

February 8, 2004
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Our Mission”
Acts 9:10-22 NLT

10 Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

11 The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to me right now. 12 I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again."

13 "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! 14 And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."

15 But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. 16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for me."

17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. 19 Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. 20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

21 All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who persecuted Jesus' followers with such devastation in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And we understand that he came here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests."

22 Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

(Acts 9:1-9) Saul (name later changed to Paul who wrote much of NT) was eager to destroy those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He even went to the high priest to request letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of Jesus found there. He wanted to bring them--both men and women--back to Jerusalem in chains as prisoners.

As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, suddenly a light from heaven flashed down around him! He fell to the ground and heard the voice of Jesus saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" (When the church or people in the church are persecuted for their belief, as is happening in many parts of the world today, it is Jesus Himself they are persecuting. And when in our own country the church or Christians are mocked, despised or discriminate against it is Jesus the mock, despise and persecute.) Saul asked, "Who are you, sir?"

And the voice that Saul heard replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus to the house of or an inn owned by a man named Judas. It was located on Straight Street (Straight Street still exists today. It runs "straight" through Damascus from east to west). Saul remained there blind for three days. And all that time he fasted going without food and water. He fasted and he prayed.

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias (I am sure this Ananias and this one only is the man our street is named after!). Saul later described him (Acts 22:12) as godly man "a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there (in Damascus)." The Lord called him saying, "Ananias!"

And Ananias replied "Yes, Lord!" ("Here I am, Lord! Want is it you want your servant to do?" That was the attitude of his reply.) Up to this point we have not heard of this man. Does it surprise you that Jesus didn't send Peter, James, John or another of His more well known followers?

1. God Calls & Sends the Unknown (vs 10-12)

God has a mission for you. God's only requirement is that you are godly, have a good reputation and most important are willing to be used by Him (willing to go wherever He says to do whatever He asks). "God called an unknown disciple named Ananias for this task. This has been true throughout church history. Consider this list of "nobodies":

John Staupitz: The man who helped lead Martin Luther to Christ.

John Eggen: Instrumental in the conversion of C. H. Spurgeon.

Edward Kimball: Just a shoe salesman . . . who happened to be D. L. Moody's spiritual mentor.

Mordecai Ham: A little-known evangelist who preached the night that Billy Graham yielded his life to Christ.

We never know how God might use us to touch a life that will, in turn, touch millions. Yield yourself to the purposes of God, and be faithful when he calls."

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God has a mission and a purpose for you. No one else can do it. He created you for a specific time and place and mission. And your life will find meaning and significance only as you find and fulfill God's mission for you. What keeps us from the mission the Lord has for us. First of all sin. We can't know God's will if we are separated from Him by sin. But once we have trusted Jesus to remove our sin and bring us into a relationship with God what then will keep us from our mission. Usually fear.

Ananias said, "But Lord, I've heard about the terrible things this man (Saul) has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus." But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say..." You see it is not about you. It is about God and doing His will and serving Him by serving

others. Our fears keep us from loving others doing for them what God wants us to do. Perfect love casts out fear. Ananias obeyed God in spite of his fear because he trusted God. And his obedience to be used by God to go to Saul in turn allowed God to use Saul to touch millions. As the Lord said to Ananias, "For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for me." Irony isn't it? Saul who persecuted those who believed in Jesus would not become the persecuted.

2. God Chooses the Unlikely (vs 13- 16)

Here was a man who was eager to persecute anyone who would believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Now God chooses Him to be His instrument in telling others that Jesus is the Messiah. You may think of your past and think how can God ever use me. Perhaps you were someone who hated Christians, made fun of Christians perhaps even tried to keep people from becoming Christians. You may feel you're the most unlikely one to tell others how they should live. Yet, God chooses the most unlikely people to know Him and serve Him. I hated Christians! They weren't "cool." I made fun of them and didn't want to act like them because I thought to be accepted I had to be "cool." "Cool" meant doing things I knew were wrong to do. I hated Christians! They were good. I wanted to be bad. One time I visited a friend. He wasn't himself. He was very serious and seemed to be in meditative thought. I asked him what was wrong. He said some people had just spent a long period of time talking to him about Jesus that night. And I said, "What are you listening to that stuff for? They are just a bunch of nuts!" And my friend said, "No, these guys made a lot of sense, they really got me thinking." But I talked some "sense" into him and was able to kill that seed that was planted in him. I had forgotten all about that incident when about six years later I went to talk to him about my new faith in Jesus. Then he reminded me, "remember that night..." I told him I was so wrong, but he just laughed.

There was someone else I knew. He became a Christian and used to witness to me. When I finally became a Christian he fell away. He went back to doing drugs and stealing and even spent some time in prison. Many years later he was dying of liver cancer. I told him he needed to come back to Jesus. And he did, just the day before he died. God chooses the most unlikely to bring his message of salvation in Jesus. God calls us, the unknown the unlikely, to a mission and prepares us for that mission.

3. God prepares the Unprepared (vs 17-20)

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. 19 Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. 20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

a. Jesus appears to Saul

If you are going to find your purpose in life it is only going to be as you know God through Jesus. Just like Saul you need to have your encounter with Jesus. He says to

you, why are you persecuting me. Stop doubting and believe. Stop going in the wrong direction and turn back to me.

b. Jesus gives sight to Saul.

We are talking of physical sight for Saul was struck with blindness. But we too are struck with blindness. We are blind spiritually until Jesus helps us to see. We need our sight back. We have lost sight of God. We have lost sight of what is really important. We live for things that really don't matter and certainly will not matter at the end of our time on earth. What is really important? Knowing God and serving God, that is the only thing that is eternal.

c. Jesus fills Saul with the Holy Spirit

Jesus does not only want to pardon our sin, then leave us empty. He wants to fill you with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that knows the will of God and makes it known to you. It is the Holy Spirit that not only reveals to us our mission from God but empowers us to fulfill that mission.

d. Jesus wants full commitment from Saul

And Saul shows that full commitment by being baptized in the Name of Jesus.

e. Jesus strengthens Saul

He has Saul eat some food for strength and has him stay with the believers. We too need to take care of our bodies so we may better serve God. And we also need spiritual food for strength. This food comes from His Word. And we also need the fellowship of other Believers for encouragement and strength. In this way God prepares the unprepared.

4. God Uses & Fulfills Those Once Unfulfilled (vs 21-22)

Saul found God and the mission God had for him. It was right along the line of Saul's gifts, abilities, personality and it brought him much joy. God wants to use you and in being used by God you will find fulfillment and joy like you've never experienced before. God loves you; He created you and has a mission for you...that only you can do. It is right along the lines of the gifts, abilities and personality he has given you and it and only it will give you great joy as you discover His mission for you. It will involve knowing God and becoming like Jesus and willing to serve God, His church and others in the world, bring glory to God in all you do and ultimately it will involve telling others about Jesus. God wants to use unknown, unlikely you and He is calling you and preparing you and will use you and you will find your purpose and it will be your joy as you answer and obey His call.