

Acts 9:10-19a
My Chosen Instrument
20180729
The gospel is to be made known

Introduction

I'll begin by asking if you have ever been caught completely by surprise? Something happens that you were just not expecting. This has happened to me on occasion throughout my life, but I will always remember a time when I was younger, when I was around 10 years old, a time when I was caught...caught by surprise. It was the middle of summer, and it was hot, much like what we are experiencing now. So naturally water toys were readily at hand. Squirt guns, water balloons, even some homemade contraptions with surgical tubing and the end of a ballpoint pen fashioned together to squirt water. Well it was with all these cool down devices in hand that my friends and I were walking down the street, passing through a section of the road that was in a low stretch, with what I would call mainly waste land on either side. We were not in a neighborhood per se but were not far for a cul-de-sac.

Naturally we enjoyed squirting each other with water. In our minds, since we had the water squirting devices, and we enjoyed squirting each other, by extension others wouldn't mind giving us the enjoyment of being squirted by us. Right? Well as it turns out that was wrong and that was when I was caught very much by surprise. A car was driving by, and it was squirted. By who I'm not sure, but the window happened to be down on the car and the driver was hit by the stream. The driver had no doubt in her mind that whatever just happened to her happened because of us. So, she slammed on the brakes. While she was throwing the car into reverse my friends disappeared like 5 or 6 little Houdini's and I just stood there. I was caught.

After she had steamed for a minute she wanted to know what I had to say for myself and since I was the only one left what I had to say for my buddies. I didn't really know what to say. I was afraid, afraid of getting in trouble. I was awash with guilt that I had been part of a company that had caused the woman so much distress. I even felt foolish that I hadn't run like the rest of the guys. In the end I could do little more than stammer an apology and promise to convey the message to the other dispersed boys. I share this story with you because it relates a type of fear that we can experience in the Christian walk. Sometimes we are surprised that now is the time and this is the person that I have to share the truth of the gospel with. When this happens, something wells up inside us, like it did with me, combinations of feelings – shame, guilt, fear all resulting in our ineffectiveness to witness for Christ.

In our text this morning we are going to be looking at this man Ananias who was, I am sure surprised to be approached by the Lord in a vision. But he was probably immediately in a state of joy to be conversing with the Lord. "Here I am Lord." However, as the Lord continues, Ananias recognizes the gravity of the assignment. He is to go to a house where a man by the name of Saul could be found. Saul, already well known as a persecutor of those who belong to the Way. This assignment causes great concern in Ananias, he is afraid. But what we see in the text is the delivery of the gospel is the mission and Ananias' part in the mission is going to carry him through the very heart of his fears.

What we are going to witness as we work through the text is a truth that is very simple. It is this. **The gospel is to be made known.** That does not mean it is not complicated to carry out. Because making the gospel known often involves overcoming the obstacles presented by our fears. Additionally, making the gospel known requires us to act in true faith.

The Lord Reveals His Will (vv10-16)

1. **v10** "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias." We are introduced to this follower of Christ who was located in the very city where Saul was told to go and wait. Saul was met by the very one he didn't believe was alive, the one he was convinced was just a distraction to true faith in God – and for that reason his life's pursuit had become the persecution of those in The Way.
 - a. **v10a** "The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias."" The thrill of having the Lord call you by name! This disciple is in a strong and vibrant relationship with the Lord, and it is helpful to point out some characteristics of this follower. Ananias, as we will see, is an obedient follower of Christ. He is in a close relationship with the Lord, as evidenced by his vision. As well as the reality that he was a follower of Christ in a time and place that it was costly to be identified as such.
 - i. **v10b** "And he said, "Here I am, Lord.""
 1. A response that echoes the words spoken by Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac (**Gen 22:1**) and the words of Isaiah the prophet when he is called by the Lord (**Isa 6:8**).

