God.

Acts 9:6, *So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

When Jesus shows you that you are a sinner and that your only hope is to cast yourself on his mercy, his purpose is not to leave you grovelling in the dust. He will lift you up and send you out to fulfil his purpose in the world.

"You will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6).

Let's follow the story. Saul went into the city of Damascus and for three days he gave himself to prayer and fasting.

Acts 9:9-11, *And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰Now 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." ¹¹So 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.*

The answer to Paul's prayer comes through a person – a man by the name of Ananias.

Why this is important?

Saul came to know the risen Christ without the witness or even the presence of a single Christian believer. He came to faith through a direct encounter with the risen Lord.

God broke through the pride and prejudice of this man's heart by a direct intervention – no one else was involved.

Saul says, *“Lord, what do you want me to do?”*

And the Lord says, *“Rise and enter the city and you will be told what you must do.”*

It's as if the Lord says to him: “You have been awakened to who I am and to your need of mercy by my direct intervention in your life, but that is not how it will normally be.”

God's normal way is to work through His people. Christ is the head. We are His body. And it is through the body that the will of the head gets done.

Jesus Christ Works through Means.

Acts 9:15, *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.*

This wonderful phrase, *“chosen vessel”* tells us two things:

a) God uses us

An instrument is how a particular task gets done. The scalpel is an instrument in the hands of the surgeon. When the surgeon goes into the operating room, he has multiple instruments by which he is able to perform the surgery. The operation will not get done without them.

b) We depend on God

What can a scalpel do?

Nothing, unless it is in the hands of a surgeon.

Christ says of Saul, *“He is a chosen instrument of mine...”* (**Acts 9:15**).

In other words, “He will be in my hands, and I will do my work through him.”

How will the name of Christ be carried to “the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel”?

The answer is that God will do it!

But how will God do it?

He will do it through his chosen instruments.

Saul is not the only chosen instrument.

We see here that Ananias is one too.

We see that Barnabas is too.

There is a pattern here. Saul is not unique.

Acts 9:10, *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."*

The Lord spoke to him in a vision and told him to go to the house where Saul of Tarsus was praying. Saul knows that Jesus is the risen Lord, but he is waiting to be told what to do.

Ananias did not want to go to Saul, and you can hardly blame him. If Ananias had seen him three days earlier, Saul would gladly have taken his life.

Acts 9:13, *Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem."*

God will call you to do things that will scare you. You will find yourself saying, "I can't do that. It's too difficult. It's too dangerous. I'm willing to do some other thing, go some other place, speak with some other person, but I can't do this!" That's where Ananias was.

But the Lord said to him, "Go"

Acts 9:15, *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.*

Thank God that he did!

Acts 9:17, *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."*

Ananias had to overcome his fear so that Saul would be overcome by grace. Thank God that is what happened.

Think about what happened as a result of this man overcoming his fear and obeying God.

Saul is welcomed into the church.

- ✓ Because Saul is welcomed into the church, he is sent out by the church.
- ✓ Because Saul is sent out by the church, the gospel comes to the Gentiles.
- ✓ Because the gospel came to the Gentiles that most of us here are in Jesus Christ today.

So don't forget to thank Ananias when you get to heaven!

God works through means. It was through Ananias, one of the forgotten heroes of the early church, that Saul was established as a believer and welcomed into the church. That changed the history of the world.

The Ministry of Ananias

a) Surrounding a person with love

Saul was blind. For three days had had been sitting in complete darkness. His entire campaign against Christians was based on the conviction that God is a God of vengeance, and now he has discovered that he is the one who deserves the vengeance of God.

Saul has been killing disciples of Jesus, and now a disciple of Jesus arrives and places his hands on the blind man's head. It must have been a terrifying moment.

What's he going to do to me?

But the first words he hears from the first Christian he meets is: *"Brother Saul..."*

Saul, my brother!

Ananias surrounded Saul with love, forgiveness, and grace.

Who can you reach out to?

Who needs to be surrounded with your love?

Your presence?

Your words?

b) Grounding a person in the gospel

Saul's blindness had a particular purpose. It was a sign of the judgment of God. And when Ananias prayed for his sight to be restored, it was a sign to Saul that God's judgment had been taken away. It was as assurance that Christ had shown him mercy, and that he had been brought into an entirely new relationship with God.

Who might you do that?

Who do you know that needs to be restored to God?

Who needs to know about the forgiveness and mercy that are available in Jesus Christ?

c) Preparing a person for the work God is calling him or her to do

You will *"carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15).

Ananias prepared him for that ministry.

Where God is at work in the life of a person, we are to embrace them as a brother or sister, we are to ground them in

the gospel, and we are to help them to see how God can use them and prepare them for that work.

This was the ministry of Ananias, and Christ uses this ministry to turn outsiders into insiders and to turn enemies into friends.

When Saul was awakened to his need for Christ, the first Christian he met loved him, forgave him, prayed for him, baptized him, fed him, guided him, and prepared him.

