THE GOOD ANANIAS—A LESSON FOR BELIEVERS

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"And 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."
Acts 9:10

AT this season we are called upon to think of foreign missions. As members of the Baptist Missionary Society, we are in happy and hopeful circumstances. God is smiling upon the work both at home and abroad, and raising up men whose hearts are in the cause.

Last year the Society was in arrears—it has expended very much more money this year than last year—and yet it has paid its way, is clear of debt, and begins the year with a balance in hand. For this we are very thankful, not only because the money is needful to defray the charges of the holy service, but because it shows that the churches have confidence in the Missionary Society, and that they are awakening to their responsibility concerning it.

The more believers in the Lord Jesus consider the matter, the more they will see that it is the duty and the privilege of all who know the Lord to make Him known to others. There was a time when Christian people thought it idle to send missionaries to the heathen, but that time only survives in regretful memories.

We remember reading that in a Scotch assembly a Moderate minister, famous in his day, talked of the proposal to send missionaries to the heathen as the greatest absurdity to which he had ever listened. One who was of another mind cried out, "Reach me that Bible"—and when the Bible was opened, and he began to point to its teachings, the caviler was silenced.

Are there any such cavilers yet alive? If there are, they are wise enough to hold their tongues. No reviewer in our day would dare to sneer at "consecrated cobblers," for they remember Carey, and tremble in their shoes.

Brethren, we are to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. This is our Captain's orders, and it would be treason to disobey. We have acted negligently towards this commission far too long. It is high time that we awakened from our sinful slumbers. May many a man and woman among us be called to mission work, and may the rest be eager to help them by their generous gifts.

What subjects have risen before me while thinking of a discourse upon missions! Many grand and exciting themes have tempted me. The coming of the Lord, the conquest of nations to His sway, the reign of peace, the overthrow of falsehood, and all manner of glorious topics invite me. But something less ambitious has won my thoughts. It lies upon my heart not to speak of things upon a great scale, above our present power, but to talk of practical matters within the reach of common Christians.

I shall not, therefore, treat of the Millennial reign, but of the kingdom of Christ in your soul and mine—and of how we can increase His dominions, and cause His kingdom to come with power. I had rather speak five words to practical purpose than fifty thousand for oratorical effect.

I have selected my text that we may see what can be done by private Christians, and learn how we can personally serve the Lord, and become links in the great chain of His gracious dispensation. The mass of us cannot go abroad as missionaries, but we can all be messengers for Christ in our own city.

We cannot all preach, but we can all pray. We cannot all give money, but we can all fill the treasury of supplication.

The question for each one to ask, is—"Lord, what would You have me do?" What can I do with a household about me? What can I do, who can only take rank as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, without special office in the church? It seems to me that Ananias may serve as a typical person, and that his history may furnish us with many useful lessons.

Brethren, I shall invite you this morning to think about this good Ananias, to whom the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias, and he said, Behold, I am here, Lord."

I. First, let us think a little about THE MAN.

He is described as "a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias." We hear of him this once, and we know nothing more about him. He comes forward at a critical point in Paul's life—executes for him a very useful office—and then disappears. The good soldier was sent upon special service by his Captain, and when he had fulfilled his commission, he retired to his ordinary place in the ranks. Who was this Ananias?

We remark of him, first, that he was *simply a private person*. He is not described as pastor, or evangelist, or even as deacon or elder of a church—yet this private person, obscure in life, and without special distinction in the church, was the channel for communicating the Holy Ghost to the great apostle of the Gentiles.

For the time being, he became one of the most important persons in sacred history. The Lord did not send to Paul for the opening of his eyes and the comforting of his heart an apostle, lest any should have said that Paul received his commission second-hand from those already in office. The Lord did not send to him any man of distinguished position or eminent gifts, lest it should be concluded that Paul received the Gospel at his hands. The great apostle could say in later days, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It was necessary that instrumentality should be used, but it was wise that such instrumentality should be of the most ordinary kind, lest any power should be ascribed to it, and lest it should arrogate to itself credit for the apostle's conversion and later life.

