

Ananias - the Obedient Disciple

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 March 2018

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 9, I'm reading at verse 10.

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. And the Lord said to him, Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarshish named Saul.

For behold, he is praying, 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. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

Often when we look for great things to be done in the church, we look at people who maybe are more at the forefront of God's work, people who seem to be always engaged in it in a very public way.

But we also know that sometimes that the Lord uses the people who are more in the background, and we find that quite often in the Bible, that there are people that we don't really know very much about.

[1 : 32] And all of a sudden, the Lord pushes them to the front, and we see and we hear of them, and then it's as if they disappear again, not that they have disappeared, but that's the only account we have of them.

And that is certainly true of this man, Ananias, because apart from what we have written for us here, and again in Acts 22 when Paul is giving his testimony, we don't hear or know really anything else about him.

But he is like so many other people who are in the church. There are people, as we say, who are more in the forefront. But the bulk of people in the church are like the Ananiases.

They are devout, they're faithful, they're God-honoring, their lives are lived very often in a Christ-like way, and maybe unknown to themselves, they are impacting many others for good.

And it's sometimes the quiet, Christ-like life that is lived on a day-to-day basis that has more of an impact on others than maybe anything else.

[2 : 45] And I'm sure as you look back over your own lives, it's one of the things that you look at and you remember the influence that certain people had, something about their Christian character, something about the way they lived, the way they conducted themselves, the consistency of their life.

It created an impression upon you for good. You knew that person was a Christian, and it affected you, their life affected you. And at the end of the day, these are the people who will most certainly receive the well-done, good and faithful servant from the Lord.

So here's this man, Ananias, and as we say, we don't know an awful lot about him, but the one thing we do at the very beginning tells us that he was a disciple. There was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias.

And a disciple indicates certain things to us. A disciple at one level is a follower. That word is often used with regard to different, it might be a leader, a great religious leader, or a great political leader.

And those who follow that person or who adhere very closely to what they believe and what they teach, they're often termed disciples.

[4 : 02] That is, he or she is a disciple of that person. But of course, we know that with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, all his people are disciples. And a disciple is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we use that expression here a lot. It's a lovely expression. We use the expression when somebody becomes a Christian. We use that and say, when did so-and-so start following?

I didn't know he or she was following. How long have you been following? Sometimes people will ask you without saying anything other than that. How long have you been following?

Sometimes you say, how long have you been on the road? Meaning the Christian road. How long have you been following? And it's a very simple, but it's a very profound statement and question. And of course, we follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we follow Jesus because we love him. We follow Jesus because his word broke into our life. There came a time when we heard the word of Jesus saying, follow me.

[5 : 12] And that was, might have been through the preaching of the word. It might have been through your own personal reading of the word. It might have been an ongoing, long drawn out period. But the Lord was working in your heart in such a way that he was drawing you and drawing you and drawing you until you came to a place and a point where you knew that it was the Lord who had called you and you began to follow him.

Because he became so important to you. Your own ambitions and life plans and all these things, you were actually prepared to change if need be because Jesus became all important in your life.

And you look back over your life and you see that this is one of the things that Jesus does. He claims your heart as his territory. It's a territorial claim.

He has come into your heart, into your life, and you begin to follow him. I'm sure as you look back over your life, you would say, I so wish that I had been a, I had followed Jesus so closely every day of my life.

But I'm sure that we all will have to say there were periods when we didn't follow Jesus nearly as closely as we should. Maybe a bit like Peter sometimes. When it says of Peter, he followed afar off.

[6 : 34] There was quite a distance between Jesus and Peter. And of course when Peter was following afar off, it wasn't long until he had actually fallen drastically.

And where he began to deny any knowledge of Jesus in a public arena. And not only to deny him saying, I don't know the man, but with oaths, with curses. But that part of the problem was, although he was following Jesus, he was following at a great distance.

So we've always got to be, or seek for the grace that we will follow Jesus closely. The closer we are to him, the safer we are. And the other thing is, when Jesus calls us, he says to us, follow me.

My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me. Remember, we follow him. We don't go ahead of him. And again, there's sometimes a tendency within us to want to go ahead of Jesus.

Because sometimes we think the Lord isn't working. Isn't that true? There are times we say, I really don't know what the Lord is actually doing here. He doesn't seem to be doing anything in my life.

[7 : 47] He doesn't seem to be fulfilling the hopes, the aspirations, the plans that I had. It's just not coming together in the way that I thought I should. And sometimes we can be tempted to try and take matters into our own hands.

