

## Week 2

### **Ananias** (Acts 9:1-22)

On April 21, 1855, a man named Edward Kimball (a simple shoemaker who just happened to teach a boys Sunday School class) led one of the boys in his class to faith in Christ. He had no idea that the little boy named Dwight L. Moody would go on to become the world's leading evangelist of his generation!<sup>1</sup>

But, even though Moody would go on to win tens of thousands to Christ, he himself became a Christian because of a hidden hero – Edward Kimball! That's typically the way God works.

For example, don't say it out loud but raise your hand if you know who was there helping the Apostle Paul to receive the Lord. His name is Ananias and he's going to show us *how* and *why* God often uses hidden heroes.

**First, let me give you some background on Paul** (he was called Saul before he met Jesus)...

***Acts 9:1–9 “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.<sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”<sup>5</sup> And [Saul] said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.<sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”<sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.<sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.<sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”***

When you look at Saul on the road to Damascus, you see a single-minded

<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 440–441). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

individual who was bent on eradicating Christians once and for all...

***Acts 8:3 "But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."***

Why was he doing this? Had you stopped him and tried to explain to him who Jesus really was, Saul probably would have shouted in your face...

*"Jesus is dead! He's a crucified nobody! And according to our Law, anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed (Deut. 21:23). Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? No!"<sup>2</sup>*

And the truth is, Jesus *was* cursed, but not the way Saul thought. You see, Jesus was cursed in the sense that He took *our* curse upon Himself. He lived a perfect life for us when we couldn't, and He died in our place when He didn't deserve it. The Gospel can be summed up in four words: *Jesus. In. Our. Place!*<sup>3</sup>

You see, even though Saul was extremely well educated in the Old Testament Scriptures (26:24), he was spiritually blind and didn't understand what the Old Testament *really* taught about the Messiah. Like many other Jews, Saul stumbled over the Cross. He later said...

***1 Corinthians 1:23 "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly [foolishness] to Gentiles."***

The entire time Saul was trying to stop Jesus, he was literally tripping over the truth! In fact, the *New King James Version* uses a unique phrase when Jesus called Saul's name on the Damascus Road. He told Saul, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

What is a "goad?" A goad was a long pole with a sharp metal tip. It was used by farmers/herdsmen to poke their animals and make them pick up the pace. And sometimes the animal would kick back at the goad, which only made the metal tip go deeper, causing even more pain. Jesus was saying, "Stop resisting Me Saul. The more you resist, the more pain you're causing yourself and others!"

So, Jesus had to get Saul's attention in a dramatic way, and it worked! When we left off in verse 9, he was blind and hadn't eaten anything in

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *The Bible exposition commentary*, Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). (Vol. 1, p. 438). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>3</sup> JD Greear

three days. His mind was reeling as he came to the conclusion that he had been *wrong* about Jesus the whole time!

And this is where Ananias comes in. According to chapter 22, Ananias was a godly man who loved the Lord (22:12). He was a hidden hero that God was about to use to change Saul's life. And it shows us the type of hidden heroes that God uses...

## **1. God uses obscure Christians.**

***Acts 9:10–12*** ***“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”<sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas [not Judas who betrayed Jesus] look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,<sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”***

So, here's this obscure Christian named Ananias who was minding his own business when God speaks to him and tells him to go and lay his hands on the man who will become the Apostle Paul – the man that God will use to write most of the New Testament and become the greatest evangelist and church-planter that the world has ever known.

However, Ananias knows all about Saul's cruelty and hatred for Christians. So, he's got a decision to make, which leads us to our second point...

## **2. God uses obedient Christians.**

***Acts 9:13–19*** ***“But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.”<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.<sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”<sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from [Saul's] eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;<sup>19</sup> and taking food,***

***he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus."***

At first, Ananias argued with the Lord about meeting Saul. Why? Because Saul was "evil" (vs.13) and he had the authority to imprison or even kill Ananias and his family (vs.14).

You see, it's hard for us to grasp the amount of faith that it took for Ananias to obey what the Lord was telling him to do. Imagine God telling you to get on a plane all by yourself and fly to the Middle East to share the Gospel with the top ISIS or terrorist commander. Would you do it without any hesitation?

This is the type of scenario that Ananias is facing. Saul was a well-known terrorist to Christians. Ananias knew that if he was misreading God, he would be tortured and thrown in prison at best. Or worst case, he would be stoned to death or beheaded.

But Ananias chose to trust God and obey Him even when his situation seemed impossible. But God can't use disobedient Christians who refuse to trust Him. He uses *obedient* Christians, which leads us to our third point...

### **3. God uses obvious Christians.**

Notice the immediate and obvious change in Saul's life when He received Christ...

***Acts 9:20–22 "And immediately [Saul] proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ."***

From this point forward, there was no doubt that Saul was a changed man...

- ***He went from hating the name of Jesus to carrying Jesus's name to the world. (vs.16). Jesus said, "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name."***

- **He went from calling Christians his enemies to viewing them as his family.** (vs.17) *Ananias referred to Saul as his "brother."*
- **He went from imprisoning Christians to staying in their homes.** (vs.19). *"For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus."*
- **He went from attacking the Gospel to defending the Gospel** (vs.20; 22). *"Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues... and...confounded the Jews...by proving that Jesus was the Christ."*

Never underestimate the power of a single witness from a hidden hero like Ananias! In fact, after Edward Kimball led D.L. Moody to Christ, let me tell you the chain of events that happened – the ripple effect on history...

On June 17, 1873, Moody arrived in England for a series of evangelistic meetings (nights of worship and preaching). While there, he spoke at a Baptist church which was pastored by a man named F. B. Meyer.

So, they became friends and Moody invited F.B. Meyer to come to America and preach. And on one of those nights (at Northfield Bible Conference), he challenged the crowds by asking this question: "If you are not yet willing to give up everything for Christ, are you at least willing to let God to *make* you willing?"

That question changed the life of a struggling young pastor in the crowd named Wilber Chapman, who went on to become a powerful traveling evangelist in the early 1900s, and he recruited a recently saved baseball player named Billy Sunday.

And under Chapman's guidance, Billy Sunday became one of the most powerful evangelists in American history. In fact, God used his preaching in Charlotte, North Carolina to save a group of young men who began to meet and pray for revival. And in 1934 this group of young men invited evangelist Mordecai Ham to come and preach a city-wide crusade (several nights of worship and preaching).

And on one of those nights there was a high school student in that crowd named Billy Graham who gave his heart to Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham became the greatest evangelist in the world, and he preached his last crusade in 2005.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://thetoryoflibertyblog.com/2012/06/18/edward-kimball-to-billy-graham-an-amazing-timeline-of-events>

And because of Billy Graham's influence, today we have guys like Greg Laurie, Shane Pruitt, Rechab Gray, etc.

There are tens of thousands (probably millions) of people in heaven because of the preaching ministries of those men that I just told you about. And it all traces back to a hidden hero named Edward Kimball – an obscure shoemaker who led a boy in his Sunday School class to the Lord.

And remember, some other hidden hero led Edward Kimball to the Lord. Never underestimate the power of a single witness – a hidden hero just like you! BUT remember why God was able to use those men – they were *obedient* and their walk with Jesus was *obvious* to a lost world.

They lived a “no doubt” lifestyle – their life left no doubt that they loved Jesus!

Does that describe your relationship with Jesus?

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### **Small Groups**