

Chosen Instruments (Acts 9:1-31)

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: 21 August 2022

Preacher: Albert Tang

[0 : 00] Hey guys, so we're going to read Acts chapter 9 verses 1 to 31. I'm going to read from NIV. This is the word. Meanwhile Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from the heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the sound, but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing.

[1 : 08] So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind. He did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.

The Lord called him, in a vision, Ananias, Ananias. Yes, Lord, he answered. The Lord told him, go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for the man from Tartarus named Saul.

For he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to the holy people in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with the authority of the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name. But the Lord said to Ananias, go.

This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name for the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

[2 : 19] Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again.

He got up and was baptized. And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.

All those who heard him were astonished and asked, Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem? Asking among those who call on his name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?

Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him.

But Saul learned about their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him a basket through an opening in the wall.

[3 : 40] When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved out freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

He talked and debated with the hallucinogenic Jews, but they tried to kill him. Then the believers learned of this. They took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tartarus.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened, living the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It increased in numbers. Thank you, Saul. Not Saul. Thank you, Song. Thank you, Saul. Yeah. All right. It's great to be with you all again. Acts 9.

[5 : 02] All right. Now, how many of you ladies would like to shop these kind of household items, especially with those with houses now, homes?

Yeah. Yeah, my wife likes to visit these briscoes, bed baths. I just go along, all right? Just, yeah, not too much interested.

But it's good to have these things in the house, right? And sometimes we, as men, you know, we think we don't like these sort of things, but we appreciate them. You know, we just took for granted. All right?

But you know what? In God's house, there are these household items too. All right? And 2 Timothy says that in God's house, there are articles, not there are special ones, and there were common ones.

Some were made of gold and silver. Some least special, but they were made of wood and clay. All right? But interesting was, whether it was special or it was common, actually the special was actually translated, it was honor, honorable.

[6 : 15] And a common one was actually, can be translated as despicable, not as special, you know, less common. But the interesting was, it's not the actual item itself that qualified them.

It's actually the attitude. See? You cleanse yourself, you cleanse yourself, and you'll be made special instrument for God.

See, in this household of God, God has different kinds of calling for us, and we are all different. Okay? But whether we're special or we're common, it's not because of the roles or the responsibilities, but about our attitude towards God himself.

Do we actually cleanse ourselves from sin that we can be used by God? Right? So, the passage here, we'll, you know, when we read Acts 9, we'll think about Saul.

All right? Even that captured my thoughts, you know. Saul. Thank you, Saul. But there was more than Saul in chapter 9. Did you realize there was another name?

[7 : 33] Ananias. There was one more name there. Barnabas. See, even just three names, we find that there are three different instruments.

God called to make the spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem, cross over to Samaria, and break through, and broke through to the ends of the world.

So, let's have a look at this 9, 1 to 31. Now, it was God's plan. It was, yes, he chose Saul. All right? But this calling of Saul involved Ananias. And eventually, it was the whole church, but Barnabas was very significant right there.

It was not Barnabas. Saul would not be accepted by the Jerusalem church. So, in order to, the gospel would be effectively preached, it was more than just one person being called.

[8 : 40] It was others need to go to follow up Saul. And Barnabas need to introduce him to the Jerusalem church. So, everybody played a part.

And today, when this message, God's word speaking to us today, I believe that we all have our different callings. But under God's call to the church, we might have respective roles and responsibilities.

Not everybody come out and speak. There are others who lead in different ways. There are group leaders who work tirelessly, days and nights, behind the scenes.

Nobody knew. All right? But we all respond to God's calling. So that his gospel might be proclaimed. Everybody play a part.

So, now, so far we've reached chapter 9, okay? Last week, Pastor William preached chapter 8, okay?

[9 : 47] And you will see the pattern. When, in chapter 2, the birth of the church, all right? Ever since the birth of the church has kind of gone up to ups and downs, all right?

There was great things that happened, but there were also challenges that threatened the church, all right? And I would say it's like, you know, there's an English phrase that says the greater the level, I mean the higher level, the greater devil, right?

But I believe the greater the devil, the higher our levels, all right? Because God transcends all and he builds the church.

And even though there are challenges, there are obstacles, there are things that go against us. But because Jesus said, I will build my church.

And therefore, we can have courage. It's not that, it's not me, it's not you that we can overcome all these things, but we can. In the name of Jesus, we can be triumphant, right?

[10:52] So, in chapter 3, the power of the Spirit came over. It was 3,000 and then 5,000, right? But there were threats and oppositions.

And when they kind of united against that, they keep on trusting the Lord. Yep, they overcame. But there were internal problems. There was, it was, it was, when they distributed, the resources was not even and there was complaints, there was moaning, all right?