But the Lord, we've got to remember what it says in Scripture, the Lord waits that he may be gracious. There are times, the Lord has a set time for everything. So we've got to learn to follow the Lord and not to be impatient.

As the psalmist says, the Lord, that my soul wait thou with patience upon the Lord alone. But a disciple isn't just a follower.

A disciple is also a learner. And one of the things, when we begin to start following, and after a wee while of following, we come to this persuasion that we don't know very much.

Initially, with the very first flush of the awareness of being in Christ and where your eyes are open to see things that you hadn't seen before. You know what?

[8 : 53] One of the things that you see once you become a Christian is how easy it is to become a Christian. How simple it is. All you have to do is to believe, to trust.

And yet, when you're outside Christ, it's the hardest thing in the world. Because so often, you rack your brains and you say to yourself, oh yeah, it's all very well for you, saying all you have to do is believe.

How do you believe? How do I get from here to there? Well, what we've always got to remember is that salvation is a gift. And I think this is a great stumbling block with a lot of people.

Salvation is not something that you can work up yourself. But salvation is something you receive by asking for it. And you go to the giver.

And that's what Jesus wants to do. He says, you know, I want to give you myself. But I want you to come to me and ask me. Say, Lord, please, come into my heart, come into my life.

[9 : 55] And you know, when we really pray that, he will do so. It is a great plea that he will always answer.

And so, as we say, the disciple is somebody who is a learner. And we're always wanting to know more and more because one of the things when you become a Christian is you get an appetite for the things of God.

You get an appetite for the word. You want to read it. And you want to understand it. You don't want to be like the Ethiopian eunuch who was going through the desert and he was reading but he hadn't a clue.

He couldn't understand what he was reading. Remember how Philip was guided by the Lord down into the wilderness and he met with him and he opened up the scripture to him.

And that's what happens when you become a Christian. You want to have light upon the truth. You want to understand it. And you're saying to the Lord, Lord, be my teacher.

[10 : 55] Open my mind. Open my understanding. I really want to know I have a hunger. I have an appetite for the things of God. That is one of the defining marks of becoming a Christian is that you have an appetite when you didn't used to.

You might be here and you might have read your Bible from Genesis to Revelation every year. Before I was a Christian, I used to do that. And I used to give myself a pat on the back as well.

But I didn't, I can't say that I had a huge appetite for the word of God. Though I read it. But it changed. When you do become a Christian, you get an appetite.

You're saying, you know, I want to, I want to know more. There's a, you hunger and thirst after righteousness as it says. But a disciple is also an apprentice.

It's a follower. Disciple is a learner. But the disciple is also an apprentice. An apprentice is somebody, as we know, isn't just learning theory. It's hands on.

[12 : 01] It is where you, it's in a practical way where you're involved at a practical level. And that's exactly how it is for the Christian. Because the Christian is learning how to live.

And when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus doesn't just say to us, right, that's you saved, now on you go and I will see you when you get to heaven.

Well, we wouldn't make too much of it. The Lord has given us a rule book. And he says to us, I want to work with you. Because we're told in Philippians, it's God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

So you see, the Lord is working in you, working in you through the word and he's teaching you how to live out the life of a Christian. And that is what we want to do.

The believer wants to live. And when we don't, when we get it wrong, it hurts us. Why does it hurt us? Because we know we've hurt the Lord. When you love somebody, you don't, it hurts when you do wrong against them.

[13 : 11] And when we do wrong against the Lord, when we sin against God, when we fail him, when we let him down, when we walk away and say, you know, that was not, I did not act like a Christian there.

I did not speak like a Christian. There might be times, maybe at your work or something like that, and maybe you get angry with somebody, maybe you speak in a way and in a manner and you say to yourself afterwards, I'm ashamed of how I spoke, of how I conducted myself at that time.

Or there might be things in life that you're saying to yourself, and it bothers you and you say, you know, I shouldn't be doing that. I shouldn't, I shouldn't, if I'm a Christian and that's the Lord working, he's convicting you and he's guiding you through the word.

His spirit and the word come together. And so, this is your apprenticeship because you are being changed. Your prayer is, Lord, make me more like yourself.

And the Lord says, actually, that's what I'm doing. That's my purpose. That's my aim for you in this world. I'm wanting to conform you. That's what God the Father says regarding his people.

[14 : 18] I want to conform them to the image of my son. We know that in glory, that's when it will become actual, where it will really be fulfilled in this world.

So often, we fail, we struggle, and as we said, so often, there's an inconsistency about us. But the great desire, and that's what's important, is the desire of our heart and our life is to become more classlike.

