

“AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE.”

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Scripture Texts: Acts 9:10-19

Introduction.

“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias.”

We have never heard of this Ananias before Acts 9:10 and we never hear of him again after Acts 9:19. From obscurity back to obscurity, a forgotten hero of the faith. This is like one of those little footnotes at the bottom of the page.

We know lots of famous Christians. Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Billy Graham, John Piper. But who knows who lead them to a faith in Jesus Christ? They are just as important.

Notice how God is directing and arranging everything. He is giving visions to prepare each one for the next step. There are many visions in Acts at critical junctions in God’s plan, changes in course, when God is up to something new, when something surprising is about to happen.

Sometimes God gives double visions, one to each party. This double confirmation tells us something really big is about to happen, a major shift in the heavenlies, in God’s plan of salvation. Like when both Mary and Joseph both receive a vision. Like when both Peter and Cornelius receive a vision in Acts 10.

God is the God of details, of antecedents, of connecting dots. Why are we ever anxious when we have such a great and powerful God who is paying attention to every detail of our lives?

An eye-opening experience.

This double vision is an eye-opening experience for both Ananias and Saul.

Notice how specific the vision is and how Jesus gives it to Ananias.

Ananias, do you know where Straight Street is? Yes, Lord. And do you know where the house of Judas is? Yes, Lord. There is a man there from Tarsus. OK, got it. His name is Saul.

Long pause. Everything has good until that last word. Wait, what?! Saul of Tarsus, Saul the Pharisee from Jerusalem, Saul who killed Stephen and some of my friends, Saul with arrest warrants to kill your disciples here in Damascus?

And you already gave him a vision of me? You showed him my picture and gave him my name? This is a suicide mission. This is signing his own death warrant. Ananias fears for his

own life. Why would Jesus send him to the executioner? News of Saul's intentions have preceded him. And Jesus had permitted Saul a great deal of success so far.

Ananias' brief crisis of faith when he informs God of something God already knows.

Ananias questions Jesus, is Jesus sure He knows what He is doing. Do we ever act like we know better than God or know more or are more enlightened, or more modern or more mature?

Do we have any problem passages in the Bible, anything we chaff at? Any place we draw the line for obeying?

There are lots of people in churches who claim to be more enlightened and up to date than God's Word on matters of salvation, sex, marriage, roles of men and women, disciplining children. Don't be proud toward God. Don't act or live like you know better than God.

And don't judge a current situation you are in by your finite, limited understanding of what's going on. You don't see the big picture, you can't know everything God is up to.

If you are in the midst of something that doesn't make sense, doesn't add up in your normal way of thinking, consider the possibility God is up to something and He hasn't let you in on all the details yet.

If some burden has been laid on your life, some heavy thing, some great requirement, don't assume it is bad, don't assume you have failed or made a mistake, don't assume God is punishing you. Don't assume you can't do it either. If God has given the task to you, then God has prepared you for it and will go before you.

The more a call from God is beyond our capacity and ability, the more He means for us to do it in His strength and by His grace.

God is actively working in the life of every follower of Jesus right now causing things, making things happen, not letting certain things work out, for His glory and your eternal salvation.

Jesus repeats Himself and adds further confirmation that this is God's will.

Verse 17 is one of those amazing verses in Acts. Knowing what he knows, Ananias without further hesitation obeys, he submits and surrenders his will to Jesus, and his life into His hands.

He immediately obeys and he goes. He man's up quickly, he does the hard thing, he does what he is afraid to do, he does what he doesn't want to do, he lays down his life.

How often does Jesus have to speak to us to get us to obey. How many times has He spoken to us in His Word, in prayer, in a sermon or teaching, and we have resisted or objected or made excuses, or just been lazy?

Jesus reveals to Ananias two remarkable things about Saul.

My chosen instrument, my elect vessel.

What people in the Bible are chosen instruments, chosen vessels?

Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, the apostles, Paul. So is it just the really important people, people God uses in a big way? Or does God use unknown instruments for His glory?

Ananias is us, one of countless numbers of followers of Jesus used in seemingly small ways that actually made a big difference. And such are we all. We are His instruments, His vessels.

Jesus has chosen Saul specifically and for a special purpose, for a very high calling in which he will do truly great things. He will be no ordinary vessel or instrument. He will bear my name before Gentiles, and kings, and children of Israel.

Please understand this and take it to heart. If you are a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus then *you are a new person with a new purpose*. You are no longer your own, you have been bought with a price and bought for a purpose.

Now you are thinking what new purpose is there for my life? I'm just a regular person living a very ordinary life like everyone else. You are in school with no clue what your future is, you are in a boring job, you have kids and your house is a mess, you are retired with nothing very significant to do.

