

A Certain Disciple

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a disciple like Ananias, who exemplified obedience and submission to God's call in the transformation of Saul into Paul.

Duration: 53:38

Scripture: Acts 2:4, Acts 9:10, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Disciple"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a woman in Scotland who desired to go to China as a missionary but couldn't due to her responsibilities at home. One day, she encounters a young boy named Bobby who is in need of clothes because his father sold them for alcohol. The woman takes it upon herself to buy Bobby new clothes and invites him to Sunday school. Eventually, Bobby accepts Jesus into his heart and expresses a desire to become a missionary. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being in tune with God and being available to hear His voice.

Transcript

Acts 9, 10, and there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. God uses unknown, little-known people to accomplish great purposes. And as you are turning to the text, in order that it might be further impressed upon your mind, remember that all we know about this man Ananias is said in this one clause, and there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias.

And to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias, and he said, Behold, I am here, The Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. For behold, he prayeth. And I seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

And Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priest to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way and entered into the house and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be

filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith and arose and was baptized.

And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Paul certain days with the disciples, which were at Damascus. I would have you see this evening that there are some things that God can do, apart from known human agency, some work that is dependent entirely upon the Holy Spirit, some ministries that he performs irrespective of human agency.

And for these we are grateful. And we are grateful that we have this testimony of God's working in the life of Saul of Tarsus, an arrogant, proud, haughty man that was committed to the task of exterminating Christianity because he felt it was a threat to Judaism, and because he felt Jesus Christ was an imposter, and because he was convinced that it was for the good of his people and for the whole nation and world if this heresy should cease. Saul of Tarsus dedicated all of his energy, all of his strength, all of his talent, all of his every waking moment to the one task of ridding the world of this blight of Christianity as he viewed it then.

God had ministries that came to him, ministry of the word through those whom he apprehended, those whom he arrested, and against whom he brought accusation. And then there was the testimony of those that had been healed through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the ministry of the apostles. There was also added to this the testimony of Stephen and the exhibition of grace and the life of Stephen asking for forgiveness of those who were at the act of stoning him, and also his affirmation that he saw Jesus Christ standing on the right hand of the throne.

But all of these did not dissuade this fanatical man from his task of persecuting the church. He continued, determined that he would succeed. And so it was that our Lord on the road to Damascus overshadowed him, surrounded him with his presence, seen as light by both Saul and those journeying with him, and spoke.

Saul heard the meaning of the words, the articulation. Those with him heard only a noise, only thunder. But the effect of it was that he had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Being convinced that Jesus Christ was alive from the dead, then he had to admit in his heart that everything said about him was true, and all the claims that he made were so. This is the logical answer to the proof of the resurrection, that if Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, then everything that he said of himself was so, and all said about him was so. This is why, through the years, the antagonists of Christ have done everything they could to attack the resurrection.

Because upon this one historical fact stands or falls our faith. And thus you will recognize that the enemies of our Lord and of his truth have always sought to attack at this point. Some saying it didn't make any difference, the historicity wasn't important, and other devious types of argument, and yet still another kind coming out and blatantly declaring that they did not believe he was risen from the dead.

We know that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. We that have been born into his family, for like Saul of Tarsus, we've seen him, we've felt him, we've met him, we've known him. And this becomes the ultimate final proof.

It was the proof that Paul required. It isn't the proof that you secure. Certainly the Lord does not deal with you, or very unlikely that he will, in manner similar to his dealing with Saul.

I believe that he fits the revelation of himself to the needs of the heart and to the purpose for the life. But the point of interest to us at the moment is this, that Saul of Tarsus became convinced that Jesus Christ was alive, and that there were logical imperatives flowing out of this. And thus, when he asked the question, who art thou Lord? He received the answer, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.

Then the next words express his total surrender, his utter abandonment to the person of Jesus Christ, not to a scheme, not to a doctrine, not to an idea, not even to the argument for salvation, but to a person. And all true conversion is a surrender to a person. This is what we mean by faith, a commitment to a person of all we are and all we have.

