

Lesson Text

Acts 9:10-20 (NIV)

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 holy people 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 proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to 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.

Today’s Lesson Aims

Learning Fact: To describe the interactions of Ananias with God and Saul (Paul).

Biblical Principle: To show how God expects us at times to be His hands and feet.

Daily Application: To overcome our fears and serve where God has called

Power Hour Lesson
Summary for August
20, 2017

“Called to Preach”

Lesson Text:
Acts 9:10-20

Background Scripture:
Acts 9:1-31

Devotional Reading:
1 Timothy 4:6-16

Introduction

Physicist Becomes a Preacher

John Polkinghorne was one of the greatest British physicists of the twentieth century. He finished a doctorate at Cambridge University at age 25 and was invited to return to Cambridge to teach when he was 27. He participated in formulating the theory of the quark, a particle that is one of the building blocks of matter. He was one of the most brilliant men of his age. Yet after 25 years of this spectacular career in science, Polkinghorne left it all to train for the priesthood in the Church of England. He was ordained and eventually returned to Cambridge University in 1986 to serve as chaplain for Trinity Hall, one of the colleges of the university. The physicist became a preacher.

This week's lesson is about an even more dramatic career change.

Lesson Background

Time: A.D. 32

Place: Damascus

Background: Saul

Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, had been trained as a rabbi by the best teachers in Jerusalem (compare Acts 22:3). His education in the law would have been the ancient equivalent of a doctoral degree today. When the Jewish leadership began to persecute Christians, Saul was their point man. We first see this in his leadership role in this regard in the stoning of Stephen (7:58).

Saul went on to terrorize the church by conducting house-to-house searches for Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:4). His persecuting zeal reached a fever pitch when he took the initiative to ask the high priest for authority to extend the persecution to Damascus, about 150 miles to the north of Jerusalem. His plan was to find Christians in the Jewish population there and bring them back to Jerusalem by force (9:1, 2). His encounter with the risen Christ is the immediate backdrop for this lesson (9:3-9). Saul's ambitions and zeal had not gone unnoticed by the Lord of the church!

Background: Damascus

The site of the current lesson is the city of Damascus. In the Old Testament, this city is identified with the kingdom of Syria (or Aram), the sometime ally but often foe of ancient Israel (see 1 Kings 15:18). Some claim that Damascus is the oldest continually inhabited site in the world. Indeed, the Bible notes its existence in the time of Abraham (see Genesis 15:2), and archaeological data extends back even further.

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Damascus was important in the first century A.D. as a trading hub for caravan routes. It was a multiethnic city with a substantial Jewish population. These facts highlight the perceived need to extend persecution against Jewish Christians there. Threats to the “purity” of synagogues in Damascus could not be tolerated.

Saul’s mission to this city changed, however, before he arrived there. As the lesson opens, Saul is in his third day of blindness as a result of his encounter with Christ.

What Do You Think?

- How can you show appreciation for the behind-the-scenes, nearly anonymous people who have influenced you for Christ?
- In what ways have you seen Christians put aside fears and follow the will of God?

Points to Ponder

1. Personal encounters with Christ can change the plans and direction of our lives (Acts 9:10-12).
2. We should not allow fear to alter the assignments God has given us (vs. 13, 14).
3. God can direct the greatest opposition into a zeal for His service (vs. 15, 16).
4. Fear is overcome by faith as faith is put into action (vs. 17, 18).
5. The foundation of gospel preaching today should remain as it was in Paul’s ministry – Jesus is the Son of God (vs. 19, 20).

Conclusion

Faith and Obedience in Two Men

The dramatic events of Acts 9 record how extreme God’s action had to be for Saul to turn his attention to God’s call. Saul was so obsessed with climbing the ladder of favor within the Jewish leadership (Galatians 1:14) that he did not recognize the legitimacy of the Christian message. He was spiritually blind to the fact that he was persecuting Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God.

Saul, as Paul, went on to become the great apostle to the Gentiles. Christians of non-Jewish background owe him a great debt of gratitude, for he fought a somewhat lonely battle to gain an equal place in the church for people of all backgrounds. Even so, let us not forget the key role of the nearly anonymous Ananias, who was called by God to overcome his fears and minister to the church’s greatest enemy at just the right time.

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The voice of Ananias was part of the call of God for the one who came to be known as the apostle Paul. Nearly 30 years later, Paul mentioned this man by name (Acts 22:12). He never forgot this man of faith, a faith that overcame fear.

Acts 9 is not intended as a pattern for how God brings people to faith, and the role of Paul as apostle was unique. Even so, God expects us at times to be His hands and feet, as was Ananias. May we overcome our fears as we answer that call!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, tune our spiritual eyes and ears to perceive the tasks You have for us. Grant us humility with courage as we embrace those tasks. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thought to Remember

God's call is insistent and persistent.

Anticipating the Next Lesson

Next week's lesson is **"Called to Be Inclusive"** and explains how the Christian faith is intended to be universal, and the gospel is to be proclaimed to everyone, everywhere. Study Acts 10.

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