I see, therefore, in many of you, dear brethren, special qualifications for certain uses, even qualifications which your being church officers, or preachers, might take from you—your very obscurity and *want* of glittering talent may be a fitness for peculiar service. There is a special work for you to do who are private Christians, and I trust you will be prompt in the doing of it.

Ananias is especially said to have been *a disciple*. Dwell on that title. He was a learner. He sat at Jesus' feet and learned of Him, and therefore was ready to instruct Saul of Tarsus. A true disciple is also a follower—he is an imitator of his Master. Christ's discipleship is always practical—it is of the heart and of the hands as well as of the head—all these were wanted in the mission of Ananias to Paul.

Oh, brothers and sisters, we must take care that we keep up the character of disciples. May we bear fruit, so we shall be His disciples. Let us never dream of knowing more than our Master teaches us. Let us never think that we are perfect, so that we have no more to learn. He who gets beyond a disciple rises beyond his proper place. Our strength for usefulness lies in our remaining disciples. You cannot disciple all nations unless you are disciples yourselves. How can you teach others that which Christ does not teach you? But if you sit at His feet and receive of His words, then shall you speak so that others shall learn of you.

Paul tells us, in Acts 22:12, that Ananias was "*a devout man*." How much I wish that all avowed disciples of Jesus were devout men. I suppose he was devout while he was yet a Jew, before he received Christ. But when he was enlightened, another element entered into his devotions, so that he worshipped God in the name of Jesus.

Nowadays we greatly need more devout men, men of prayer, men who dwell with God in secret—devoted men, men of devotion—for the strength of the spirit of man lies in fellowship with the Spirit of God. A devout man is soon discovered—this fire from heaven cannot be hid. The devout man may not

be more somber than others—why should he be? He certainly will not be more anxious to make a display, but it will soon be seen that he is more full of power.

A devout man is a remarkable man. If he prays, you perceive that he is familiar with that holy exercise. If he is called to endure trials, his patience proves that he submits himself to God. His daily conduct in the affairs of this life exhibits a secret sacred something which few understand, but which all feel. The Spirit of God dwells with the devout man, and fits him for the Lord's service.

I believe that God loves to send as His special messengers those who ordinarily dwell near Him. Let us aim to abide with God that we may be employed by Him. Every Christian man cannot be a talented man, but every Christian should be a devout man. Every man cannot be eloquent, but every man who loves the Lord may be devout—and in that devotion lies a main qualification for service. He that has power with God will not fail to have power with men.

Paul also tells us that Ananias had "*a good report* of all the Jews which dwell in Damascus." They hated Christians, but they could not help respecting this devout man. The world had then, as it still has, a respect for those who walk with God. If we are to be useful to our fellow men, we must deserve their esteem. We are not to curry favor with them by lowering our principles to gain their approbation, but on the contrary, we are to win their respect by sheer force of unbending holiness that so we may have power over them for their good.

We are to win influence over our fellow men by an upright character, and a generous behavior—so that if they wish to speak against us, they may find no matter for accusation unless it is concerning our zeal for the Lord our God. Oh, that our church members were all men of spotless character! Oh, that all professors were well-reported of!

The church is injured in her efforts for the conversion of the world by the inconsistencies of certain of her members. Let us provide things honest in the sight of all men, and by our lives adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things—and then we shall be prepared for the Lord's use among our neighbors.

This, then, was Ananias, a disciple towards Christ, devout towards God, and upright towards men.

Another qualification of Ananias for the work which the Lord put upon him was *his general thoughtfulness for the church of God*. This comes out in his own words. It is evident that he thought about the persecutions of his brethren. He says concerning Paul, the persecutor, "I have heard by many of this man." No doubt he had frequently made Paul the subject of conversation, for he was grieved at the afflictions of the saints in Jerusalem, and he feared for his brethren in Damascus.

Observe that he is the first to call Christians "saints," or holy ones. He had evidently observed the followers of Jesus, and had noticed with delight this point of their character. It is well to speak frequently of matters which concern Christ's kingdom.

Ananias was in sympathy with tried saints, was deeply touched by the story of their trials, and could not forbear to dwell upon their sorrowful experiences. All the servants of God who are what they should be take a great interest in the condition of the church of God—they bear one another's burdens and share each other's griefs.

