

Seven New Testament Soul-Winners

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANANIAS - THE SKILLFUL SOUL-WINNER - ACTS 9: 10-18

THE conversion of Saul of Tarsus was a matter of such importance, in the early history of Christianity, that the man himself became the center of attention in the inspired report of that event.

However, there are incidental interests and associated individuals that are worthy of careful study, and full of suggestive lessons.

Chief among such individuals is Ananias, the Christian believer, selected by the HOLY SPIRIT as Saul's initial instructor. Believing, as we do, that the Spirit of GOD always selects the right instrument or agent, for the service to be performed, we must consent that Ananias was peculiarly fitted for this particular post of teaching Saul the further steps essential to his complete salvation.

A thoughtful perusal of these verses, Acts 9:10-18, suggests at least three things concerning Ananias:

- He was on talking terms with GOD:
- He received a Tough Assignment: and
- He Dared to Undertake.

On Talking Terms with GOD

"There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias: and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord" (v. 10).

Then his Lord knew him by name. [49]

That statement involves more than its mere utterance would indicate. If it means anything, it means that GOD himself is an intelligent person, capable of thought and speech, and acquainted with His creatures, and especially so with His chosen servants.

That is the sort of GOD everywhere revealed in the Bible.

Go back to the book of Genesis and when GOD walked in the garden of Eden at the close of the day, He called unto Adam and said unto him, "**Where art thou?**" He knew him; He named him. In the fourth chapter, when Cain had murdered his brother, the Lord said unto Cain, "**Where is Abel, thy brother?**" Also, we have Him calling Noah by name, and so on, including many Old Testament saints, poets and prophets.

The GOD who numbers the hairs of your head knows your name better than the parents who gave it to you, or the friends who, when they give you attention, call the same.

There are many men who do not know GOD; there are no men unknown to GOD. One preacher has declared that there is an almost an "infinite spring of consolation in the conviction that CHRIST knows His disciples."

This much is certain, that if He did not know us, our salvation would be insecure; and if He were not sufficiently familiar with us to call us by name, our communion with Him would be a questionable thing indeed. I have a great many acquaintances whose names I could not call.

I said to my church officers, this past week, that if I only knew the names of every boy and girl in our Sunday School and church, and of every young man and woman, members of the same, as perfectly as I know some of them, it would be not only an unspeakable pleasure to me, but a power for GOD and the Gospel.

Therein is the Lord's superiority, "**His sheep hear His voice.**" "**He calleth His own sheep by name.**" How wonderful! Their names are legion, yet CHRIST is never under the necessity of saying what often attends our embarrassed speech, "Pardon me; I know you well, but I cannot recall your name." [50]

The Lord could talk to Ananias.

There was evidently ground of intimacy between them, for when He spoke his name, Ananias responded, "**Behold, I am here.**"

How wonderful it is to be not only on speaking terms with the Lord, but on terms of visitation.

The Old Testament record of Samuel bears this out. When that prophet was a little lad, and the Lord called his name, so distinct was the voice that he thought it was that of Eli, his senior and superior; but when once he realized that it came from a higher source, his response was, "**Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.**"

My great and lamented friend Leander Keyser, said a very true thing when he declared that we are too prone "to think of CHRIST as far away in the heavens."

Some people deny that you can be on intimate terms with the Son of GOD, but Christians certainly should know Him from experience and daily walk with Him, and engage in repeated conversations. Dr. Keyser was right in remarking, "Only that faith which receives CHRIST

himself into the most intimate fellowship will experience the fullness of joy and the peace of GOD which "**passeth all understanding.**"

My good predecessor, Dr. Wayland Hoyt, speaking of our Lord's presence with us, said, "Far up in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London there is what is called the 'Whispering Gallery.' You stand within the gilded railing of that gallery, and as though the mighty dome were sensitive, even each little whisper of yours gets reply of echo." So it is in the spiritual realm! CHRIST has placed himself in such relation of personal experience with us that there is an instant and constant reply to our hearts.

I do not claim to have ever heard an audible word that came from Heaven, and yet I earnestly contend that I have talked with the Lord many, many times, and He has talked with me just as often.

In prayer we talk to Him; by the still small voice of the Spirit, and through the words themselves of sacred Scripture, He talks with us. So the Christians of this day can be as definitely instructed and as surely guided as was Ananias when the Lord said to him "**Go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus.**" [51]

There is but one reason why we do not hear from the Lord more often; that reason is in our own fault.