2. "Here I am." Faithful words spoken by those who love the Lord, words that should be said by us when we seek the Lord in prayer. "Lord, I call out to you...here I am...and I am listening."
- ii. **v11a** "And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight,..." This highlight of Ananias' life, conversing with the Lord, is suddenly taken for a loop at the name of Saul, a name that would give every Christian at the time great anxiety and something we will look at more in depth in a minute.
 1. **vv11b-12** "...for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision..." Already in the book of Acts we have seen other followers of Christ receive instruction, and it seems as if the greater the challenge in the instruction, the greater is the clarity given by the Lord.
 - a. In Acts 5 the apostles were arrested by the Sadducees and were rescued out of prison by an angel of the Lord, who told them to go and speak in the temple all the words of this life (**Acts 5:17-20**). A more challenging assignment is given, so more detailed instruction.
 - b. But then with Philip, whom we have looked at recently, he was just told to go to a certain place, and then to join with the chariot carrying along the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8:26, 29**).
 - c. So, what we are beginning to notice from this pattern is that as the apparent risk of the mission is increased, the greater clarity the Lord seems to give.
 - b. **v13a** "But Ananias answered,..." Church, I want us to notice here that Ananias has been presented with an assignment he had no idea was coming. He was surely surprised. The command of the Lord to have him go to Saul was distressing. So, where does Ananias turn? Who does he look to for help? Here in v13 it states he answered and in the following portions of verse 13 and the verse to follow he makes his concerns known to the Lord. Often, I know our pattern is to turn to other sources for help in dealing with our anxieties. Who here has sought out a medical professional, or a parent, maybe a close friend, or checked out a book on the topic; all before turning to prayer? We all have, we neglect simply going before the Lord in plain, simple language – prayer.
 - i. **v13b** "Lord, I have heard from many about this man,..." By Ananias' testimony we learn more about Saul. Even in Damascus, over 150 miles away from Jerusalem, Ananias has heard from many about Saul. It was Saul's very mission in life to do away with those who were pursuing Jesus.
 - ii. **v13c** "...how much evil (harm) he has done to your saints at Jerusalem." Ananias is concerned about what he is being asked to do by the Lord. Look, it is not wrong to take your concerns before the Lord in prayer. This is a big assignment; the Lord is directing Ananias to go to this man who is known to do harm to Christians.
 1. Have you ever felt you were being prompted by the Holy Spirit to approach someone with the gospel only to have your heart rate immediately quicken, your face flush, and your tongue dry out and seem to stick in your mouth?
 - iii. **v14** "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on..." You see Ananias even knows why Saul has come to town. To continue spreading the net to gather those who identify with Christ and to place them into a state of imprisonment. Notice how he has brought his concerns before the Lord in a matter of fact manner. These are Ananias' concerns with what the Lord is asking him to do.
 1. So, let me ask you what are you taking before the Lord in prayer? What are your concerns? Have you made them known to the lover of your soul?
 2. You might be thinking but the Lord has given the instruction already - it is clear what Ananias is to do. Isn't this dialogue just delaying obedience? But this is not the case, for the Lord is tender and loving to his own. Fellow believer, he wants to talk with us!
 3. **1 Peter 5:7** "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."
 - c. **v15a** "But the Lord said to him," You see it is not silence that meets Ananias after he makes his concerns known to the Lord...no...the Lord answers him.
 - i. **v15b** "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name..."
 1. This is the nub of the matter. Christ is telling Ananias. **The gospel is to be made known.** And I have chosen this man Saul to be my instrument to make it known.

- ii. **v16** *“For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”* One of Ananias’ chief concerns was the idea of suffering or being taken by Saul, but these words from the Lord are given to Ananias to alleviate him of that concern. I just recently heard about a missionary woman, I believe from the 80’s whose mission field was Lebanon. This was in a war-torn nation, in the middle of a bloody civil war. Of course, that meant she was constantly hearing people tell her how much danger she was facing, but her response is much like you might hear from many a saint through the ages. *“The safest place to be is in the center of God’s will.”* **Even in the most brutal example we have seen in the book of Acts so far, in Stephen, he died with his face set upon the Lord and words of forgiveness on his lips.** **Transition:** Here at the end of v16 the dialog ends between the Lord and Ananias. The Lord has Revealed His Will and we now have to transition to see if The Servant will Submit.

The Servant Submits (v17)

2. **v17a** *“So Ananias departed and entered the house.”* It doesn’t take us long to see that Ananias does in fact submit to the Lord’s will, and he goes to the place that he would otherwise be afraid to go, and in all likelihood he is still afraid – but he is trusting the Lord more than himself. He goes to the house containing Saul. Now we all know that outward compliance and full heartfelt obedience are not one in the same. In what we will see next from Ananias will easily erase all doubts or questions that might be related to Ananias’ motives.
 - a. **v17b** *“And laying his hands on him...”* Our forerunner in the faith, Ananias was able to take his hands and place them on Saul. He reaches out and touches him. **Does picturing Ananias doing this, placing his hands on Saul, in your mind - cause you to consider the love that is conveyed by the human touch? It certainly does for me and makes me want to demolish the barriers to human touch – appropriately of course – but to show others the love of Christ in this way. Especially those who would otherwise never experience a kind handshake, a hug, or a hand upon their shoulder.**
 - i. **v17c** *“he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road...”*
 1. He uses a term of endearment that we find common among the church to refer to a fellow believer. A term that shows solidarity. Here in the house of Judas, Ananias is fully submitted to the Father’s will, trusting the Lord more than he was trusting himself, he lays his hands on this man, and he calls him brother.
 2. **Brothers and Sisters, how do we improve in this as a church? Maintaining appropriate levels of respect and yet expressing our love for each other more freely?** And yet I am not forgetting that here in **v17** Ananias who had never likely met Saul before in his life is calling him brother and placing his hands upon him.
 - ii. Why is it that Ananias is there? The Lord has sent him and he states to Saul in **v17d** *“...so that you may regain your sight...”*
 1. It has been three days since Saul had his encounter with the Lord upon the road, an encounter that left him unable to see.
 2. The Lord even gave him a vision (**v12**) where he saw a man named Ananias come – lay his hands on him and open his eyes so that he could see. Here now in his presence is the very man doing exactly what was foretold.
 - iii. **v17e** *“...and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* This portion was not recorded in the dialogue between Jesus and Ananias in the earlier verses, but much like Philip with the Ethiopian once Ananias was there with Saul this proclamation is made over him, and he becomes filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. Receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant is the guarantee of your union with Christ, forever inseparable from him. Paul knows this to be true and the Holy Spirit inspired him to write about it. Reference **2 Cor 1:21–22** and **Eph 1:11–14**.