They do not go in and out of their pews on a Sunday, and then fancy that their connection with the church is ended—but they bear upon their hearts the interests of Zion. They hang their harps upon the willows if she is captive, and they rejoice when they see her enjoying prosperity. They take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof. It is one mark that a man is right towards God when he is right towards the family of God. All that belongs to Jesus belongs to me if I belong to Jesus. All the interests of His kingdom are my interests if I am truly walking in fellowship with my Lord.

See, then, the man Ananias—there is nothing brilliant about him—he by no means claims distinguished rank. But he is what I pray we may all be—a vessel fit for the Master's use—cleansed, prepared, consecrated, set apart unto God. Hence he was used of the Lord.

II. Now, secondly, let us consider HIS POSTURE.

This is seen at once in his answer to the divine call. The voice said to him, "Ananias," and he answered, "Behold, I am here, Lord." He was familiar with the Old Testament. He remembered how the

Lord said, "Abraham," and the patriarch answered, "Here am I." He remembered how the young child, Samuel, when the Lord said to him, "Samuel, Samuel," answered, "Here am I."

He recollected how the prophet, when he saw the excellent glory, and heard the voice saying, "Who will go for us?" responded, "Here am I, send me!" He made the same answer, because his mind was full of Scripture, and also because he could not find a better reply. For the words were few, and reverent, and very fully expressive of what he felt.

Did not this indicate that his heart was *responsive* to the divine voice? "Ananias." "Here am I." Do you not think that God speaks to us many times and gets no answer? Happy is he who can say with David, "When thou saidest, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek."

Every Sabbath you receive a heavenly message, and in your reading of Scripture, and in your private worship, voices whisper to you from God, voices which the ear hears not—does your heart hearken to these calls? When your heart hears a rebuke for a certain omission, do you respond by repairing that omission?

Or if it be a rebuke for sin committed, is your heart humbled at once, and ready to respond by putting away the sin? If there be a call to duty, or a secret prompting to sacrifice, does your spirit say at once, "Here am I"? Scarcely should we need the Lord to speak, for, "as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress," responding to very motions of her hand, so should our heart be immediately answerable to the will of the Lord in all things. O Lord, make us like wax to Your seal! May our heart echo the voice of our heavenly Father.

He was also *ready*. "Here am I," said he. He did not ask, "What for?" but, "Here am I," ready for anything. Oh, that our hearts might be in such a state that were it for living or for dying, for giving or for losing, for suffering or for working, the same response would come forth—"Here am I, make what use You can of me, my Lord. I shall count it an honor and a joy if You will send me anywhere, to anyone, with any message, at any time—here am I."

Oh, brothers and sisters, are we free from reservations? Whatsoever the Lord says to us, are we prepared to do it? What drawbacks there often are! What hindrances to consecration, what reserves for the flesh. But blessed shall that man be who has no answer to give to God's call but just, "Here am I." Ready, aye ready!

Again, I think his posture was one which I can only describe by using the phrase that he was *all there*. "Ananias." "Here am I," said he. Would not some Christians be compelled to say if they described themselves truthfully, "1 am not here—You call me but I am not here"? Is it not so, that sometimes in prayer we are not there? In singing the praises of God, how often it happens that the mind is wandering—we are not there.

I know there is such a thing as preaching, and teaching, and doing service for God with a portion of yourself—and it is not a fact that all that is within you is stirred up to the service of the Lord. I often see upon a sunny wall, a chrysalis, and when I go to take it down, I find that the summer's sun has shone upon it and the insect has developed, and left nothing but an empty case behind.

How often in the pew we find the chrysalis of a man, but where is the man himself? Wait till tomorrow morning, and see him in his shop—there is the man. Or to follow up the figure, there is the butterfly with all its wings. Wait till you find our friend engaged in secular employment to his own advantage, and then you will see what he is made of. But in the work of the Lord, he is not worth his salt.

But oh, brethren, if ever a man ought to be all there, it is when he is called to the service of God. He should marshal all his faculties, and every faculty should reply, "Here am I." Call over the muster-roll of all your powers, and capacities, and abilities—and let each one of them answer to it, "Here am I!" The whole of a living man is something worth having, but a fragment of a man is only fit to be buried.