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? This is repentance, this is faith, and it resulted in a revelation of Jesus Christ in Paul, for he said, when it pleased God to reveal his Son in me. And this is the logical consequence of true repentance and true faith, a revelation of Christ in the believer's heart. You know him because he's been revealed in you.

Oh, there's been a revelation to you through the Word, through the truth, but the reason that you can say tonight that you're a Christian is that there's been a revelation in you. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Now obviously he is in you in other manner than he is in heaven.

He's there in his resurrection body. And if you are his, he is in you by his Spirit. But nonetheless real, nonetheless personal, is this matter of our meeting with him.

And we are grateful for this because it establishes the fact that there is much that the Lord does at this point of repentance and faith. There is, as my conviction, shared I'm sure by many of you, but not by all, is this, that when from the moment of regeneration we are in, we have the Spirit of God in his regenerating life. For the Word says, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

But you understand that you can be born, when you are born again, you were born of the Spirit. This is true. But you were not necessarily born full of the Spirit.

Now you're going to argue and say, but I know that Cornelius was born again this time, with salvation come to his house this day, and he was filled with the Holy Ghost. That's why I said usually, generally, because of the moment that one dogmatizes in respect to the working of God, they're caught in the dilemma that God doesn't always do things the way we propose and suggest and affirm that he does. He's the God of infinite variety, and we delight to have it so, and would not change it.

And I'm so grateful that he cannot be compressed into any formula. It's marvelous to see, as someone recently used in a group meeting, the spontaneous, wonderful irregularities of the Holy Ghost. Oh, that we should be grateful for these divine irregularities, these heavenly interventions into the pattern and plan that we have established.

But this much we do know, that if any man is born of God, he has the Spirit of God. Born of the Spirit, but not born full of the Spirit. And it was possible for this work to be done apart from any human instrumentality.

But you know, this man, Saul of Tarsus, was a very confident man, self-confident. We might even be so bold as to say he was egotistical to some degree, at least. At least he'd set himself an enormous task to exterminate the Church, and he felt he could do it.

And probably he was in a fair way to do it, humanly speaking, until he encountered the Lord. And so God gave him a revelation of himself, a revelation that Saul needed, that he had to have. But isn't it wonderful that he was led by the hand, blind? I'm so grateful that this man met the Lord in such a way that he had to be conducted as a little child.

I think it was typical. You see, when you're born again, you're born as a babe. And however adult you might have been in certain respects, the moment that you are born into God's family, there's a whole new world relationship that begins in your infancy.

This is the reason why in the New Testament they established the pattern we call Godparents. You know, most things that are here in ceremony had beginning in need and in fact. And it was true, shortly after this, that we find the first occurrence in the writings of Godparents.

A person would be born again through a revelation of Christ, but however magnificent that revelation was and however certain they were of the fact that they'd met Christ, they were babes. And so the fellowship would assign to this babe in Christ parents. Ought to be that way, hadn't it? And there was entrusted the responsibility of these Godparents to instruct the babe in Christ in the things of God.

Because after all, the teaching in the church and the preaching of the word was going to be addressed to the needs of the greatest number of people. And the instruction that would be given by the teachers could not go for the whole group back over all of the basic principles of Christianity every time some new person was born again. This was necessary if there was to be a mature group.

So the assembly would appoint Godparents. Someone that probably congenial in age and temperament and background, probably in geographical locality. And it was the responsibility of these spiritual parents to nourish the babe in Christ in the things of the Lord.

And when the young convert would be presented to the elders, they didn't question him, in a sense, if he had not matured properly. It wasn't his fault, it was the fault of his parents. You know, if an infant is suffering from spiritual malnutrition, don't spank the baby.

Spank the ones responsible for the diet of the child. Deal with them. And so it was a double responsibility of the babe in Christ to study and the Godparents to nourish.

And I think it's necessary for something like this to be re-established if there is to be an early maturation. So often when people are born again, they come into the congregation and they are like a person trying to get on a train when it's going 50 miles an hour. They're just sort of running along behind, panting and out of breath, and only touching the ground about every quarter of a mile or so.