But then they overcome this, they seized the opportunity and they set aside deacons to do all these jobs. And they did it well and the gospel just kept spreading, all right?

But then, persecutions. And the first martyr, Stephen, right? You heard about this last time, okay? But yet, the gospel continued to advance.

It was because of Stephen's persecution and death. They had to flee. And as they fled, they took the gospels beyond the realm of Jerusalem, Judea, all right?

[12:07] And now, today, we talk about God's specific plan in choosing Saul, all right? So, Pastor Williams spoke last time, right?

Everything was within Jerusalem up to chapter 8, all right? They thought, wow, we're having great revivals here. Many priests came to Christ.

Wow, hallelujah. We're very busy to keep up with these people, converting. Don't have time for anything else. Everything was good, but it was within Jerusalem.

But Jesus said, beyond. The only thing they broke away from Jerusalem was persecution.

Never thought about, you know, going beyond Jerusalem through these circumstances, all right?

But now, to the end of the earth, God's specific plan in choosing Saul.

[13:07] But it's not just Saul. It was whole church. We all need to respond, okay? It was encounter of Paul, the submissions of Ananias, and recognition of the church.

Barnabas played a very important part in that. So, let's look at each individually. First, the encounter of Paul. Okay? In verses 1 and 2, it said, meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats. He was very passionate. He was very aggressive in persecuting the church. Okay? Why? Because as he was sharing his testimonies in chapter 22 and 26, on different occasions, he talked about his own upbringing.

He was a devout Jew. He was brought up in a very, very devout way. In the teaching of the law, he had a great teacher.

All right? So, these Christians, they were cults. They were against his faith, his religion. I mean, these are pests, and they need to be exterminated.

[14:19] So, he did all he could to try to, for the name and the name of God, to exterminate them. Right?

That was in his faith, in his understanding. He was doing the right thing. But, when God had his plan, in verse 15, when he was appearing to Ananias, before Saul even had that encounter, Jesus, God said to Ananias, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and the kings and to the people of Israel.

That was the call of God. And that encounter was very dramatic. Okay? We read about it. I won't go into details about it.

We don't need to. Now, I mean, with 40, 50 people here, we don't need to have that specific encounter. How many people have actually saw flashes of lightning and 10 angels blowing 20 trumpets and Isaac, you come to me, and you drop onto the ground?

You know? Hardly anyone would see. I tell you what, these encounters, if we don't respond, you know, one day we need to be accountable to God.

[15:52] It was one Saturday night. It was one sister who told me. It was one Saturday night. It was 10, 15 years ago, right here. And on Saturday service, most of you were still attending Saturday service at that time.

She told me, while we were worshipping, she actually saw Jesus. Here. I said, wow. I've been pastoring for about 30-something years.

I never physically saw Jesus. There's nothing, anything like that. But she told me she saw Jesus. Wow. What would you have responded?

How would you have responded with your life? But today, she's not at church. I don't care what kind of encounters you have.

But how do we respond to the encounter to Jesus? You know? God calls us in different ways.

[16:59] He would call Saul to specifically, as his chosen instrument, to preach the Gospels to the Gentiles.

But he might have called you to something else. We're thankful that there are many who are actually considering full-time ministry in this church. Praise God.

Let this be so. But I still guess majority of us, we're just called in our profession, in our workplaces, in our homes, to actually fulfill his task in our lives so that we can honor him.

All right? Now, this word vocation, it came from, you know, when we fill out our resume, our CV, you know, we say vocation, you know, what kind of career.

But it's kind of very much downplayed this word. Actually, this word comes from Latin vocation is to call. That's God's calling.

[18:16] My job, my career, is God's calling. It's a divine call. Whether you're a doctor, you're a dentist, you're a...

Yeah, even I was a takeaway shop proprietor, whatever. God calls me there. Until God has specific calling and told me to turn around, to do something else, he calls me and you to be in that role, to honor him and to be salt and light to others.

And in church, yes, we're all called to be his instruments, to work together, to build up his church. You know, how do we live our life?

You know, when I was small, when I was young, you know, the parents, Chinese parents, always tell you to, you know, like, do things right. All right? Do things right.

I mean, live up to, you know, your family tradition. You know, don't cheat. But actually, we do.

Actually, shop, you know, Chinese, actually, they're the best in cheating tax, you know.

[19:38] All right? When we were having takeaway shop, you would not bank all the money that comes to your businesses.

All right? You always cheat. But God knew. So I was out of that when I became a Christian. All right? All right. But doing things right, it may not be pleasing to God.

There is a difference between doing things right and doing the right things. What is the right thing that calls you to do?

Now, I believe I'm doing the right things that God called me. I don't necessarily do things right all the time. Right?

I make mistakes. But as long as we do the right things that God wants me to do, we're pleasing God. What is that calling that God has in your life?