Oh, that we might be found with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and we ourselves as men that wait for our Lord, and watch for His coming. We are to be ready at His bidding to consecrate every

faculty of spirit, soul, and body, to the grandest cause that ever moved the soul of man. There is the man and there is his posture—may we be like him. and stand as he stood! Help us, O Spirit of the living God!

III. Now, thirdly, we are to look to HIS DIRECTION.

When he had thus said, "Here am I!" the Lord gave him his orders in detail. I do not say that the Lord will give us orders verbally as he did to Ananias. And I would have you take heed that you do not mistake whims of your own mind for the voice of God. But I do say that whatever your hand finds to do, you are to do it with all your might, and believe that God's voice is calling you to that service which His providence places in your way.

God still guides His servants when they are willing to be guided. Ananias had his orders as to *where* he should go. The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas." The Lord knows the street, and He knows the house where the sinner lives who is to be blessed by you.

The Lord is very specific in His directions, for He gives Ananias the name of the person who kept the house. Whether it was a house of public entertainment or not, I do not know, but the Lord knew all about it, and He gave His messenger precise directions.

If you stand waiting for the Lord, He will direct you today to the right street, and to the right house. Only wait upon Him, and if you go in His name, He will take care that you are not sent to the wrong person.

His directions further related to the person *to whom* he was to go. This person was to be named Saul, known to come from Tarsus, and he was to be a blind man, for he was to "receive his sight" through this Ananias. The Lord knows the individual whom you are to bless, and all about him—what he is, and where he is, and what he has been doing, and what he is doing and what he is going to do.

Though, as I have already said, you have no verbal directions given to you, yet any person who falls in your way, if you will but seek to do God's work to him, will turn out to be *the* person whom God intends you to bless. You are to deal with him in faith under that impression, and you will not be disappointed.

Ananias was also told *when* to go. He was to arise and go at once. Perhaps he had not yet left his bed, or it was a vision of the night, but he was to "Arise and go." God's errands are so important that we must not delay in their performance. Whenever a man proposes to obey in a week's time, he confesses himself to be disobedient for that time. He who, when he receives a message delivers it at once, with the impression of His call fresh upon him, will deliver it with authority and power. This day there is a call to each believer to proclaim the glories of the name of Christ wherever he has opportunity—this let him do at once.

Ananias was also told *why* he was to go. He was to go to Saul of Tarsus, "for behold he prayeth." The servant was to go because the Master was there already. God had inspired the prayer of the blinded persecutor, and now He was about to answer it by Ananias. Where God has ploughed, we are to sow. Of that preparation you know but little, but your own duty is clear enough. If you begin to pick and choose the objects of your labor, you will select the wrong persons.

But if because God has put such and such a person in your way, you tell him of Jesus and His love, you will make no mistake. The Lord who prepares you to speak has prepared him to listen. In fact, in this case, Paul was so prepared that he had "seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in." If we are always ready for the Master's work, we shall be surprised to find how beautifully He makes us fit in with His providence and His grace.

There is a person in this Tabernacle this morning who has been here many times, and has always expected that a Christian friend would speak to him, and yet nobody has done so. But if you do it this morning, he will respond to you and say, "Thank you; this is what I was looking for. God has been troubling me of late in my thoughts, and I am desirous to find the way of peace. You are the very person whom I wished to see." God sends the right messenger to the right man—Ananias to Saul.

He had further directions, for he was told *what* he was to do when he found Saul—he was to lay his hand on him. There is a great deal in the touch of an earnest man. If you stand half a mile off from a man, and throw the Gospel at him, you will miss him. But if you go close to him, and lay hold upon him, giving him a hearty grip of the hand, and show that you have an affection for him, you will, by God's blessing, lead him in the right way.

You must come into heart contact if you are to influence the man. "But," say you, "if I did thus grasp a man and speak with him, I could not open his eyes." Could Ananias do so? Yet the Lord worked by Ananias, and why not by you? "Oh, but I do not think I could comfort a troubled heart." Ananias could not have comforted Paul unless the Lord had been with him. Paul was a vastly superior man to Ananias, but yet the humbler man was the means of the spiritual enlightenment of the greater mind—and why should not you?