And it isn't fair. There ought to be personal instruction. This, I believe, was part of the sharing plan of the early church, so that they could be nourished in the things of the Lord.

And we understand that. But the point before us is that he had to be led by his hand, picturing that state of spiritual infancy by which we're brought into the Christian life. All of his learning at the University of Tarsus, all of his personal study, all of his expert knowledge of the Torah and of the rabbinical writings, as good as it might be at some future time, wasn't enough.

And so they brought him into the city of Damascus, leading him by the hand, and indicating that from then on he had to be nourished and taught and instructed. But the fact here is that he had to learn his

relationship to the body. I said he was a very self-confident man, and probably enormously egotistical naturally.

We find evidences of it as he deplores it in his writings. And so he had to learn that he was part of the body. And you know, it's wonderful.

I'm so thrilled that the Spirit of God did it just this way. You know, if he'd have been setting it up, he'd have said, now, since I am such a notable character in Israel, and since I have converted to Christ, certainly they ought to send down Jerusalem for Peter and John, or at least one of the apostles, to meet with one as such importance to the whole cause as I will be. This would have been thinking, natural thinking.

But isn't it marvelous how the Holy Spirit deals with us in terms of our greatest need and his most loving purpose? I'm confident that in the city of Damascus there were teachers. I'm confident that there were leaders, there were elders. Undoubtedly there were some well-known, well-established that God might have spoken to.

But isn't it sweet? He spoke to a certain disciple. That's all we know about this man. You see, Saul of Tarsus had to learn that he was dependent upon the least of God's children, the least known, the least recognized, that everyone could make contribution to him.

And the fellowship into which he was coming did not have the hierarchical structure that he was leaving. Oh, there you had the chief priest, and then the members of the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees, and the lawyers. You had a whole structure.

And this he was leaving. Now he's coming into an entirely new relationship. And the most important event in his Christian life, we're assuming he was a Christian there, the most important event in his Christian life is to be shared by a certain disciple.

And you know the other thing is wonderful, that when Apollos, this very brilliant, personable, eloquent young man, needed help, certain disciples, Priscilla and Aquila, instructed him in the way more perfectly. God seems to delight to meet our need from unexpected sources. And he usually seems to find great joy in not only meeting our need, the need of which we're apparent, but needs which we may not be apparent.

And there was a need that Paul had not recognized. He needed to realize that this first beginning of fellowship in the body, that everyone was important. Saul of Tarsus, notwithstanding, was utterly dependent upon a certain disciple.

And that in God's economy, everyone was important. But there are some things you must understand about Ananias, if you were to liken yourself to him. First, he was a disciple.

Do you know what the word disciple means? Means a learner. And you're only a learner when you're learning. And you're only a learner when you're doing what you've been taught.

And discipleship, therefore, is not a matter of membership in some organization, but it's an attitude toward the teacher. You may have been a disciple yesterday, but are you a disciple today? Is this matter of discipline a matter of current attitude toward God? Or can you say, well, thank goodness I've completed that short course, that correspondence course, and now I don't have to study again for another six months. Then you have six months when you are released from discipleship.

The attitude of a disciple is one that is continually being taught by the teacher. And so Ananias, however long he'd been in the way, we do not know whether he was established for years, whether he's one of those at Pentecost. Oh, there's much that we don't know about him.

But we do know that at this time, his attitude was one of utter submission to the teacher. And this is why he was usable. Far be it for me to suggest that some of the elders, some of the leaders, some of the teachers, weren't in an attitude of discipleship at the time.

But the fact is that Ananias would not have been usable if he had not been in that attitude of learning, of submission to the teacher, and obedience to what he was taught, a certain disciple. Now, you may not have any greater recognition by the world or by history than this man had. But the degree to which you'll be useful to God is determined entirely not upon the past, but upon your present attitude of submission and obedience.

