

## A Street Less Traveled

Acts 9:10-19

### Introduction

Every one of us, sometime during our school years, learned the story of Isaac Newton's famous discovery. You may remember the story. Newton was sitting under an apple tree one afternoon, and a ripe apple fell from one of the limbs and hit him on the head. At that moment, Isaac Newton discovered the need for Excedrin! No, he discovered the Law of Gravity.

Few of us learned, however, that if it were not for another scientist named Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned of Newton. In fact, it was Halley who:

- challenged and mentored Newton through his original ideas;
- corrected Newton's mathematical errors;
- coaxed the hesitant Newton to put his discoveries into writing;
- edited and supervised Newton's publications;
- even financed Newton's first edition.

Historians call it one of the most selfless examples in the annals of science. Newton began almost immediately, to reap the rewards of scientific prominence and prestige, while Halley withdrew into the shadows and received little credit. One biographical statement about Halley said that he did not care who got the credit, his mission in life was to simply advance the cause of science. In fact, the only reason we even know the name of Halley is because of the comet that was named for him. Halley calculated that the comet would appear every seventy-six years

and then, would disappear once again into the vast heavens.

### The Brief Appearance of Ananias

Our study today, resembles the story of Edmund Halley. It is the story of a man who launched the prominent career of another man and then, disappeared from sight. His name was Ananias, and his brief appearance occurs in the book of Acts, chapter 9. Like the comet and its discoverer, he appeared for just a moment and then, withdrew into the shadows of history, never to be heard from again.

Now, in our last discussion in the book of Acts, we watched the dramatic conversion of Saul, the grand executioner of the church. Saul was a brilliant Pharisee and was the main antagonist of the new church. He was on his way to Damascus to capture the Jewish Christians who had scattered from Jerusalem, to bring them back to stand trial for heresy. He had a dramatic conversion along the road and was then, lead to Damascus blinded. While Saul was waiting for further instructions, the Lord was working on the heart and life of another man.

Let us pick up the story at that point. Notice verse 10 of Acts, chapter 9.

*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."*

By the way, you need to know that later in the book of Acts, Saul recounts this story and describes Ananias as a leading Jewish Christian; a man who had an outstanding testimony of integrity and godliness (Acts 22:12). Ananias was, no doubt, a leading

member in the Christian community in the city of Damascus.

It is to this man that the Lord appears in a vision. Look at verses 11 and 12.

*And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for 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.”*

Now do not overlook the fact that the Lord does not tell Ananias anything about Saul’s conversion. Ananias only experiences the chill of hearing the name of the church’s arch-enemy; the dreaded hunter of Christians – the Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus.

## **The Difficult Assignment of Ananias**

Let me give several points about Ananias obeying this difficult assignment.

### **An act of faith**

1. First, for Ananias to approach the enemy of the church took nothing short of an act of faith and courage.

I am so glad that the Holy Spirit moved Luke to record the next part of this conversation. It reveals that Ananias was made of the same stuff that you and I are made of. It gives you and me great hope. Look at verse 13.

*But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem.”*

Ananias is informing the Lord of who Saul is, as if the Lord does not know. In other words, “Excuse me, Lord, may I remind You of some things I’ve heard about Saul? These are things You evidently, must not have heard. This man is Your enemy, and he has done a lot of bad things to Your children in Jerusalem.”

Continue to verse 14.

*and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.*

In other words, “Lord, You’re telling me that he can’t see, that something’s happened to his eyesight. Now, we’re having a prayer meeting tonight, so please explain to me why that shouldn’t be part of our

‘answered prayer’ column. If he can’t see, then he can’t see Christians – like me – and that means he can’t catch Christians. This sounds like a praise item to me, Lord!”

The Lord responds in verses 15 and 16.

*But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*

What a great lesson for all of us. Ananias knew all about Saul’s past; God knew all about Saul’s future. Ananias knew Saul as the great persecutor of the Christians; God saw him as the great preacher of the gospel. Ananias saw him as a murderer; God saw him as a chosen instrument.