If we talked with Him more often, He would speak to us more often. If we sought His presence more often we would hear His speech more often.

This leads me to a further suggestion:

Ananias was attentive to GOD's word.

The text says, "**Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost**" (vs. 17).

However, for our encouragement, I will not pass over the fact that Ananias had faults in common with all of us.

Before he acted obediently he had to reason it out with the Lord, and had to tell the Lord how much evil Saul had done, and how he had even come to this city with evil intent, and with authority to bind all that call on the Lord's name. Man's egotism is such that he seldom surrenders even to the Divine voice without an argument.

One day Peter preached in the streets of Jerusalem a sermon that was evidently delivered in the power of the Spirit, and great conviction fell upon the people, and being pricked in the heart, they said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, "**Men and brethren, what shall we do?**" Peter said unto them, "**Repent and be baptized everyone of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**"

Those words still contain the prescribed path for all men and all women who are under conviction for sin and inquiring the way. And yet, every few days I read another disquisition on why we need not be obedient on the matter of baptism, why the method of baptism does not matter, or why we need to be baptized at all, as one of our Baptist churches recently announced that it is not necessary for entrance into their membership.

Fredrick Robertson was right when he said, "Nothing can be love to GOD which does not shape itself into obedience."

The surrendered will is the sine qua non of success. [52]

A missionary to India tells of an experience that he had at Lucknow, India. He was at prayer when a voice seemed to say to him, "Are you ready for the work to which I have called you?" To which he replied, "No, Lord, I am not. I am done for. I have reached the end of my rope."

The voice answered, "If you will turn this over to me and not worry about it, I will take care of it."

To which he quickly answered, "Lord, I close the bargain right here."

In speaking of it, he said, "A great peace settled into my heart and pervaded me. I knew it was done. Life, - abundant life - had taken possession of me. I was so lifted up that I scarcely touched the road as I quietly walked home that night. Every inch was holy ground. For days after I hardly knew I had a body. I went through the days working all day, and far into the night, and came down to bedtime wondering why in the world I should ever go to bed at all, for there was not the slightest trace of tiredness of any kind. I seemed possessed by life and peace and rest - by CHRIST Himself."

It is our increasing conviction that the man who is taking his orders from the Lord is in line with the Divine will, is the man the Lord himself empowers for every assigned duty, and for him there is assured success.

This commission involved

A Tough Assignment

Saul was the man Ananias did not want to meet.

Nor would we like to meet such a man - an enemy of our profession, a persecutor of CHRIST's people, and a man clothed with authority to arrest, try and convict. The most of us are so easily scared that we can hardly speak to a child on the subject of accepting JESUS. A full grown man or woman increases our fear, and if a Judge of the Court, or a Queen of Fashion, or a King of Finance should come into the audience, and we knew that he, or she, was without CHRIST, the very suggestion that we go to such an one and speak to him or her, would set our teeth chattering, and our knees knocking together. [53]

I remember some years ago there was an unconverted woman who used to come into this audience, and in a protracted meeting I saw one of the earliest students of Northwestern and his wife make a bee line for the old lady who had enjoyed means, who was well educated, and I thought to myself, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." But once again my judgment was as remote from GOD's way as was the conduct of these two young people in keeping with His will, for the woman later said, "If I was disposed to give my heart to CHRIST, those young people could help me, for I believe in them and in their sincerity of profession!"

"The fear of man bringeth a snare!"

One reason why the most of us are worthless in personal work is at that very point. Courage is not in our makeup.

When I think of what Peter dared on the day of Pentecost, in facing the very people who had crucified CHRIST, and calling upon them to repent, I feel like promising GOD never to refer again to Peter's cowardice at the High Priest's palace. For the most of us, the pallid fear of the High Priest's palace is constantly on us. Our lack of courage accomplishes a paralysis for our tongues, and a shaking of our knees, and we say not a word.

On the other side, Ananias was the man Saul wanted to see.

GOD had spoken to Saul also in a vision, and had named Ananias as the one who should come and put his hand upon him that he might receive his sight. Who can tell what was Saul's anxiety to see this man; what were the thrills of hope as he waited for this agent of the Lord to arrive.