Though you should meet with a great skeptic, or a very learned person who is quite a giant Goliath, compared with you, yet make bold to play the man—for the Lord does not work by gigantic instruments, but by young Davids, who seems unequal to the task. At any rate, I do pray you, dear brother, be ready to speak what the Lord has spoken to your own soul—and be this your resolve,

"Now will I tell to sinners round
What a dear Saviour I have found;
Point them to Thy redeeming blood,
And say, Behold the way to God."

Your instructions are in the Scriptures—follow them!

IV. But now, fourthly—good Ananias, excellent man as he was, had HIS DIFFICULTIES, and so when he was bidden to go, he said, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name."

These difficulties were *very natural*. Saul's conversion was astonishing to the last degree. Ananias had long been thinking of the terrible persecutor, Saul—"I have heard by many of this man." Could it be that this wolf had become a lamb? Ananias had Saul on the brain through terror of his cruelties, and now he was to have Saul on the heart through joy of his repentance.

He had heard such dreadful stories of the ferocious persecutor, that as soon as he heard the word "Saul," it took his breath away. There is a promise that the leopard shall lie down with the kid, but it is not surprising that the kid should at first shrink from the monster—and so this dear, plain, simple-minded man was startled at the idea that he was to visit the malicious man who had sought the lives of Christians.

But notice that his objections were such that *he could tell the Lord about them*, and whenever you feel any difficulty, if you can lay it before the Lord in prayer, there may be unbelief in it, but there will be no willful sin in it. We do not praise that good man who said, "Send by whomsoever thou wilt send, but not by me." Yet he was not blamed when he gave his reason, and mourned that he was slow of speech. The Lord met him in great tenderness, and helped his infirmity. To tell your difficulty to God may be an evidence that you are hearty in his service, and only regret that you have not greater ability to consecrate to it.

But observe, that his difficulty was *unfounded*. If he had thought for a minute, he would have concluded that if Saul prayed, he must have ceased to persecute. To any man who prays we may go with confidence that he will listen to our witness concerning Christ, in whose name he is praying. Ananias had forgotten this.

The Lord had changed the heart of Saul. He had visited him with the light of His glory, and made him His captive for three whole days of darkness. And now he was ready enough to welcome the man by whom his eyes would be opened. Do we not lose opportunities of doing good by dwelling too much

upon the past characters of those to whom we are sent? Do we not say, "I have heard of this man, that he is a desperate, drunken, swearing fellow—I shall not go near him"?

My dear friend, this is the man who most needs your aid, and who knows but at the very time when you go to him, the Lord may be dealing with his conscience, so as to set before you an open door? Are we to speak to none but those who will welcome us? In that case we shall be often disappointed, for such persons do not always repay our exertions.

Those who have been for a long time very hopeful are usually the most hopeless of cases—but utterly hopeless people are often the most hopeful when we have faith enough to approach them. Do not bury a man before he is dead. Hope that so long as a sinner lives he may yet live unto God. Be hopeful that He who placed this sinner in your way, and you in the sinner's way, has designs of love which are about to be accomplished.

V. Concerning Ananias, I want to remind you, in the fifth place, of his COMFORT in the work.

The Lord reassured His servant first by reminding him of *the doctrine of election*. God said to him, "He is a chosen vessel unto me." Some read it, "He is a choice vessel," as if there were originally something in Paul which rendered him a choice person. But the apostle himself does not put it so, for he describes Ananias as saying, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that you shouldst know his will."

He did not know the will of the Lord except through the divine choice. To him the revelation of God came as the gift of sovereign grace. Here was one whom God had chosen to bless, though Ananias knew it not. The grand doctrines of sovereign grace and of electing love are the most powerful inducements to labor for the conversion of all who come in our way.

Did not our Lord say to one of His servants, "I have much people in this city"? And did he not make this his encouragement for preaching the truth with all boldness? So let it be your encouragement. Behind all opposition there is an almighty will which cannot be set aside—there is a purpose which must be accomplished—there is a predestination that can by no means be defeated.