Now, let me say it again. The degree to which you're going to be useful to God tomorrow is not determined by the accomplishments of some yesterday, whether it be in school earning a degree or whether it be in church and performing work. The degree to which you're going to be useful to God tomorrow is the degree to which you approach tomorrow with the attitude of discipleship, of submission to the heavenly teacher.

Because tomorrow will, of course, depend upon the past, but it will also depend upon that moment, for an attitude of indifference or of callous unconcern can keep God from using you tomorrow, using me. It's imperative, therefore, that we recognize that the attitude of discipleship isn't something that happened in the past and we can put up a lapel button and say, now I am a disciple because back there I enrolled and paid my tuition and I learned for a little while. It's a current attitude.

You see, if he had been indifferent, if he had been preoccupied, if he had been out of fellowship, he never would have heard when God spoke to him. For the first thing that he did was to get his attention and do you know when God is speaking to you? Are you in sufficient tune with him, in sufficient communion with him, that God can speak to you and say your name and know that the Lord has something that he wants to say? How often God has to use crisis of one kind or another to interrupt us, to get us quiet enough to hear him, and how pathetic it should be that way. Why can we not right at this juncture say the purpose of my heart tomorrow is to obey the Lord, to be available to the Lord, to be taught of the Lord? Why can't we ensure tonight that we're in close enough communion with him that if he speaks your name, you're going to be aware of it? He, Ananias was.

And what of you? The next thing that we'll notice about this is that Ananias could distinguish the voice of God from the voice of his own imagination, from the voice of his own enthusiasm, from the hallucinations that might have come from some outside force. He was sufficiently grounded in his relationship with God that he could know that it was God speaking to him. I do not believe for a moment that this need be restricted to anyone.

You can know the Lord well enough. But you see, the trouble with most of us is that we haven't specialized in fellowship with God. We haven't taken time enough with him so that when God speaks, we know it's God speaking.

We've been content to listen to others speak to us about God so long, and we've spent so little time talking to him, that when he speaks to us, we aren't quite sure that it is God. Or if there is some other intrusion, we can't distinguish between the two. Now, the relationship of a man to God called the Christian life is a

vital personal relationship in which it is quite possible that God will speak as definitely as he did to Ananias.

He knows your name, and he's able to speak to you. And there ought to be a sense in which you can recognize his voice. You know the word well enough.

You know the truth well enough that when God speaks, you are in that close fellowship with him that you can test it and be absolutely certain that it is the Lord. And the third thing is this. Ananias was instructed that his ministry in behalf of Saul should be to further relate him to the Lord Jesus, to establish him in the faith, and unite him to the fellowship.

Now, you can believe, therefore, that when God speaks to your heart, the effect of that is going to be to nourish the believer, to establish him in the faith, and to deepen his relationship to the fellowship to the body of Christ. There are certain patently clear rules here set forth concerning the speaking voice of God. And you will understand that when Ananias heard God speak, he was prepared to recognize it was God because of what God asked of the voice that had spoken to him and said, now I want you to go out and buy a farm on a down payment and then ask the church to support it or something.

Then there would have been a sense in which he would have been wrong. Go out and buy a four-story building here and you have nothing but ten dollars. You want to be awfully sure when you buy a school the way R.A. Forrest did that God's telling you to do it.

Otherwise, you may be stuck with twenty-five thousand dollars to pay. Now, God led Dr. Forrest to do it. But he had been many, many years with the Lord, many, many years with God.

So when he gave the man ten dollars on a twenty-five thousand dollar investment and said, will you trust me, trust me and the Lord, the man said, well, I trust the Lord and I'll get better acquainted with you as we go along and I'm prepared to learn about you. We'll see. And he was able to buy that hotel and that land and establish the school.

But you know, if you come to me and tell me that God's doing that through you, I'm going to question it very seriously. You know, I don't mean to be skeptical. It's just that I think you need a little practice with the Lord before you go out buying any hotels.