The desire and the practice of our life is that we're seeking to live according to God's word. So anyway, here's this man, Ananias, and he's a disciple.

But there's one other thing that we're told, and if we go to Acts chapter 22, when Paul is giving his testimony, he mentions, of course, Ananias, who was part of his testimony. And he says there that Ananias, a devout man, and he's well spoken of by all the Jews who live there.

Now that is quite a testimony. He's spoken well of by all the Jews who live there. Now we've got to remember that there were believing Jews and unbelieving Jews.

[15 : 35] And the unbelieving Jews didn't like the Christians. But all the Jews had time for Ananias. And that's quite amazing.

Because that means that this man, that his lifestyle, his way, his conduct, his everything, had such an impression on everybody that he was well spoken of, that he was well thought of.

And we've got to remember that people will often make their judgment about Christ as they look at you and as they look at me. And that's scary.

Because there are times you think, oh no, if people are assessing Jesus as they look at me. And sometimes we can feel really, really ashamed.

Because we can sometimes say, I am not a good witness. But here's this man, and it was very obvious that his consistency of life spoke to everybody who was about.

[16 : 41] And anyway, what I like about Ananias is that as the Lord comes to Ananias, that there is an immediate response from him.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias, and he said, here I am, Lord. There's an immediate response to the voice of God.

And what we know of Ananias, the little that we know of him, we're not surprised. Because he was ready immediately to hear the voice of God. Now that's important.

Because you know, the Lord is often speaking to us, and we're not listening. The Lord is speaking to us with regard to our duty in this world. And sometimes we're not hearing.

The Lord might be rebuking us through his word, and we're not hearing. Because you see, this world has an incredibly deadening impact upon our souls.

[17 : 39] It affects us. And so often, we're not hearing what God is saying. Because God speaks to us all the time. He speaks to us through his word. Every single day, he's speaking to us through his word.

And we've got to be seeking and saying to the Lord every day, Lord, help me to hear what you're saying to me. Because you know that after, you know full well when you read God's word, when you come to his word, and sometimes you say, whoa, I know that that is speaking powerfully to me today.

That's going right into my heart. It might be by way of rebuke. It might be by way of direction. It might be by way of promise, reassuring you. You might be down, down in your spirits, and the Lord, you read the word, and it just lifts you up, and you say, wow, I needed that.

That's the word of God. And he speaks to us in this way. And so we need to have the ears to hear and the heart to understand. But obviously, Ananias, being such a devout man, he was able to hear the word of God right away.

And Ananias answers, here am I. And that's great. There's just this immediate response. And he's ready to do what God asks him to do.

[19 : 03] That's a thing that we have to ask ourselves as well. Are we ready to do whatever the Lord would ask us to do? Because, you know, it's all too possible that you might be saying in your life, you know, Lord, if you don't mind, just leave me to get on with my life as it is.

I'm committed to you, Lord, but I don't want to be too committed. Do you know what we're like? We want to keep little bits of our life to ourselves. This is my bit. We can be like that as Christians.

And we're holding on to this little bit, Lord, you can have everything else, but a few wee bits in here, they're mine. The Lord says, no, actually, I want all of you. And I want you to go where I will have you go.

And I want you to do what I will have you do. And that's what the Lord wants of us. That's what the Lord expects of us. Well, that's exactly the kind of man Ananias was. Because what the Lord asked Ananias to do at that particular moment was the most difficult thing that he could have asked Ananias to do.

He said to him in verse 11, And rise, go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarshish's named Saul. And Ananias said to the Lord, Saul!

[20 : 25] You can hear every alarm bell going off. Saul was a byword for Christian persecution. This was a man who was coming down, see at the beginning of the chapter what it says, But Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.

What that is saying is that this man was committed, his whole being, his very breath was seeking the destruction of the Christian faith.

He was putting all his abilities, and he had loads of ability. He was putting all his energy, and he had loads of energy. He was putting everything that he had, every bit of him.

His total commitment to a life on earth was to eradicate the Christian, to destroy them, to murder them, and to put them in prison. And the Lord is saying to Ananias, I want you to go and see this man.

So you can see straight away, you can almost hear the panic in the voice of Ananias. Saul, that's what he says.

[21 : 42] Lord, I have heard from many about this man how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. What a legacy. You know, it's no wonder that Saul, well, who was later Paul, in his writings, he often harped back to what he had been.

And there was part of him never got over. He knew, oh, the Lord said he was going to suffer a lot for him, and he did. But Paul, he termed himself the chief of sinners.