You cannot be a Christian and not have an important part to play in the body of Christ and in God's purposes for His kingdom on earth. You need to start with a change in perspective and attitude and prayer. Ask God to show you and use you. Pray like Saul for God to open your blind eyes, to give you an eye-opening experience to see your reality with fresh eyes.

How can you go to school as unto the Lord? How can you go to work as unto the Lord? How can you do retirement in a way that glorifies God and makes a difference in the lives of those around you? How can you be a parent in a way that honors God and His Word?

Go into the world in peace: be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; [be patient with each other and] honor all people; always seek to do good to one another and to everyone, love and serve the Lord, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (see 1 Thess. 5:13-18, ESV).

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

Even though he is divinely appointed and called and anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit and even though Jesus is going with him and before him and was already said what he will do, still it won't be easy. He will suffer and he will suffer greatly. He will bear the cross.

What does this mean?

Up until now Saul had not been suffering, so now *why* all of a sudden is he going to start suffering? What is it about conversion, about following Jesus that brings about suffering?

Becoming a Christian puts you completely out of step with the world, it puts the world in opposition to you. The Christian worldview and the world's worldview are antithetical to each other. The Christian view of everything is different, money, sex, marriage, time, eternity, how to be saved, what is worth living for, what we are living for, what we worship.

We are out of sync, out of step, with the spirit of the age. As one pastor put it, we are terminally un-cool.

Saul became very quickly un-cool, out of sync with his entire Jewish world, all his friends, all his colleagues and buddies in the Sanhedrin.

We are not truly prepared and able to follow Jesus until we are prepared to suffer for it. We must be ready to submit.

We must pray for wisdom, and for courage and perseverance, not to grow weary in well doing, so that we not become discouraged or think something is wrong or we have done something wrong. In this life we will have trouble. It is the lot of the godly, of all who follow Jesus. The servant is not above the master, as He suffered so will we.

Jesus doesn't put this in the fine print, He doesn't wait until we are after we commit to tell us. He says up front, "I will show him."

The truth is the way is narrow and hard that leads to life. If you want to follow Jesus there is going to be a cross.

There will be a laying down of our lives for our spouse, family, friends, brothers and sisters. There will be a dying to self and sin.

Matthew 10:38-39 Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Brother, Saul.

What a transformation. What a astonishing turn of events. What an oxymoron. No one ever dreamed of those two words being spoken together. Brother, Saul. With these words, Ananias is not just greeting him, he is actually welcoming Saul into the fellowship of believers.

Try to imagine saying that to your worst enemy. To someone you fear and who is out to harm you.

It reminds me of that story of the older couple in our last church who's daughter was killed, and they visited the man in prison and led him to the Lord and when he got out they invited him to stay in their home until he got back on his feet. Such forgiveness, such grace. Such freedom in

Christ to have an eternal perspective and not be kept in bondage to anger, hate, lack of forgiveness.

We must always be ready and willing to except a new believer no matter what their past, race, economic status. If God has forgiven them then we must just as quickly forgive them, receive them just as God has forgiven us and received us.

Are you gracious, quick to show compassion and kindness? To extend Gospel grace? We will see later when Paul goes to Jerusalem, the believers there don't welcome Paul in, until Barnabas comes and vouches for him.

We pray for the salvation of others, what God will change their hearts. But we must be ready for how God might answer, and how God might change our hearts in the process. Are we ready to die to prejudices, die to pride, die to hate, die to unforgiveness?

Are we prepared to have our eyes opened? Are we prepared to except people with messy lives, messy stories?

Baptism.

Saul receives the sign of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He is now in Christ, he belongs to Christ. His mission and purpose and goal in life is forever changed. He is not his own, he belongs body and soul to Jesus. His life is marked and sealed.

This symbolizes a spiritual transformation. He is redeemed, he is forgiven, he is received into the body of Christ, filled with Christ's Spirit.

He receives new eyes, the old is gone. The one who hated Christ now belongs to Christ.

Baptism reminds us of the importance of submission in conversion and Christianity. We are not our own anymore, we are bought with a price. We are His. His will is to be our will.

Remember your baptism, remember who you are and whose you are, that you have been chosen, bought with a price, sealed with the Holy Spirit and water baptism.

Everything has changed. Nothing can remain the same.

You are a chosen instrument, an elect vessel of God, a new person with a new purpose. Submit your way to Jesus however crazy or hard the path seems. Whatever the cost it will be worth it because God's plan is always best.

Who has been the most influential person in your life? Who has had the most impact on your faith? And in whose life is God using you to bear spiritual and eternal fruit? Be prepared and be available to imitate Ananias, to be used by Jesus in the life of someone else.