A few weeks ago we had in our midst Dr. Kallenbach, who is blind. Suppose that GOD had said to him, "There is coming to this church, in which you are preaching, in a day or two, a man that I have sent. He shall lay his hands upon you and light shall break into your sightless eyes. These glass balls will be turned to flesh and blood, and your vision will be instantly and perfectly restored!" [54]

Do you think he would have slept in between the announcement and the hour fixed for the event?

Paul was blind; totally blind! For three days his eyes had been sightless. But in a vision it had been promised him that a man by the name of Ananias was to come and put hands upon him that he might see again. The sightless are all about us!

The pity of it is that the most of them, "**having eyes, see not;**" and consequently are not sensible of their own condition. Yet, your obligation, my obligation to bring the light to them is none the less on that account. What are we doing for them this morning? Are we indifferent to their condition? Are we dead to our own responsibility?

Some time ago *the Sunday School Times* told the story of a young man in Indianapolis who had intellectual difficulties about accepting CHRIST.

Doubtless, as is usual, they had been superimposed by some older skeptic.

A layman of that city, hearing of this, made up his mind that he would see if he could not help the young man. He found him at his boarding house and in his bedroom, and sitting down beside him frankly stated why he had come, and said, "Let me hear about these difficulties, see what they are, and what about them!"

One after another they were presented and answered.

Finally, when the last one had faded away, this layman said, "Will you kneel with me in prayer?" The young man consented.

At the close of the prayer, the layman turned to him and said, "Cannot you now accept and surrender to CHRIST?" And the young man answered, "I will," and he did, and that layman went back to his pastor and reported, "I have had many thrilling experiences, but that one outranks them all."

Who was that layman? Benjamin Harrison - ex-President of the United States.

Ananias must have had many great hours in his life, but never a greater than when he led this young Jewish attorney to CHRIST.

It was the Spirit's guidance that brought them together.

There is a principle involved in this story that marks the uniform operation of the HOLY GHOST. The same GOD who convicted Saul commissioned Ananias. [55]

I sometimes wonder if there is ever a convicted man without another commissioned at the same moment. I doubt seriously if GOD ever brings a man under condemnation for sin without saying to some one of the saints, "Go to that man!"

Turn back one chapter, to the eighth of Acts and what a marvelous illustration of that truth we have.

There is a eunuch - treasurer under Candace - on his way home from Jerusalem, reading Esaias the prophet, and wondering in his heart what Esaias meant. But he was not left to wonder long, because GOD had an obedient soul-winner at His command, in the person of Philip, and the Spirit that had convicted the eunuch, said to Philip, "**Go near and join thyself to this chariot.**"

You know the rest of the story; how that eunuch was led into the light and was baptized. I think it is a marvel how often the Spirit brings together the sinner and the soul-winner.

Many of you will remember when the Chapman campaign was on in Minneapolis, and you will recall Henry Ostrom, both because he was of that campaign and because he has been in Minneapolis often since that time.

This week, when I received from London *The Advent Witness*, I found in it a story from Ostrom that related to the time of that work. He said that it happened in a city of some two hundred

thousand. He was preaching in a downtown church. When the hour for service came he could not deliver the sermon that he had prepared. He asked the song leader to sing a hymn, and then another and another. When he realized that the audience would not longer wait for the sermon, he got up and said: "You have come tonight in answer to the announcement to hear a certain subject discussed. I cannot speak on it! If there is anybody here who is disappointed, it will be all right, he may retire, for the Spirit of GOD is constraining me to speak on another theme."

And he says, "I turned loose on a subject I never had used."

The next morning there came to a certain man's residence a woman who asked the privilege of confessing a plot to blackmail him for \$25,000.00. The wife was called in, and the woman told her story. She said, "I have already received \$500.00 for my part in this plot. [56]

The plot was hatched in this city, and a certain attorney was the leader in the same. But I felt led to come to church, and Dr. Ostrom's sermon on Sin convicted me. I went home and slept not a wink, and on my knees I promised GOD both to return the money and to come and make this confession."

The lawyer was disbarred immediately by his fellow attorneys.

How strange! And yet how natural to the work of the Spirit! He knew the woman's need; He found in Ostrom a spokesman, and in that church house they were brought together, and the result was the salvation of one man's reputation and of one woman's soul. Fear not, He who commissions you will go with you!

He dared undertake

Setting his fears aside, Ananias obeyed!

The text reads: "**Ananias went his way, and entered into the house and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou earnest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.**"

Permit me to call especial attention to Ananias' spirit and method.