You know, you and I, we use that expression and there are times we actually mean it. There are times in our lives when you say, and when I say, you know, I'm the chief of sinners. You mean that with all your heart.

But Saul really was the chief of sinners. He was somebody who had the light. He had lived at the time of Jesus Christ. He knew everything about Jesus, but he was so blinkered and blinded.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees to the very, as high as he could go. But he was the biggest legalist that could be found, and he hated Jesus Christ.

[22 : 53] And he caused havoc and destruction in the church. and for the rest of his life, Paul had to live with that. He was responsible for the deaths of many Christians.

He was responsible for tearing husbands and wives apart, imprisoning them. And although the Lord forgave him and although the Lord used him, so he became one of the greatest men ever in the Bible, his past, although it was forgiven, must have personally haunted him because of what he had done.

He had blood on his hands. And so, it was quite a thing that Ananias was being asked to do.

And sometimes we have to ask us, I wonder why the Lord asked Ananias, somebody who was in the background, why didn't he say to Peter, who was the leader of the church, or why didn't he say to John, would you go down to Damascus and lay your hand upon Saul?

Well, I don't know the reason, but it could have been that if it was Peter or John who were apostles had gone down, then people would have said, oh, it was, Paul was made an apostle by the apostles.

[24 : 13] He didn't get an apostolic calling. He wasn't called by Jesus Christ. He was called by the apostles. So he's not a real apostle. And Paul was always at pains in all the different churches he went to, to highlight that he was an apostle born out of time because one of the things an apostle had to see, an apostle had to see Jesus Christ.

And Paul, of course, that's why he says he saw Jesus out of time. He was given that vision into heaven where he was blinded, where he saw the Lord Jesus, the risen Savior.

And so, people would say, oh, well, it wasn't Peter or John, it wasn't one of the apostles, it was Ananias. So the Lord, as we see, is all wise.

And so, Ananias is asked to go and to lay his hands upon Saul. It was quite a challenge. Maybe the Lord is challenging some of you here in different ways.

Maybe he's challenging maybe he's been for a while to speak to somebody. Somebody at work, somebody at school, maybe a neighbor, somebody. And you get the opportunity to speak to them about Jesus Christ.

[25 : 28] Other people that you know and it's bothering you that you, somehow you just haven't managed to share the gospel with them, that somehow you go away time after time and you say, you know, I still haven't been able to say a thing.

Well, you ask the Lord to open the doors for you that you will be able to. And maybe there are people that you say that they're on your heart, they're on your soul, but you say to yourself, you know, I can't ever see that person become a Christian.

You know, there might be people today that you know, you know them really well, but church is the last place you would ever expect to see them. In fact, they don't really have any time for the gospel.

And you say to yourself, well, there's no point in speaking to them. We don't know. We know that the majority of people who come to faith are people who normally are within the sphere of the church, but not always.

The Lord is full of surprises. And he's always taking people from here and there in the next place. And that's, if you had run a survey in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, and you would say, who do you think is going to be the great missionary that the Lord is going to use to build up and to develop the church throughout sort of in this part of Europe?

[26 : 59] It wouldn't even be on any person's list to list Saul. He was just, it wouldn't even come into their consideration. So when the Lord puts it upon your heart to speak to somebody, even as you say, a friend who might not have any desire, or appear to have any desire for the gospel, you do what the Lord tells you to do.

And so, while Ananias obviously had a sinking feeling at what the Lord was asking him to do, Jesus is telling him that this is a chosen vessel of his.

And so, as we said, we must go about, we must be sensitive to the leading of the Lord. But when the Lord is telling Ananias about Saul, he says to him, you know, go to this particular house, for Saul is praying.

And that was really, that's kind of what it was. That's it. Ananias, he's a changed man. And I'll tell you how he's a changed man, because he's praying. Now, Saul as a Pharisee would have prayed and prayed and prayed, but he didn't really pray.

Jesus gives an example of the prayer of a Pharisee in the wee illustration he gives to the publican and the Pharisee. And when we look at the Pharisee's prayer, it was very wordy.

[28 : 24] It was probably, in fact, it wasn't really a prayer. All he said was, I thank you, Lord. When he began, you think, well, but then it was all about himself. Praising himself, telling the Lord all the good things he was doing.

And then thanking the Lord that he wasn't like that publican over in the corner. I thank you, Lord, they're not like him. And yet, the poor publican in the corner, all he could do was, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

The Pharisee went home, but he wasn't justified, but the publican was. So, Paul being, or Saul, as he was then, being a Pharisee of the Pharisee, he would have had long, lengthy, beautiful, intellectual prayers, because he was a great mind.