### **An act of forgiveness**

2. For Ananias to go, secondly, was nothing less than an act of forgiveness.

Go back to the last part of verse 11 and take a closer look.

*. . . for he is praying.*

The Lord gives Ananias a clue. Pharisees did not do a lot of praying in private; they usually prayed in public. Furthermore, they usually did not hold prayer meetings in houses, but Saul was praying in the house of a man named Judas who lived over on Straight Street. That street, by the way, is to this day, the principal street running from the west gate to the east gate in the city of Damascus. Ladies and gentlemen, God was asking Ananias to do nothing less than act as God’s agent of forgiveness by revealing first, his own forgiveness of Saul.

Forgiveness. Do you know why there are not more travelers on streets named Straight? Because it will not allow grudges, bitterness, and hatred to accompany any traveler upon its pavement. The man who traveled down this street was a man who had left anger and bitterness behind.

Look at verse 17.

*So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

The verb “be filled” is in the subjunctive mood. This is not an imperative, “Saul, be filled with the Holy Spirit right now.” No, translated with the flavor of this subjunctive mood, it could read, “Saul, if you want it to happen, the Spirit of God will fill, or control you at this moment. You need to decide.”

Paul is already saved; he is already indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That happened three days earlier on the Damascus road. Now, he is in need of control or domination by means of the Spirit.

Continue to verses 18 and 19a.

*And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.*

### **An act of acceptance**

3. There is a third point about Ananias’ coming, and it is observed in other disciples as well, and that is, it was an act of acceptance.

Notice the last part of verse 19.

*Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus*

What an incredible turn of events! The one who had come to capture them, is now captivated by them!

However, think of Saul’s great guilt. Imagine how he must have felt as he came to know these big-hearted people, who shared their meals and their joy in Christ with him throughout the day. Saul knew he had come to imprison and torture them. He knew the damage that he had already done.

While the spotlight of our study today is not on Paul, I think we can at least learn this truth,

*You cannot go back and rewrite the first chapters of your life, but you can start now, to begin writing a new ending.*

Saul will end his life known not for murdering Christians, but for advancing the cause of Christianity. What a different ending!

## **Application**

Let me apply our study today, with a couple of tips for travelers along Straight Street.

### **Forgiving someone else is best enabled by remembering our own sinfulness**

1. The first tip is that forgiving someone else is best enabled by remembering our own sinfulness.

Ananias could forgive Saul because he himself had been forgiven. He was perhaps, among the crowd at Jerusalem who shouted, “Crucify Him!” He was numbered among the nation who rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Forgiving someone else is best enabled by remembering our own sinfulness and forgiveness.

### **Forgiving someone else is best engendered by remembering the example of our own Savior**

2. Secondly, forgiving someone else is best engendered by remembering the example of our own Savior.

Wasn’t it our beloved Lord who hung on the cross in order to forgive?

Didn’t He say through the prophet Isaiah, as recorded in chapter 1, verse 18,

*“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”*

Didn’t His Spirit move John the apostle to promise, in I John, chapter 1, verse 9,

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Go to the foot of that cross and look up into the face of the One who had every right to be bitter, but was not. You will see in Him, the person who had every justifiable reason to hold a grudge, but He did not. Go to Him and pray, “Lord, make me like You.”

Look back at verse 17a of Acts, chapter 9.

*So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, . . .”*

Once they were enemies, now they were brothers!

As a result, the church will soon be introduced to the testimony of its chief ambassador. This would happen because one man, who would soon disappear into the shadows of Saul’s prominent ministry, was willing at that moment, to obey the word of Christ. One man was willing to make a short and somewhat fearful journey along a street named Straight. That

street today, does not have many travelers, but for the believer, like Ananias, it should be well traveled. There is not much traffic along that path – the path of sinners who have been forgiven and are now,

extending forgiveness to one another. However, in so doing, the church is advanced mightily and honor and glory are brought to the Creator of the church, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/16/1997 by Stephen Davey.

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