God works through means: Paul prayed, and the answer came through a person. It was through this ministry of Ananias that Saul was welcomed, disciplined, taught, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

This principle is foundational to the ministry and to the mission of the church. Of course, God is able to transform a human life without any other person being involved. But he chooses to work through his people. We are his “fellow workers”

1 Corinthians 3:9, *For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.*

He is the head. We are the body.

William Carey was a young minister in England during the late 1700s. He lived at a time when many Christians and churches had become focused on themselves, but Carey was gripped by the needs of the world in his day.

On one occasion, when he was arguing the case for sending missionaries overseas, he was interrupted by an older minister: “Sit down, young man,” he said. “You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without consulting you or me.” That was the prevailing idea among many Christians at the time.

Carey responded by writing a book called: **An enquiry into the obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathen**. It is a marvellous book that shows how God’s work gets done through means – praying, giving, going, and proclaiming the gospel.

From this conviction that God works through means, Carey launched a missionary society, and at its first meeting **in 1792** he called people to “*Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.*” That comes right through his understanding of how God works through means.

Within a year he sailed to India where he served, at great cost and with great effect, for more than **30 years**, translating the

whole Bible into **6 languages**, and parts of the Scripture into **209 other languages and dialects**.

A whole generation followed William Carey and his two convictions to the mission field – that God works through means, and that the greatest privilege of our lives is to be God's chosen instrument.

God works through means.

His people are the chosen instruments by which his work gets done in the world.

There is no greater privilege than to be an instrument in the Redeemer's hands.

Christ works through means. But in all these means, we must never lose sight of the message.

Jesus Christ Himself is the Message

For some days, [Saul] was with the disciples at Damascus.

Acts 9:19-20, *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*

His ministry is clear from day one. Saul proclaimed the person who changed his life. Notice what he proclaimed about Jesus: He is the Son of God. He is God with us, God in the flesh.

Notice how he proclaimed Jesus:

Acts 9:22, *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

("the Christ" is the deliverer who was promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures)

This can only mean one thing: Saul spoke about Jesus from the Bible. He opened the Old Testament and he showed how it all points to Jesus.

This is exactly what Philip did with the Ethiopian he met in the desert. Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with **Isaiah 53**, "he told him the good news about Jesus" (**Acts 8:35**).

And this is exactly what our Lord himself modelled on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:27, *"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"*

Here is the **ministry of Saul of Tarsus**, and it is our ministry today. It was the ministry throughout the New Testament, and it was Jesus' own ministry.

Saul proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues saying, "He is the Son of God." He did this by opening the Scriptures and showing that he is the Christ. And he did this in the power of the Holy Spirit, as a chosen instrument in the hands of his risen Redeemer.

I want you to see that proclaiming Jesus Christ is the clear and unchanging ministry that pervades the New Testament and is given to us today. Let me give you 15 examples!

In Damascus:

Acts 9:20, *Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*

Acts 9:22, *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

In Lystra:

Acts 14:7, *And they were preaching the gospel there.*

In Derbe:

Acts 14:21, *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,*

In Macedonia:

Acts 16:10, *Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

In Thessalonica:

Acts 17:2-3, *Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”*

In Athens:

Acts 17:18, *Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this ^[g]babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.*

In Rome:

Romans 1:15, *So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.*

In Corinth:

1 Corinthians 2:2, *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

2 Corinthians 4:5, *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.*

In Troas:

2 Corinthians 2:12, *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord,*

In Galatia:

Galatians 1:16, *to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,*

In Ephesus:

Ephesians 3:8, *To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

In Philippi:

Philippians 1:18, *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.*

In Colossae:

Colossians 1:28, *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

This emphasis on proclaiming Christ was not only pervasive in the ministry of Paul, but Peter, writing to the church, says that it is our ministry too.

1 Peter 2:9, *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;*

John, writing to the churches, says that the proclamation of this gospel is for every nation, tribe, language, and people.

Revelation 14:6, *Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—*

Saul did not sit down and say, “Now what are the issues that need to be addressed in the Roman Empire?”

He did not set out to change the world.

He set out to proclaim the Christ who had changed him.

Through his proclaiming of Christ, lives were transformed, churches were planted, and the world was changed.

Here is how God's work gets done in this world:

We are the means. Christ is the message.

The work of God gets done by His chosen instruments who act in obedience.

Even when they are afraid, who are filled with the Spirit, who know and love the Bible, and are able to open it and point others to the Jesus who can change the world.

Conclusion:

What happened to Ananias?

We don't find him at all in the scriptures after the conversion of Paul!

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,*

Ananias is also listed by **Hippolytus of Rome** and others as one of the seventy disciples whose mission is recorded in **Luke 10:1-20**.

Ananias could have walked with Paul and made the ministry stronger, but he did not. Why?

May be Ananias felt that it is not his calling to go with Paul?

Maybe Ananias had his own call and ministry?

We don't know. But we see a missed opportunity.

But one thing we can learn from this.

Everybody cannot be Paul but can be Ananias!

You are never a lost cause.

Your past does not define you.

There are no limits on the good you can still do.

Discover the life you were created for filled with peace and love.