He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He was a superb intellectual, but he had never really prayed. Prayer is from the heart.

Prayer is real. Prayer is when we want to engage with God, where we want to pour out our heart. And that's why the Lord said, you know, he's praying.

[29 : 34] If the Lord had said to Ananias, you'll find him in the church, that wouldn't have satisfied Ananias. Because you say, yeah, he could be in the church, but he could still be an enemy.

Or even if he had said, he's in the church and he's preaching, that wouldn't have satisfied Ananias either, because Judas went out preaching. So, but when he said, he prayed, in other words, he continues praying.

He can't stop praying. That was the key, that was the mark, that was the evidence that there was a change in his life. And so we find that prayer is the heartbeat of the Christian.

The Lord hears the prayer. As we say, the prayers don't need to be loud and long and flowery, but they need to be from the heart. You look at Hannah. Hannah went to the temple to pray.

Only her lips moved. And yet she was able to say of little Samuel when she brought him to the temple, for this child I prayed, and God heard and answered my prayer.

[30 : 46] And that's what he does when we pray genuinely and sincerely and with our heart. He hears and he answers. And then the very last thing that we would say is this, is we see the Lord's knowledge of every situation.

Sometimes it might be just a wee point. But you know, sometimes we can get so down and we feel misunderstood and we wonder, is the Lord really in control? Oh, yes, he is.

Just look at the wee bit of detail here. And the Lord said to him, to Ananias, rise and go to the street called straight. So the Lord is giving directions to Ananias where to go to this particular street.

And when you go down that street, go to the house of Judas. And when you go into the house of Judas, you will find there a man of Tarshish, named Saul. And I'll tell you right now what he's doing.

He's praying. You see how the Lord knows absolutely every detail. And he knows every detail about you and me as well. Everything.

[31 : 52] And God is at work. He has a plan and a purpose and he won't be thwarted. And we often look, as we look at life, it seems to be going against what we think God is going to be doing. But that's so often the way it works.

This is where our faith is tried and tested and built up. You can go right through the Bible and there are all the classic examples. We mentioned Joseph this morning.

Joseph had early promises that his brothers would serve him, that his brothers would bow down before him. And if ever there looked like that that dream, that these visions, that these things that he had from the Lord, that every day of Joseph's life in Egypt in the dungeon, it seemed like the burial of his promises, promises, the promises that God had given.

And yet in a moment it all changed. And just as the psalm says, men had dreamed were we. It just had happened, everything, the Lord propelled them just in a moment up so they became prime minister in Egypt from the dungeon.

It wasn't long until the brothers were bowing down before him. The fulfillment of the dreams. dreams. The Lord is in control every day, every night.

[33 : 18] And that's important for us to know, particularly when we feel down, when we feel misunderstood, when we feel, Lord, what are you doing? If we could hear the voice from heaven, the Lord would say, I know what I'm doing.

Absolutely. Just trust me. And that's what the Lord wants us to do. Every day and every step of our life to trust him.

And the more we trust him and follow him, the more we will discover the blessings he has in store for us. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we pray to bless us tonight with all the enriching of your blessing.

May your hand be opened to us in good, and may you give to us liberally, not according to our deserving, but according to your great mercies.

And according to your great love. We give thanks, Lord, that you have done the greatest thing possible. We give thanks for the death of Jesus. And if God spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not freely also give us all things?

[34 : 28] Help us, Lord, to be bold in our requests, but also humble. And we ask, Lord, that you will do us good. Take us to our homes safely and guide us throughout this week.

Keep us from hurt and harm, and watch over us and forgive us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing from Psalm 34 and sing Psalms.

Psalm 34 and sing Psalms. verses 1 to 7. It's on page 40. At all times I will bless the Lord, I'll praise him with my voice.

Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice. Together let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me. I saw the Lord, his answer came. From fear he set me free.

They look to him and shine with joy. They are not put to shame. This suffering man cried to the Lord, from him deliverance came. The angel of the Lord surrounds and guards continually all those who fear and honor him and sets his people free.

[35 : 48] Psalm 34 1 to 7. At all times I will bless the Lord. At all times I will bless the Lord.

I'll pray and with my voice because I glory in silver and withips in ■■■■■■■■ I incrível K Kennedy I saw the Lord, his answer came from fear, he set me free.

May look to him and shine with joy, they are all true to shame.

The suffering man cry to the Lord, draw me delirious.

The angel of the Lord surrounds and are continually, all who take care of one care in his sanctity, he will be.

[37 : 57] Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.