You ought to, you ought to at least have a little, little get your feet under you, you see. But you can be absolutely certain when the Spirit of God says to you, Mary, John, whatever your name might be, over here is someone that I want to have established in the faith that he's speaking, because he wants them established in the faith. And when he says to you, I want them to come into a closer, fuller relationship with me, then you can understand that God's speaking, because this is what he wants for his children, that they come into a closer, fuller relationship with him.

And then when he says, I want them to be bound more closely to the body of believers, that they will understand their place in fellowship with others in Christ, then you can be sure that the Spirit of God is speaking. So this wasn't an unreasonable thing that God asked of Ananias. It was accord with principles.

The manner in which he's going to lead you will be in accord with these principles. Oh, it isn't the only way, but it's the general way of the Lord's direct leading. You may find, for instance, when you go home tonight, and as you give yourself to rest, and you say, Lord, I want to be utterly available to you, the Lord may bring to mind someone.

Say, speak your name, and interrupt you, even awaken you, and press upon your heart someone. And the first thing you do is to start to pray for that person, and perhaps then to seek them out, and to find if there isn't some way that you can minister to them, and share with them their need, and then to seek to establish them in the faith, and encourage them to be more perfectly instructed and united to the Lord, and then brought into closer fellowship with the Church. This is good guidance, you know.

This is something that you can confidently rest on. There isn't any fanaticism in this at all, particular, definite, specific, but the principles are so patently clear that however unknown you may be as a disciple, you can believe that when God burdens you in these regards, in these particulars, that your burden is from him. Now, the next thing that's so important is that Ananias was specific in what he did.

He went directly to the person whom he was instructed to help. He did it because his desire was to be useful to the Lord, and he realized that the complaint that he gave, and it was a specific complaint, and incidentally the person to whom you may be directed to help may have as great a need and as bad a background as Saul had from the Christian standpoint. But you see, when you find yourself incorporated into a ministry as, for instance, some of you are laboring in the afternoon Sunday school, and some young girl in your class is pressed upon your heart by the Holy Spirit, and maybe they've got a very, very bad home life and a difficult background, and there's not a thing in the world to commend them to you, you know something, my dear? You'd better be faithful, because only God knows what he wants to do with that person.

I've told you, and I believe it bears repeating, because, you see, most of God's work is done by certain disciples, not by the famous and well-known. It's by certain disciples, unknown. We all are acquainted with the fact that missions, as we know it, is rather recent.

About 150 years is the longest. Before that time, the Moravians had done a great work, and there have been others, but it's been, we roughly say, 150 years of modern missions. It was very difficult one time for women to go to the mission field, almost impossible.

And whereas I've related this before, I do it with apology. Nevertheless, I believe it presses the point. There was a woman in Edinburgh, Borough of Scotland, that wanted to go to China and couldn't, desperately concerned that she should be able to be used of God in China and couldn't.

She had to work, stay home, care for her family. But one day, she was walking down the street, certain errands, responsible on a Saturday afternoon. And as she crossed a little alleyway, a little boy, seven or eight years of age, maybe nine, somewhere around there, dirty, ragged, disheveled hair, runny nose, dusty, muddy, dashed out, bumped into her.

And because she was the larger, fell down and lay there sobbing. She picked him up, wiped his face and says, what's your name, laddie? He said, Bobby. So she said, well, Bobby, where are you going? Well, I'm running.

My father's a drunkard and he's been chasing me and I thought he was after me, but I don't see him. And she said, well, Bobby, do you ever go to Sunday school? No, ma'am, I don't. Would you like to? What is it? And she explained it to him.

And so he said, well, I can't go. I have nothing to wear. She said, Bobby, next Saturday, you meet me right here.

I can't today, but next Saturday you meet me right here and we'll buy you some clothes so you can go to Sunday school. So she was there and he was there. And they bought him everything he needed.

He had no other shoes, no stockings, no underclothing, no shirt, trousers, or anything. He just bought it all. And he took it home and he came.

And he came the second Sunday and he came the third Sunday, but the fourth Sunday didn't come. And she went looking for him and she caught up with him. Bobby, why are you running? He said, because you'll be angry with me.

