Why Him?

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Acts 9:10-19

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in
a vision, ‘Ananias.’ He answered, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ 11The Lord said to him, ‘Get
up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man
of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12and 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.’ 13But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about
this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14and here he
has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.’ 15But the
Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my
name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16I myself will
show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’17So Ananias went
and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the
Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you
may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ 18And immediately
something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got
up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

1. Hidden Heroes

In the Bible there are so many well-known heroes-Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Daniel, Jeremiah, Joseph, Mary, Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul. There are also many ordinary people in the Bible. But they have made a big impact on someone.

Do you know the third son of Adam and Eve? His name is Seth. Who are the two midwives who saved the Hebrew children in Egypt? They are Shiphrah and Puah. What would have happened if one of wise men went back to King Herod and told him where Jesus was born? There are many women who supported the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. We do not know their names other than Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna.

People say that behind every great man there is a great woman. In the Bible, behind a great man there is someone who helped them to be great. Apart from Jesus, perhaps there would be no one who has had a greater impact on the world than the apostle Paul. But do you know who helped Saul become the greatest apostle Paul? His name is Ananias.

2. The Importance of Ananias

In Acts 9:10 and the following, we find Ananias, a disciple of Jesus. Ananias is the same as the Hebrew word Hananiah, meaning “favored of the

Lord." The Bible does not talk about Ananias much. In Acts 22, St. Paul describes Ananias as "***a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there***" (Acts 22:12). He was a Jew.

One day in a vision, Jesus asks Ananias to go to the street called Straight, and look for a man of Tarsus named Saul at the house of Judas and pray to restore his sight. Ananias says, "***Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he had done to your saints in Jerusalem***" (verse 13). And Ananias adds, "***And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you***" (verse 14, Good News Bible).

The Bible does not say this, but what Ananias is trying to say is "Jesus, are you crazy? Do you know why Saul is here? He came to arrest me. Do you want me to go and pray for my enemy to restore his sight?" "Oh, no. I can't do it." Ananias does not want to go and see Saul because he knows why Saul came to Damascus. Saul was well known among early Christians as an enemy of the church.

Ananias knew that he was on Saul's list of people to arrest. Ananias would have been afraid of Saul. But Jesus tells Ananias, "***Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;*** [16]***I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name***" (verses 15-16). Jesus says, "I do know why he came to Damascus, but do not worry about him, Saul has now changed. I am going to use him to tell the Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel about me."

At the time, Saul was temporarily blinded and stayed in Damascus for three days. Paul's physical blindness symbolizes his spiritual blindness. I am sure Paul was meditating on what he had been doing and what happened on his way to Damascus. Paul would have been confused about what was going on. Paul thought he had been serving God by persecuting the followers of Jesus, but he began to realize that he was wrong.

3. Ananias' Encounter with Saul

Ananias is reluctant to go, but he goes to see Saul anyway. When he sees Saul, Ananias calls him "brother Saul." Since Saul is not able to see Ananias, Saul would have been scared when Ananias called his name. Ananias tells Saul that Jesus had sent him to pray for Saul. Ananias lays his hands on Saul and prays to restore Saul's sight and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Verse 18 says, "***Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized***." Within a very short period of time, a big change happens to Saul. For Saul's conversion, Ananias contributes a lot. Let us see a video clip.

What does Ananias' visit mean for Saul? First, Saul must have been overwhelmed by what happened to him. But Saul is accepted by Ananias as a brother in Christ, not as a persecutor. He was encouraged by Ananias.

Second, Saul's physical as well as his spiritual sight is restored. Saul is now convinced of how much Jesus loves him and that Jesus is the one whom God has sent. Third, Saul receives a confidence that Jesus calls him when he is filled by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Saul is baptized by Ananias. Paul now becomes part of Jesus' followers and movement. And his baptism would be the beginning of his commission as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The change in Saul is dramatic. In less than one week, Saul goes from being a destroyer of Christ's followers to preaching about Jesus. Many people were amazed by the change in Saul. The followers of Jesus had expected Saul to arrest them, but instead Saul proclaims that Jesus is the Christ.