He is facing now a man that he has good reason to hate, as well as fear. He knew what Saul had done to his brothers and sisters - the saints; and now when Saul was blind and consequently impotent, how easy it would have been for him to have told Saul what he deserved, to have humiliated him, declared his judgment from the Lord just and long over due; to have said, "Good - you got what was coming to you all right!"

But the exact opposite characterized both his manner and his message.

He tenderly laid his hands upon him; he called him "**Brother Saul.**" He admitted that he had had a visit from the Lord, and he gave the afore-time persecutor to understand that he had not come as an enemy to taunt him nor as a coward to cringe before him, but as a brother, to love him. [

I wonder if this kind of an approach is not the way to win men?

I wonder, if we dispensed with our foolish fears and made all our approaches kind, if we could not win?

Looking back over my own history in evangelism, I recall two incidents of winning men that hold place in happy memory. One of them was an atheist; the other one a skeptical lawyer. When I first approached the atheist he was resentful and sarcastic; but by GOD's help I was able to maintain toward him a cordial attitude, and in four days, the result of a little conversation at the close of each meeting, he capitulated and gave his heart to CHRIST. In the incident of the lawyer, he knew the love that I bore to his parents, and he held in high esteem the dear old lady who had sent me to see him, and those circumstances accomplished a hospitable reception, and a half hour was sufficient to complete the task of leading him to CHRIST.

Success commonly attends the spirit of obedience.

The text says: "**Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forth with, and arose, and was baptized.**"

I have little doubt that both the suddenness and the completeness of this experience surprised Ananias as much, or more, than it did Saul.

He had the promise from the Lord that this would be the result; but what ecstasy comes to us when GOD's promises are made good in our experiences.

A few times in life I have seen people healed instantly in answer to prayer, and it has always surprised me, brought to me a spiritual stimulus unknown to any other hour; made me feel the nearness of GOD as I never felt it on any other occasion.

A. J. Gordon's great co-pastor told me one day when he was speaking of the character and accomplishments of his chief, that whenever Gordon witnessed a clear instance of Divine healing in answer to prayer, it seemed to bring to him an abundance of life, and for days following such an experience his exuberance of spirit was manifest. His faith seemed to take wings and dwell in the heavenlies. Little wonder!

Finally: *This convert was immediately commissioned.*

Of Saul it is written: "**Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.**" And it is further said that "**Saul increased the. more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.**" [58]

This should have been no surprise to Ananias, for when the Lord sent him to show Saul the way, He said to him, "**He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.**"

How little we know what will be the final result of a sound conversion. Dr. Alexander Bruce, speaking of GOD's elect, says, "They are chosen not so much to privilege as to function. Their vocation is to be the light of the world, the salt of Society."

Certainly Paul was "**a burning and a shining light**" and his gospel is "**the savor of life unto life.**"

We never know when we lead a man to CHRIST what contribution we may be making to His cause.

On occasion I have referred to my friend Charlie Gremmels, of New York. It was his partner in business, Mr. Campbell, who led Will Borden to CHRIST, and Will Borden, the nephew of my own great layman William Borden when I was pastor at New Albany, Ind., and the heir to a million or more, became in turn the greatest representative of Christianity known to Yale University in the first decade of this century.

- He opened up the Yale Hope House with a \$200,000.00 building on the University grounds, where hundreds have found salvation.
- He gave to the National Bible Institute of New York City another \$100,000.
- He opened five rescue homes in New York where the cup of salvation is offered to every soul seeking their shelter.
- In Madison Square Garden he preached the Gospel to passersby.
- Under the impulse of the Still Small Voice he went to India, that he might tell them of JESUS his Savior and his Lord,

and though he died in his comparative youth, he had already given his life and a million dollars to the cause of CHRIST.

Charlie Gremmels, in a recent address, recited this history to illustrate the Scripture from the twenty-third Psalm, "**My cup runneth over.**" [59]

We have had a good deal from the New Dealers on "the full" even "**the abundant life,**" and when one of them defined what they meant by it, it was physical and even carnal.

But the Scriptures reveal an overflowing life, and Saul, when once changed into Paul, illustrated it. He did not stop with personal salvation. Instantly he became GOD's agent of salvation to others.

"My gracious Lord, I own thy right
To every service I can pay,
And call it my supreme delight
To hear thy dictates, and obey." [60]

~ end of chapter 4 ~