Why? Well, my father found my clothes under the bed and he pawned them and he bought a drink. And I can't come to Sunday school and they were your clothes. Oh, she said, that's all right, Bobby.

Meet me here next Saturday and we'll buy you another pair of suits. And that was done. And the second time, but this time he came to her and said, my father has found my clothes.

I hid them, but he found them and he sold them for a drink. She said, Bobby, we'll buy some more Saturday, but now we're going to keep them at my house. And so Sunday morning, you come early and we'll clean, you clean up and put the clothes on here and go to Sunday school.

Then we'll come home and take them off. And so this was done week after week after week. In about six, seven months after this it started.

One day, one Sunday morning, Bobby came and said, last night I asked Jesus to save me, to come into my heart. And I've given my life to him and I believe that he wants me to be a missionary and I'm going to go. And so he went on learning the word, studying.

Year after year, this woman, his benefactor, prayed for him, helped him, tutored him when he needed it, guided him in his schoolwork. Well, the years passed and she's never been known. Name isn't known.

One day in China, one night, late at midnight, in a little barren room with a candle in a dish against a wooden table with a pack of paper on it, kneeled a man, hands folded over the paper, tears streaming down his cheek, as he is dedicating the first manuscript of the Chinese Bible. For it's the same Bobby of Edinburgh, Robert Morrison, the first missionary to China. And we don't know who it was, but we know a certain disciple, a certain disciple, was the instrument of opening all of China to the Just as Ananias, a certain disciple, was an instrument of God in accomplishing his purpose through Saul of Tarsus.

Now, I cannot guarantee that if you surrender your entire being to the Lord Jesus Christ, embrace the cross with all its slain cutting edge, that your name will be in the I can't guarantee that at all because of Pentecost. You see, there were 120 people in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, but we only heard of four or five of them afterwards.

Peter, John, James, possibly Stephen was there, Philip, some of the others. But very few of the people in the upper room ever did anything notable and ever gotten their names in the record. Matthew isn't mentioned again.

It's surprising how few of that number ever accomplished anything. When I find some of my preacher friends making such pragmatic statements as, well, being filled with the Spirit, they ought to be successful. You know, the success God seeks for isn't measured statistically.

It's measured in availability. And it may be that you're successful in just touching one little Bobby somewhere on the path, and that's all God asks of you. And so the thing that he were concerned about is that you should recognize that your place is just to be a certain disciple in utter submission, in close fellowship, walking in the fullness of the Holy Ghost and available.

We have no evidence at all that Ananias was ever sent on another errand. Oh, to be used of God and to be content not to be. Not to have it become a habit and an obsession.

To be useful and then to wait until we're used again and not have to create for ourselves tasks. This, I submit to you, is that which he's asking for, utter availability and constant worship. Constant worship.

You have a task, you have a responsibility. It is to be available to the Lord for what he has for you. Now notice something else.

Ananias was the human instrument of leading Saul into a relationship with Jesus Christ which was normative to the New Testament. He'd had a glorious revelation of Christ on the road to Damascus. Unquestionably, the Son had been revealed in him, been born of God.

But you see, he needed to be introduced to fellowship with the believers, and so this was a body matter, a matter of the group, and Ananias represented that group. And he came to him and said, Brother Saul, you're now part of a company of people. You are one of many.

Brother Saul. And then he related to him, because the Lord had shared with him what had been done, and he said, the Lord has sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Now the point I want you to see is this, that everything that had happened to Saul had, wonderful as it was, necessary as it was, had stopped short of his being filled with the Holy Ghost.

Do you follow? Born of the Spirit, yes, but he wasn't born full of the Spirit. And so it was necessary for there to come into his life a participation with the Church, in which participation he should be drawn into the fullness of the Spirit. And I would submit to you, therefore, that part of your responsibility as just a certain disciple is to be in a relationship that is normative in order that you can lead others into that same relationship with the Lord.

For you cannot take anyone where you haven't gone. If Ananias had not known the fullness of the Holy Spirit, he never could have been used to lead Saul into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Do you follow? It was absolutely imperative that Ananias should have been where he wanted Saul to go.