Many of Jesus' followers would have been suspicious about Saul's conversion. But Ananias' witness would have made a big difference in accepting Saul as a genuine apostle of Jesus. Ananias' encounter with Saul was divinely arranged. Jesus gives specific directions to Ananias about where to go and what to do for Saul. In Saul's vision, Jesus tells him to expect Ananias' arrival.

We do not hear more about Ananias in the Bible. When we compare the influence of Ananias and Paul, we might say that Paul's influence on the early Christians and the church is much bigger. However, without Ananias, Saul could not have had the impact that he would have on the Christian world. Through Ananias' visit, Saul was able to have confidence that Jesus called him and that Saul was empowered by Ananias to preach the gospel. Ananias' visit can be seen as a small contribution to God's kingdom. But for Saul, his visit becomes the beginning of Saul's ministry.

4. The Call

On Wednesdays, there has been a great group of people who have gotten together in the morning for Bible study led by Geri Rider. The textbook the group is using is called "The Call" written by Adam Hamilton, pastor of the Church of Resurrection in Leawood, KS. On the first page of his book, pastor Adam writes, "In memory of Pastor Phil Hollis, who helped me to hear God's call to follow Jesus and then encouraged me to answer God's call to be a pastor. I am forever indebted to him." Did Pastor Phil know Pastor Adam would be a pastor of the largest United Methodist Church? Probably not. But as far as Pastor Adam is concerned, Pastor Phil has made a big difference in his life.

No one in the early church expected that Jesus would call Saul to be one of his apostles. Saul was considered the enemy of the followers of Jesus. We see from today's passage, that Jesus' love goes beyond what we think is possible, and that Jesus even loves and calls his enemies, those who hate him. What Ananias does may not seem to be a big deal. However, the course of

Christianity and Christian history was forever changed by a small act of obedience and faithfulness by Ananias.

5. Conclusion

What image comes to mind when we hear the word “God”? For most of us, we may see a fatherly figure. For me, God is like a movie director and we are the actors in the movie. We pursue our own safety and happiness. But we learn that our life is in God’s hands. We do not know what will happen this afternoon. We could be afraid of not knowing what will happen next in life. But we know that God has a script for our lives and the lives of every single person on the earth. God directs and works behind the scenes to create the beautiful masterpiece of our lives.

Our lives have times of sadness, fearfulness, but also joy. In all parts of our lives, we know that God is there, every step of the way, leading and guiding our lives towards the good that he has prepared for us. Even when it comes to the people we may not like, we can find ourselves asking God, “why him or her?” We can complain about our spouse, our children, maybe even our pastor, DS, and Bishop. But just like the story of Paul, we cannot forget that God has control of even our enemies. And God loves and uses even those whom we may have problems with to become instruments of God’s kingdom.

6. Application

For the past 72 years, South and North Koreans have been divided on the Korean peninsula. Each side sees each other as the enemy. North Koreans killed South Koreans during the Korean War, and vice versa. Even though these are one people, each side sees each other as the problem to the situation.

This has become more visible with all the news regarding North Korea lately. As you know, the government here is concerned about North Korea and what is going on there. The leader of North Korea has test fired many missiles and continues to develop technology for missile-based warfare. We don’t know what will happen in the future of Korea. Many are concerned about the possibility of war. Yet, even in this situation, we see God moving and changing the hearts of God’s people in Korea.

On February 9th, this Friday, the world will meet in Pyeongchang, Korea to compete in the 23rd Olympic Winter Games. What is exciting about this event is that the North Koreans will participate in the games. The South and North have seen each other as mortal enemies for decades. And yet we can see how even in the face of problems and troubles, God has found a way to bring two enemies together.

God loves all his children and every child of God belongs to Him. Like Saul and Ananias, our enemies may one day become our brothers and sisters, and like North and South Korea, we may one day be brought together with our

enemies to advance God's kingdom. There is no situation, no person, and no problem too great for the God we believe. I pray that God helps us to love one another and use each of us to build God's kingdom here on earth. Amen.