

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 9:10-22

Topic

Jesus sends Ananias to lay hands on Saul
and he receives his sight

Title

On Vessel Assignment From God

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."

Acts 9:11 So 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.**"

Acts 9:12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

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.

Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

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.**"

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

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."

Acts 9:18 Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Acts 9:19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

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

Acts 9:21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

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.

Introduction

Bob Uecker was a mediocre major league baseball player for the Braves, Cardinals, and Phillies. He was a career .200 hitter. He became much better known after his playing years were over as a comedian poking fun at his own undistinguished playing career. When asked what he considers the highlight of his career he says,

In 1967 with St. Louis, I walked with the bases loaded to drive in the winning run in an intersquad game in spring training.

I think that a lot of Christians put themselves in the category of Bob Uecker when it comes to their walk with the Lord! We don't have a lot of spiritual career highlights – just a daily walk with Jesus.

Ananias might encourage you if you're feeling that way. He steps onto the scene, prays for Saul, then disappears. It might be the spiritual highlight of his Christian career.

Saul goes on to have a career filled with highlights. Everyday brings some new and amazing episode.

We can learn from both men. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Sees You As A Vessel He Can Choose, and #2 Jesus Sees You As A Vessel He Has Chosen.

#1 Jesus Sees You As A Vessel He Can Choose (v10-17)

On his way to persecute Christians in Damascus Saul met the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. The encounter left him temporarily blinded. During the ensuing three days of prayer and fasting Saul received a vision of a man named Ananias coming to lay hands on him so that he would receive his sight.

Enter Ananias:

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."

Ananias is described as **a certain disciple**. The word **certain** got my attention. I need to be careful because I'm no language scholar, but the real scholars whose books I read describe the word **certain** as *an enclitic indefinite pronoun*. It seems to mean a certain one among some or any that Jesus could have chosen.

The idea is that the Lord could have chosen from any number of Damascus disciples. There were many at His disposal. For whatever reasons, Jesus called upon Ananias.

Maybe you don't have a distinguished spiritual career. Maybe you have no career highlights. That's not the point. You are His **certain disciple**. Can the Lord call upon you if He so chooses? Are you available to Him?

The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision. There is no explanation. Visions were a common occurrence. The supernatural was a common occurrence.

Ananias immediately responded with words a servant would use, **Here I am, Lord.**

There are two things you need to settle in order to be available should the Lord call upon you as His **certain disciple** for some special assignment:

1. First: You need to have an expectation of the supernatural. I think we sometimes miss out on assignments the Lord has for us because we are not really expecting Him to call upon us. And we're therefore not developing any sense of hearing His voice or following His leading in our lives.
2. Second: You need to be ready to say **Here I am, Lord**. For lots of reasons we are sometimes unprepared for an assignment. We're not keeping ourselves sharp and on-call.

Acts 9:11 So 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.

Acts 9:12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

Jesus gave Ananias a very detailed itinerary. He told Ananias exactly what was going to occur. He doesn't always reveal so much information. Normally the Lord only gives you the next step of faith. You'll get as much (or as little) information as you need.

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.

Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

We don't have enough information to label this as doubt or fear. It may simply be a request for clarification. It's as if Ananias wanted to know if the Lord was talking about *the* Saul who had come to wreck the lives of the Christians.

If it was doubt or fear then I am encouraged. The Lord understands our doubts and our fears. We can discuss them with Him.

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.

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Saul's professional and personal future is summarized. He will go about proclaiming the risen Christ but will suffer many things along the way. Most of the Book of Acts from this point on is an expansion of these two verses.

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."

Did the Lord tell Ananias that Saul was also going to be **filled with the Holy Spirit**? He may have and the words were not recorded by Luke.

It's just as likely that Ananias assumed that Saul would be filled. Jesus had told Ananias that Saul would go forth preaching about Him to Gentiles, kings, and Jews. **Every first century believer knew that could only be done by a person filled with the Holy Spirit.** It is a main point made over-and-over again in Acts.

That brings us to a third point about being available for an assignment. **You must be filled with the Holy Spirit!** Notice this isn't the being filled with the Spirit that comes from filling yourself with the Word of God. No, Saul was a brand new believer. This was what we call the baptism with the Holy Spirit – the empowering to serve the Lord.

