

This morning, I am beginning a new sermon series called The Power of One Life. I will be looking each week at a different minor Biblical character and the impact they had for better or worse as they submitted to God or rebelled against Him. No matter how ordinary we may feel, each of us can be used by God to do extraordinary things. This summer, we will look at the stories of various men and women of the Bible and see just how much difference one life can make.

This Sunday, I want to look at a man named Ananias, whose story is found in Acts 9. Background – Acts is the story of the early church. The first Christians were seen as blasphemers by the Jews for proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord. Fanatical Pharisees tried to round them up and jail or stone them. Among the fanatical Pharisees was Saul, who became known as Paul. His conversion, and the role Ananias played in it, is found in Acts 9:

Acts 9:1-22 - *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-- Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-- has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could*

see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Three things I'd like to highlight from this passage about the life of Ananias and the concept of salvation.

1) Salvation is a supernatural work of God

Salvation refers to being rescued from the punishment we deserve because of our sinful rebellion against God. Biblically, on the human side there are two concepts – repentance and faith. Turning from sin to believe in Jesus. On the God side there is justification, adoption, and regeneration. We are declared righteous in the sight of God because of Jesus' death for us (justification), we become sons and daughters of God (adoption), and we are given God's Holy Spirit inside of us to give us spiritual life (regeneration).

The supernatural quality of salvation is obvious in the story of Saul – he did nothing to save himself. It was completely due to the intervention of God. But don't let that fool you. Even if you were saved at 7 at a VBS or if you were saved last week, it was a supernatural work. No one decides to follow Jesus unless God has regenerated their heart and made them alive. Couple passages that highlight this fact:

Ephesians 2:1-5 - *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

John 3:1-7 - *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the*

miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

You must be born again from above. Nobody just decides and comes in to the faith. We were enemies and now we have been reconciled. We were dead and now we are alive. Salvation is a spiritual work of God. The gospel in a nutshell is this:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 - Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

We were dead in our sins, and Christ died for us and rose again so that all who repent of their sins and believe in Him are born again. Forgiven. Adopted. Regenerated. Justified. All of it a supernatural work of God.

Having said that...

2) God almost always uses people to bring other people to faith in Him

Even though God did it, he chose to use Ananias to be a part of it. Ananias must have been one of the leaders in Damascus for God to appear to him, and the passage tells us that Paul stayed with the Christians in Damascus and is disciplined by them before he sets off to proclaim the gospel.

We never hear from Ananias again in the Bible. But where would we have been without Ananias? Where would Paul be without him? And where would we be without Paul? **As world-changing as Paul's life was, he would not have been who he was without the obedience of a man named Ananias.** And God is

calling you this morning to be like Ananias, to play a part in the eternal salvation and discipleship of those who are far from God. Perhaps you will stay even more anonymous than Ananias did, but your eternal impact will be greater than you could ever imagine.

Who knows what role you might play? Sunday School teacher. Model of a Christian. Witness.

And if you have repented of your sin and trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I can almost guarantee that **there was at least one person** – a parent, a pastor, a friend, or even a stranger – who was largely responsible for leading you to that decision. Someone you can point to in gratitude and say that it was the witness of that person that is largely responsible for bringing you to where you are today. I am sure you thank God for them.

My conversion came when I was 18. Three college students – Shari Engman, Karlyn Banda, and Stephan Thibodeau – started a youth group and invited everyone they knew. And it was through that group that I came to faith in Christ. You don't think I'm eternally grateful for that? They didn't know I was going to be a pastor; they were just obedient to God's call to share the gospel.

Think of the beauty of the rescue – the fireman rescuing from a burning building, the diver pulling someone out of the water, the doctor saving a man's life on the operating table. Those who helped save you from your sin did not just help save you for this life, but for eternity as well.

If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, God has entrusted you with the charge to go **and do what that person did for you, to help people come into a relationship with Him.**

Matthew 28:18-20 - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As Paul put it:

*2 Corinthians 5:18-21 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the*

world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* ²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The gospel is about **reconciliation**, which implies that there is a **broken relationship between God and man**. Nobody is born right with God; we all need to be reconciled. And as Paul puts it, it was done in Christ, through His death on the cross, and as a result God is not counting men's sins against them, but sees us as perfect in His sight – the righteousness of God. And now we have the message of reconciliation, imploring people to be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ, the sinless one, took on our sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

3) No one is ever too far for God to save

Surely there was no more important early Christian than Paul. Called by Saul, his Hebrew name, he was a devoted Pharisee who was intent on destroying the heretical followers of Jesus. But on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him, blinded him, and turned his life around. As he stayed in Damascus, blind, the Lord came to a man named Ananias and told him to go to the house of Judas and to ask for Saul.

Talk about the need for **discernment** on the part of Ananias. As you'll notice, he protests at first – isn't Saul our enemy? But God persuades him that Paul is going to be used to carry the gospel message to the Gentiles, and Ananias takes the risk and goes to pray for him to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to see again.

1 Timothy 1:12-17 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.* ¹⁴ *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁵ *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst.* ¹⁶ *But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.* ¹⁷ *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

I implore you this morning, be reconciled to God. We want you to know God. We want you to know the eternal difference Jesus Christ makes, both in this life and forever.

And if you have been reconciled, know this morning that your life is meant to make an eternal difference in the lives of others. Pray for opportunities to share about Jesus and take risks to invite people to church. **Don't know anyone?** Get involved somewhere where you will meet people.

Let me leave you with two challenges this morning. Meditate about those who brought you to faith and reach out in thanks to them, to encourage them. Secondly, remember that gratitude and go and share the gospel with someone else.