



Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

"On Vessel Assignment For God"

Acts 9:10-17 & 22:12-16

God chose to use Ananias as a "vessel" to minister to Saul as His chosen "vessel."

It's an illustration. We are all vessels in the household of God, available for His use. We are all, you could say, on 'vessel assignment for God'

Acts 9:10-17

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."

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.

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."

13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

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

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.

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

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 22:12-16

12 Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,

13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

15 For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

On his way to persecute Christians in Damascus Saul met the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. The encounter left him temporarily blinded. He was led into the city and taken to the house of Judas on Straight Street. Nothing more is told us about his lodging. It would seem that this was prearranged, before his encounter with Jesus. If so he was lodging with a Jew sympathetic to destroying Christianity. Yet there was Saul fasting and praying after an encounter with the Lord.

There he had a vision of Ananias coming. I wonder if he shared that with Judas?

Ananias is described as "a certain disciple." The word "certain" got my attention. 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 reason or 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?

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

First you need to have an expectation of the supernatural. The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision. There was no explanation. Visions were a common occurrence. The supernatural was a common occurrence.

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.

Second Ananias immediately responded with words a servant would use, "Here I am, Lord." You need to be ready. For lots of reasons we are sometimes unprepared for an assignment. We're not keeping ourselves sharp and on-call.

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.

Ananias was at first reluctant. Not only was this Saul the punisher but in all likelihood the house of Judas was no safe place for a Christian to visit uninvited.

I'm not ready 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.

When Ananias arrived his prayer was accompanied by the laying on of hands. What's that all about?

In the Old Testament the high priests would lay hands on the burnt offering to pass the sins of the people to the animal to be sacrificed. The actual act in it self did not transfer the sins to the animal but the obedience of following the law of God.

The priests were associating themselves with the animals to be sacrificed for the sins of the people.

In the New Testament you see examples of laying on of hands as spiritual gifts were being imparted and as healings were received. But you also see gifts and healings without the laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands, then, is not anything mystical. It's to associate yourself with and identify with the person. It's a point of physical connection that illustrates your spiritual unity.

Did the Lord initially 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 point made over-and-over again in Acts.

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 must be what we call the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit coming upon Saul to empower him to serve the Lord.

That brings us to the third thing you need to be available for a special assignment. **You need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit!**

If you've never been baptized with the Holy Spirit; or if you don't believe there is such an experience subsequent to salvation; or if you have been baptized with the Spirit 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.

Next Saul was baptized. It would seem from the Book of Acts that adult believers were water baptized as soon as possible, immediately if possible. I think it's probably more biblical but since baptism isn't a requirement for salvation we have some wiggle room.

Still the New Testament frowns on an unbaptized believer.

Saul had been saved but left blind on the road to Damascus. When Ananias prayed for him scales... fell from his eyes. I think it's literal.

Although he could now see, it's possible he had some permanent damage. When he wrote to the Galatians, in a very early letter, he made a remark that indicated he had some sort of on-going eye trouble. It may have stemmed from these scales. If so every moment of his Christian life Saul had a reminder of his former spiritual blindness.

God told Ananias that Saul was His "chosen vessel." 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 various 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 that you have chosen and are in your house and at your disposal. 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.

It led to excessive wear on Saul. In his first letter to the Corinthians Saul wrote, "... We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now" (First Corinthians 4:13).

"Filth" and "offscouring" refer to the stuff you scrape off a pan after cooking. Saul saw himself as the everyday cook pan in the household of God. He was constantly in the fire; he needed a lot of maintenance.

On the one hand it would be 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.

Your service is always as unto the Lord. It's a matter of being faithful to what He has chosen for **you**.