If you've never been baptized with the Holy Spirit; or if you have but now somehow think you can serve the Lord in your own wisdom and strength; you are not going to be getting too many assignments to serve Him!

Like Ananias you and I are **certain disciples**. At any moment the Lord could choose us for an assignment. We need to be expecting it; we need to keep ourselves ready for it; and we must be familiar with the baptism of the Holy Spirit to accomplish it.

#2 Jesus Sees You As A Vessel He Has Chosen

(v15-16 & 19-22)

You and I are not Saul, also known as the apostle Paul. Our lives may not be a Christian highlight reel! We may not (yet) even have anything we'd consider a highlight.

We are still to have an understanding that Jesus has chosen us. Not just that He might choose us from time to time to do something spiritual. He has chosen us. Each of us is a chosen vessel of His.

The analogy of the vessels is that there is a great house and in it many different kinds of vessels. Think of your own house. You have glasses and dishes and Tupperware and Pyrex. There are vessels made of porcelain and plastic and metals. They each serve different purposes. Some are used everyday and show the signs of wear.

Some are used infrequently. Some are on display! But all are vessels in your house at your disposal that you have chosen.

For His own reasons and to His own glory Jesus chose Saul as a vessel He would use in a very dramatic way. Saul was one of those vessels used everyday.

Keep this analogy in mind and let me read an autobiographical quote from Saul. In his first letter to the Corinthians Saul wrote,

1 Corinthians 4:13 ... We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

Filth and **offscouring** refers to the stuff you scrape off a pan after cooking. On the one hand it's wonderful to be used profoundly, like Saul. But those vessels used most often take a lot of abuse.

I guess the point I'm making is this. You are a chosen vessel every bit as much as Saul... Or Peter... Or Billy Graham. The kind of vessel you are is not up to you to decide. You're the Lord's, in His house, at His disposal.

Let's take a look at Saul as God's chosen vessel. Go back to verses fifteen and sixteen for a moment.

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.

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

It was a big professional assignment and it required a great deal of personal suffering.

I think the Lord's statement is applicable, with some changes, to each of His chosen vessels. Let's say you are a wife and mom. I think the Lord would say, *You are a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before your husband and children.*

It only seems less glorious because we judge things from a human standpoint. Your service is always as unto the Lord. It's a matter of being faithful to what He has chosen for **you**.

Saul's assignment required a great deal of suffering. I can understand it because of the nature of his work. I'm still trying to work-out why some 'ordinary' Christians suffer more than others. I don't think we'll know until we look into the face of the Lord at His reward seat.

Acts 9:18 Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Saul had been saved but left blind on the road to Damascus. Now **scales... fell from his eyes**. I think it's literal.

It's also possible that, although he could see, he had some permanent damage. When he wrote to the Galatians in a very early letter he made a remark that indicates he had some sort of on-going eye trouble. If so every moment of his Christian life Saul had a reminder of his former spiritual blindness and to not trust in the flesh.

Acts 9:19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

He was physically **strengthened** by **food**. Then he was spiritually strengthened by fellowship. Food and fellowship; it doesn't get any better than that!

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

Acts 9:21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

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.

Jews met weekly in the synagogues. Saul would certainly attend and be asked to deliver a message. Instead of declaring Jesus Christ dead and Christians heretics he proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world.

Note the word **immediately**. Saul could be used **immediately** not because of his previous training or upbringing or intellect. He could

be used immediately because he had been filled with, baptized with, God the Holy Spirit.

Saul would go on to have a notable Christian career. Commentators can't help but describe him as the greatest Christian of all time.

Is he? *Or are **you!***

In the end it will be you and Jesus, face-to-face. Saul and his accomplishments won't be a factor at your reward. You will understand that the Lord was the one who saved you when He did. You will understand that the Lord was the one who decided what type of vessel you would be.

All that will matter is your faithfulness in what you were called to do.

You are a chosen vessel. You are on vessel assignment for Jesus. Within your regular assignment you need to expect the supernatural; be ready to respond; and be baptized with the Holy Spirit.



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