"Oh," says one, "if I believed that God had an elect people, I should not preach again." It is amazing how people argue—for that is the very reason why I do preach. If the Lord has not chosen any, what is the use of my preaching? But if He has done so, I shall not preach in vain.

Often have I thought to myself—I shall have a picked congregation today—God will bring the very people here that He means to bless—and He will save His own elect by His own Word. It does not rest with me, nor with them, but with Him, and therefore there is hope. The eternal purpose goes forth in all the majesty of its might, therefore will we go to every creature, testifying in the name of Jesus—and believing that as many as the Father gives Him, shall come to Him.

Moreover, the Lord put aside the fears of Ananias by telling him that He had *chosen this man to a great purpose*. "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name among the Gentiles." A great sinner is to be made a great saint. A great opposer is to become a great laborer. Who knows how largely God may use the sinner whom we seek to save? Who knows what may be in any man, or in any child?

You, dear teachers in the school, may be teaching Luthers, or Melancthons. You may be instructing, in those young girls, holy women who shall serve the Lord abundantly. You are handling choice materials, therefore be not careless in your service. To you is given not gold, nor silver, nor precious stones, to fashion, but immortal spirits that shall glorify Christ on earth and in heaven.

And then, to remove all difficulty from the mind of Ananias, the Lord told him that *He would go with him*—"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." You are bidden to teach the Gospel to an individual who has been very hardened—and you fear that you have no strength for such an undertaking, and therefore you cry—"Lord, I cannot show this man the truth."

The Lord replies, "*I* will show him." "But," say you, "he is so ignorant!" "I will show him." "Alas, he is blind and prejudiced!" "I will show him." You are "labourers together with God." When we lift our trowel upon this wall, we may know that a divine arm is moving at the same moment—and the stone which we seek to place in its course shall be laid there by an omnipotent hand, which works effectually.

Wherefore, give yourselves up to your Lord's work, whatever that work may be. "Behold I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."

VI. I must ask your attention for a minute or two to the sixth point, and that is, the difficulties of Ananias being taken away. Observe HIS OBEDIENCE to his Master's orders.

It was *prompt* obedience—"Ananias went his way and entered into the house." No longer hesitating nor delaying, he went his way with all speed. His obedience was *exact*—he entered into the house, and putting his hands on Saul, said, "Brother Saul." He did as he had been bidden.

There is a great point in that. Mind that what you preach is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus and that what you do is by order from the throne, and that it is carried out in the Spirit's power, for you cannot expect the Lord to bless your message if you alter it. If my servant goes to the door and amends the message which I have sent by him, why then he must bear the responsibility of doing so and also run the risk of dismissal.

But if I, as Christ's servant, deliver my Lord's message to the best of my knowledge, just as He gave it to me, then my Lord is responsible for the success of it, and not myself. Be prompt, therefore, and be exact.

Then, see how *loving* he was. "Brother Saul," he said. Saul of Tarsus would not have made two bites of Ananias a little time before, if he had fallen into his power. But now the words "Brother Saul" are sweet to his ear.

Love is the method of grace. You cannot win souls by putting on a morose countenance and repelling all approaches—but it must be "Brother Saul." Do not be afraid to call the individual "Brother," but take care that you mean it. Though he may be a greater and wiser man than yourself, still come close to him with confident affection, for if he be indeed a brother, he will accept the salutation. And if not, your peace will return again to you.

Ananias did not use the term as a cant expression, but his spirit and feeling were brotherly. The love of his speech bewrayed his deep affection and intense sympathy. He was as pleased with Saul as a mother with a newborn child. He shared, with angels, the joy over the returning prodigal.

See also how *wisely* he spake. It was given him in the same hour what he should speak. He did not pompously say, "I am an ordained official, and therefore speak with great dignity." But he began, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me." It was wise thus to sink himself in His authority.

He speaks most wisely all through, and speaks precisely the right words. When he alludes to Paul's former course, he only gives a hint of it, "The Lord that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest." He does not say, "as thou camest to persecute us," but he allowed conscience to do its own work. He gives the items of his errand—"Jesus hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost." I have not time to indicate all the points which show the prudence of the Lord's messenger. May we also be made wise to win souls.

