

This morning, I am beginning a new sermon series called The Power of One Life. Each week this summer, we will be looking at someone from the Bible that can be preached on in one sermon, learning about 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. Quick 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 priest ² 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.

We also hear more details about Paul's encounter with Ananias when he is telling the story in Acts 22:

Acts 22:12-16 - "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴ "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

There are three things I want to highlight from this passage about Ananias and Paul's conversion.

1) Salvation is a supernatural work of God

Before we get to Ananias, we need to look at the salvation or conversion of Saul in this passage. 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 and self-centeredness to believe in Jesus, trusting that He died for our sins. On the God side of salvation there are three elements: **justification, adoption, and regeneration**:

Justification is the legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us and declares us to be righteous in His sight. This is God as judge.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Adoption is the act of God whereby He makes us members of His family. This is God as Father.

John 1:12-13 - *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Regeneration is the act of God by which He imparts spiritual (eternal) life to us. This is God as heart surgeon.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

The reality of regeneration tells us that salvation or conversion is not like joining a club. **It is a supernatural work of God whereby He gives us spiritual life.** In the story of Saul's conversion, the supernatural quality of salvation is obvious – he did nothing to save himself, and in fact was completely opposed to Jesus when God intervened in his life. **But make no mistake: even if you were saved at 7 at a VBS or if you were saved last week, your salvation was a supernatural work.** No one decides to follow Jesus unless God has regenerated their heart and made them alive. Here are a couple of 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.'

Pay attention to the metaphors. You were dead and made alive. You must be born again from above. Nobody just decides and comes in to the faith. It is not that we were ignorant and now are wise, or we were bad but now we are good. No – we were spiritually dead and now we are alive. Salvation is a supernatural work of God. 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.

You will know you are saved when you see the evidence of a supernatural work in your life. Again, there are many things I can point to, but the three most important are these:

Love for God and His people

1 John 5:1 - Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his children as well.

Heartfelt obedience to God's commands

1 John 3:9 - No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Growth in Christlikeness as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

I became a believer at 18 and something was clearly different: there was a desire to know God that I had never had before. The Bible became alive and made sense to me. I wanted to be around other believers. I started to see some things in my life as sin, things that were not good for me or for others.

Salvation is a supernatural work of God. But having said that...

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

Even though God initiated Saul's conversion, he chose to use Ananias to be a part of it. As we read in Acts 22, Ananias was one of the leaders in Damascus. Paul stayed with the Christians in Damascus and was disciplined by them before he set 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.**

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.

Has anyone ever heard the name **Edward Kimball**? In 1854, Kimball was a Sunday School teacher in Detroit, and one day he went to visit a 17 year-old boy who was in his Sunday School class who had little interest in God or religion. During his visit with this young man at his job in a shoe shop, he led the boy into a relationship with Christ. That young man was **D.L. Moody**, who went on to become one of the greatest evangelists in the world, sharing the gospel with 100 million people, as well as founding Moody Bible Institute and The Moody Church in Chicago. But the story doesn't end there. At one point in his ministry, Moody preached in England at the church of a man named **F.B. Meyer**, who credited Moody for revolutionizing his ministry. Meyer wrote many books and preached the gospel for many years, and his preaching inspired a man named **J. Wilbur Chapman** to evangelize. Chapman worked with the YMCA, where he met a baseball outfielder named **Billy Sunday**, who converted to Christianity and worked with Chapman for two years on his Christian crusades. At one of Billy Sunday's crusades, **Mordecai Ham** was asked to preach, and as he did, a 16-year-old boy in the audience named **Billy Graham** came to faith in Jesus. You never know the difference that one life can make.

Has anyone heard the names Shari Engman, Karlyn Banda, and Stephan Thibodeau? These three college students started a youth group in 1994 and invited everyone they knew, including my girlfriend at the time, who invited me to come. And it was through that group that I came to faith in Christ. They didn't know I

was going to be a pastor; they were just obedient to God's call to share the gospel with a group of teenagers.

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 could be greater than you could ever imagine.

There is nothing greater than being used by God to save someone from eternal separation from God. 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.

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. As we see from Saul's conversion, since salvation is a supernatural work, no one is out of God's saving reach. **Don't know anyone?** Get involved somewhere where you will meet people.

Take out the connection card:

Reach out in thanks to someone who was instrumental in bringing you to faith. Write down the names of people you want us to pray for salvation for. If you don't want it made public, just put an X. Pray that God would give you an opportunity to share your faith with them

Commit to joining the pre-service prayer team, or coming on Sunday mornings
Consider teaching or assisting in Children's Church

Let's end by sharing testimonies about someone responsible for bringing you to faith in Jesus.