And he, therefore, had to come to Saul as one who had shared. Now this hadn't made him famous, this hadn't made him lots of things, but it had made him available to the Lord, and it made him to speak with the authority that he could do exactly what God told him to do. And after all, this is that which God asks of you, for you see, everyone that is born again, as wonderful as it is to have passed from death to life, ought early to be led into a relationship of identification with Christ and the fullness of the Spirit.

I am greatly grieved that we have left this matter up to individuals. Sometime, soon, I hope, we will be able to return again to biblical principles, and when people testify to repentance and faith, the eldership, the Church, will feel it's their responsibility to conduct and lead such into the relationship described here as being filled with the Holy Ghost. I believe this is coming.

I believe it's the way God wanted it. I do not believe that it ought to be associated with meetings or with summer conferences or with revival campaigns. I believe this ought to be a matter which is shared by the eldership, shared by the Church.

It ought to be conducted and guided and instructed and led, just as you see in a chapter or so, when Philip went down to Samaria and prayed for them, and Peter and John came down, instructed them, and guided this whole company of believers into that basic relationship upon which all participation in the Church depends, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, all wise and useful participation. So, Ananias was instrumental in the hand of God of initiating Saul into a relationship that was God's will and God's purpose, and hear me, I cannot dogmatize, but I would like to, would not have been experienced by Saul apart from Ananias' participation, that it was necessary for Saul, for Ananias to obey the Lord if Saul was to be where God wanted him to be. And I believe that this speaks to the problem that we confront in a community of believers such as this, with many of you hungry for God, longing to know him in his fullness, and whereas I can't for a moment excuse any by say to you that for the time will come, and perhaps is nearer than we think, when we shall be able as a company to share one with another.

Certainly Ananias shared Saul's need and Saul's concern, and this, I think, ought to characterize believers everywhere. You ought to be concerned, of course, whether or not you know the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but you ought to be concerned that every other believer know the fullness of the Spirit of God. This life of identification with Christ, death and burial with him, and the union with him in his resurrection life.

Now, a certain disciple. God uses the nameless saint. He uses the unknown servant, and he's quite prepared to use you if you're prepared to be used by him.

Will you see this? Will you recognize this? And will you put yourself in the way where God can? Now, let me ask you. If there was someone in New York that God wanted to reach, could he reach through you? First, are you living in the attitude of discipleship, utter obedience to his word and learning from him? If you aren't, then there's an issue here of sin that you ought to deal with tonight. You ought to deal with the thing that's standing in the way because you know full well if there's known disobedience to the will of God, you are not in the state of a disciple, regardless of what you may have been last week or the month before.

Brokenness, confession, and a conscience void of offense toward God are the inescapable requirements for discipleship. Then secondly, let's allow that as far as you know your heart tonight, there is nothing standing in the way. Are you walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? I didn't say, were you filled with the Holy Spirit? I said, are you walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Secondly, is there in your heart tonight a concern for the spiritual maturity and well-being of the children of God? Someone might say, well, why wasn't Paul Ananias out there on the street witnessing? I think it was Vance Havnett that said, if I had a choice in a week's meeting between seeing three people born again, 30 people born again, or three Christians brought into a union with Christ in his death and his resurrection, releasing his resurrection life in them, I would rather spend that week with the three, for far more than the 30 will have been brought to Christ by those three in a right relationship with the Lord.

Now, the question then that comes is this, are you concerned about the spiritual maturity and normal life of believers? You ought to be about yourself, and you ought to be about others. Are you? These are the prerequisites for being useful to God in the way and place he'll put you. And so the question that comes tonight is this, are you part of the fellowship? You say, well, I'll never be a well-known teacher.

I don't have the gift of teaching. I may never be a great exhorter. I don't have the gift of exhortation.

I'm not a preacher. What is there for me? What was there for Ananias? Obedience to the will and plan and purpose of God. This is for you, and God will use you, God will bless you, and through you God will bless the world, if you're willing to find his place and fill it for his glory.