Notice how thoroughly *faithful* Ananias was. He said, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." The tendency with many good evangelists is to say nothing upon that point. The main thing is to get this man to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but to say, "Arise, and be baptized"—is not that far less important?

Brethren, we have nothing to do with altering Christ's message—we are bound to deliver it as a whole—without addition or diminution. The tendency everywhere is to say, "Baptism should not be mentioned—it is sectarian." Who said so? If our Lord commanded it, who dares to call it sectarian? We are not commanded to preach a part of the Gospel, but the whole of the Gospel—and this Ananias did.

Is it not written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"? Why omit one clause? I question whether God's blessing has not been withheld from some teachers and preachers because they have failed to repeat their message in its entirety.

A brother will write to me next week and say, "I am sorry that I cannot circulate your sermon, because you allude to baptism." My dear brother, if you cannot circulate the sermon, I must be content without your kind help—but I cannot amend the Lord's Word to please the best man upon earth. What prominence is given to baptism here! We would greatly err if we believed in baptismal regeneration, or even in the efficacy of washing in water for the removal of sin.

But on the other hand—we are not to place in the background an ordinance which, by the language of Scripture, is placed in the forefront. Ananias said to Paul, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." And this tallies with that other text, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." In both of these passages the Lord puts a special honor upon baptism, and it would be evil for us to neglect that which He so evidently esteems.

Do not make any mistake, and imagine that immersion in water can wash away sin—but do remember that if the Lord puts this outward profession side by side with the washing away of sins, it is not a trifling matter.

Remember that other text, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"? Faith must be followed by obedience, or it cannot be sincere—do, then, what Jesus bids you. That is not, however, my point. I want to urge upon you that you should always speak the Lord's Word faithfully, and be true to that which the Lord reveals to you, even to the jots and tittles.

In these days there is much talk about "undenominationalism," and in that talk there is much to be admired. But the danger is lest we should on all hands begin to pare away a little from the Word of God for the sake of an imaginary unity.

The suggestion is that one is to give up this—and another is to give up that. But I say to you—give up nothing which your Lord commands. In all charity believe that your brother desires to hold only Christ's truth, but do you make sure that you hold it yourself, whether he holds it or not. This is the best undenominationalism in the world—every man to be faithful to his convictions, and true to his Master out and out—and then to give his brother in Christ credit for doing the same. In this way we may expect the Master's blessing.

VII. For lastly, observe the RESULT of what Ananias said. The results were IMMEDIATE, for Paul received his sight at once, was comforted at once, and baptized at once.

But the results were most *extensive*, for this Paul became a preacher of the Gospel to every land. As the apostle of the Gentiles, he brought multitudes to Jesus. It was a splendid work that Ananias did that morning. For to this day, the testimony of Paul to the cross of Christ is ringing over Europe, and throughout the whole world.

Where would we have been as a nation if it had not been for the apostle of the Gentiles? Our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to raise up in Paul a specially useful instrument of blessing to the sons of men. I might almost say, among those that are born of woman, there has not been a greater than the apostle Paul. It was needful that Ananias should link him to the church of God by instructing him in the faith, and initiating him by baptism.

Go you, then, my brethren and sisters, wherever God sends you, for you know not what may be within a man, a woman, or a child whom you shall bring to Jesus. Everybody is not a Paul, but yet you may find a Paul among your converts.

The pearl fisher standing on the rock plunges deep into the sea—he does not know whether or not he shall bring up a pearl that will decorate an emperor's diadem. But he searches the deeps in that hope, and why should he not bring up such a treasure as well as anybody else? No matter though the fisherman himself may be coarse, and ragged, and rugged, yet he may light upon a priceless pearl.

And you, whoever you may be, I charge you, in the name of the eternal God, plunge yourself into your work with whole-hearted devotion, and you shall yet discover some hidden jewel which shall adorn Immanuel's diadem. So may it be with you, dear friends, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
ACTS 9:1-21 AND ACTS 22:1-16

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—
72 (SONG I.), 45 (VERSION I.), 972

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