Transition: This is what it looks like for the Servant to be Submitted and it is by no accident that as we observe submission to the Lord that in the final point The Lord's Will is Done.

The Lord's Will is Done (vv18-19a)

3. **v18a** *"And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes,..."* Saul had been stricken with blindness. A blindness that was physically picturing his spiritual condition apart from Christ, but upon being made full of the Holy Spirit his spiritual condition was made right.
 - a. **v18b** *"...and he regained his sight."* With the scale like covering no longer present he can once again see. Saul is given clarity with his vision, but more importantly is the clarity he begins to have concerning the person of Jesus Christ.
 - i. This is a clarity that builds rather quickly for Paul. Many of these early converts to Christianity from Judaism had a great wealth of knowledge concerning the Scriptures. They were looking forward to the Messiah – and they discovered him in Christ. *So, let me encourage once again the importance of daily reading in God's word, nourishing your spiritual appetite with what God has so graciously provided for us.*
 - b. **v18c** *"Then he rose and was baptized;..."* It was without a doubt that Saul had put his faith in Christ. Ananias went to him at the Lord's command to confirm the work of Christ in his life and most likely Ananias oversaw the baptism of Saul as a sign of his spiritual condition in Christ.
 - i. We practice this same form of baptism to this day, for the believer – baptizing them into the church, confirming their faith in Christ before all who are watching, celebrating the magnificent work of Christ to save lost sinners unto himself.
 - ii. **Matthew 28:19** *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* We have seen this as the practice of the believers in Acts and will continue to see it as we work through the remaining chapters. *If you have never been baptized, but have put your faith in Christ it would be wonderful to help you follow through in obedience to the Lord's command. Please talk with one of the elders or the deacons about baptism so that we can celebrate together as we exercise obedience to the Lord as a body.*
 - c. **v19a** *"...and taking food, he was strengthened."* For Saul, now that his world is beginning to make sense again in light of the truth of the gospel, he breaks his fast and takes in food for nourishment.
 - i. *It really is not very often that we speak of fasting here in the church, but since it is here in the text it is a good reminder for us to exercise fasting as part of our prayer life.*

Conclusion

As we conclude our message this morning you might be wondering, why Saul? Why would God choose him? Later we know he is known by the name Paul and he explains better than I can by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit why God chose him. **Read Ephesians 3:7-12** Paul began that portion of Scripture with "Of this gospel I was made a minister..." This, if you will remember, was the main idea of the text - the gospel is to be made known. It was the task explicitly given to Saul to carry out, he is described to Ananias by the Lord as his chosen instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (**Acts 9:15**). So, as you think once again; why Saul? Be reminded that he was part of God's

plan. If Saul, a murderous persecutor of the church, was part of God's plan what about you my friend? Where do you fit into making the gospel of Jesus Christ known?

Family

Table Talk



July 29, 2018

Family Discussion

1. Have you ever been given an assignment that you were surprised to receive? How did you respond to the one giving you the assignment? In Scripture, many of the heroes of the faith were given difficult assignments by the Lord. Ananias is one of those that can be counted among that bunch.
2. One of the things the Lord had Ananias do when he came to Saul was to lay his hands on him. This is a common practice in the church, the elders will often be called upon to pray for someone and they lay their hands on them. How is Love communicated by simply touching someone?
3. What the Lord asked Ananias to do was not easy; to go to a known persecutor of the church - but he did it because he trusted the Lord. It is for the value of the gospel that the assignment was given. In many places in Scripture the gospel is likened to a great treasure. How do you treat the precious good news about Jesus?

GOD'S TRUTH

The gospel is to be made known!

Key Verse

"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."
Acts 9:15 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into
God's Word...

1. Genesis 22:1-18, Acts 9:10-16, Philippians 4:11-13
2. James 5:14, 2 Corinthians 13:11-14, Acts 9:17
3. 2 Corinthians 4:3-7, 2 Timothy 2:22-26, Matthew 13:44



Scripture Memory: Acts 10:42-43

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)