There's no such thing as an unimportant Christian. The only thing there are is unusable Christians, not unimportant Christians. Now, you determine whether you're going to be usable.

If you're usable, you're important, for God has some life that he can touch through you better than anyone else he has. He could use Ananias with Saul better than anyone else he had, and he can use you with someone better than anyone else he has. Let us bow our hearts in prayer.

Our Father, we verily believe that most of thy work is done by the unknown saints. We believe that when the records are unveiled and the books are opened, those of us that have stood in the public eye, carried responsibilities for thee, are going to have been shown that ours was but a partial task in comparison to the unknown Ananiases that thou hast, the Priscilla's and the Aquilas, these men that are little known and little recognized, but thou hast been pleased to find them available and use them. Show us tonight, our Father, that we determine whether or not we have a ministry by our brokenness before thee, the confession, cleansing of all that would stand in the way of using us, the embrace of the cross, our union with him in his death, and the experience of the fullness of his spirit, the attitude of discipleship, of submission to his word and will, the ear of our hearts tuned to hear him speak, a great concern for the spiritual well-being and development of the saints, the longing to see all have the best that thou hast for them.

We believe, our Father, that these are the qualifications for usefulness to thee, and we would ask that somehow the Holy Spirit would give us a measure tonight of our usefulness, of our availability, and give to us, Lord, the realization that it's infinitely better that the people that are here should go out into this needy community, each being but an Ananias available, than that there should be some one person prominently doing the work for all the rest. Show us that this is thy plan, the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry. This was his ministry, and something similar in thy will and plan can be the ministry of each of us.

Lord, none of us know whether the life we touch tomorrow may be the one that in thy plan will be the instrument of deliverance to our nation and land and day and generation. Give to us sensitive hearts. Give to us that calm confidence that is, even though we are not perhaps being used at the moment, thou hast asked for availability.

And while we wait, to await in worship and in love and in adoration, teach us, Lord, that it isn't how much we do that men see, but that it's we do that which thou dost seek and ask for from us. We thank thee for each who carry load of responsibility, daily task, hourly, weekly burdens, in behalf of this church and work and fellowship. We're grateful for this.

We would ask them to, their hearts to be encouraged and strengthened in thee. But show to us, Lord, pastor and elders and deacons and teachers, that these ministries that we carry are not to be the whole of our work, but we're each to be available to touch that life that thou wouldst reach through us, when and where thou wouldst use us. And so press upon our hearts, a concern for men, individuals, for boys, for girls, for people, not just people in a general sense in the mass, but that lady, that young woman, that boy, that hungry-hearted Christian, wherever may be found.

Give to us, therefore, Lord, a personal concern for the spiritual nurture and maturation and development and well-being of the whole household of believers. Father, we thank thee for thy presence. We thank thee that in thy plan everyone is important and everyone is a ministry.

Give to us that sense that we recognize our interdependence one upon another. We need each other. We need the gifts that thou hast given to one another.

We need the abilities and the talents, the vision, the burden, the strength of hand. We need one another. Oh, give to us an appreciation, Father, for every member of the body of Christ, that we shall all sensitively recognize that we've been bound together of members of a body, Christ the head, and each of us interdependent upon the other members of the same body.

We ask it with thanksgiving while our heads are bowed. Well, this has not been to the point of some particular invitation, but there is a particular invitation is this. If you have a particular need and God has shown it to you, don't leave until you've dealt with it.

This room to my right, your left, we call Wilson Chapel, is yours. If you're willing to go there, we'll join and talk with you and open the word to you and help you. Oh, that somehow the Spirit of God should show you that this is a very practical matter and God tonight wants you to begin being an ananias to him, available for whatever ministry he has.

Let us stand for the benediction. Early give us, Father, we pray, the accompany of spirit-filled men and women are available for all thy purpose. Continue with us.

May thy grace and mercy and peace be in abide upon us now till we meet again. In Jesus' name, amen.

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