[20:44] We're not perfect. Surely. But if we're just doing the things that God, that pleases God, and he calls me in that situation, in that role in my life, I'm serving him.

I, yeah, I make mistakes. I have my weaknesses. And I have my sins. And he said, yes, but as long as I'm doing the right thing, one day when God, when Jesus comes back, good and faithful servant, are we walking in this calling that he has for me?

Secondly, the willingness of Ananias. In verses 10 to 19, especially in 11 to 12. The Lord told Ananias, go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for his praying.

In the vision, he sees this man, Ananias. God was saying to Ananias, yes, go to this guy. In the vision, he would see you. You'll be going there to lay your hands on him and restore his sight.

And he actually, the first response was worried. He didn't want to go. Very natural. It's like, you know, if God gives you a vision and go to this guy.

[22:12] He's got a gun in his room, in his home. He's going to rob the bank. And you go there and pray for him. Would you? And the response from Ananias was, no, what?

I've heard that he's persecuting the church in Jerusalem. And now he's got the papers from the priest to come to Damascus to take us, arrest us back to Jerusalem.

You ask me to go to pray for him? And then, surely, when the calling is from God, it may not be all easy.

That would be challenging. There are times that we think, have we actually got the right vision? But, ultimately, Ananias submitted.

He was willing to go. With challenge. Uneasy. But, he went. And in verses 18 to 19, Ananias went to the house, entered it, placing his hands on Saul.

[23 : 26] Listen to this. He said, brother Saul. Wow. Can you imagine? Saul just had this encounter. Jesus.

That was the name that I was persecuting. You know what it was? Need to integrate. Wow. What that vision actually meant.

And somebody now, it's called this guy. He was a Christian. He came to me and called me brother. And he came and prayed for me.

And he explained, was this Jesus that you saw on the road to Damascus and asked me to come and pray for you. And be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Wow. And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes. And he could see again. And what was more, he got up and was baptized.

[24 : 28] What did Ananias do? He did not just go and pray. I believe he did a few things more.

So that Saul would understand. And he got baptized. I think in today's term, it's like follow up and discipleship.

Right? When somebody comes to Christ, a lot of things are known for him or her. Someone needs to be standing alongside, coming alongside, and to be with him or her.

To tell him what is next, what to do. Right? Like, we went to this Billy Graham crusade with a training a couple weeks ago.

And this guy was explaining, you know, there was new converts. They have very, very, they are very uncertain in a lot of ways.

[25 : 41] Spiritually, they need protection. Because they just responded to the Spirit of God.

Right? So it's a spiritual thing. It's a spiritual battle. If we don't go alongside and pray for them and empower them spiritually, Satan, he's over here, he's going to grab him back.

You know? I mean, Satan works a lot harder than us, you know? And we, you know, when we see somebody came to Christ in a rally or in a meeting or whatever, and said, oh, we just get, oh, congratulations.

And then we left him alone. And Satan, wow, it's a good time for me to grab him back. No, they need someone to stand alongside, like Ananias.

Now imagine, Saul, when he came to Christ, wow, it was a big, great encounter, right? But spiritually, emotionally, relationally, intellectually, he was in a new, it was a new thing for him.

[26 : 51] Very strange. Who on earth can come? Yes, of course, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is in him. Yes, but we're still human beings.

We have our emotions. We need relationships. And we need more information. What next? And there, Ananias came, stood alongside.

All right? We need more Ananiases. To be with those vulnerable ones. Not just people come to Christ.

I mean, people called for ministry. They will encounter great spiritual conflicts. We will appreciate people to pray for us.

Not even just, you know, being called for full-time ministry. What about the leaders? When they serve, they will encounter many challenges.

[27 : 50] Satan would really want to focus on them. Because, you know, when he attacks the shepherds, the sheep would disband.

So pray for those who are called by God. Whether they were specific callings. Or just serving in church.

We do need to stand alongside one another. Ananias. And then, Ananias. Would that be your calling? Thirdly, the recognition of the whole church.

Verses 20 to 30. Now, in verse 19b, Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. Why? Because Ananias followed up.

And he would introduce Saul to the believers in Damascus. The church of Damascus. That's why he was able to spend several days serving, preaching, fellowship with the disciples in Damascus.

[29 : 05] Alright? But, when he was persecuted and people wanted to kill him, so the church in Damascus sent him to Jerusalem.

Okay? But when he was in Jerusalem, those disciples in Jerusalem wasn't sure this guy saw.

He went away. He got the paper and went away. They were going to take those brothers and sisters from Damascus, come back to Jerusalem and to kill them.
Right? And what? This guy, Saul? He became a Christian? Come on. Could it be a setup, man? Could it be a plot? So, nobody believed it.

Only Barnabas accepted and took him in. Not just he himself took him.

[30 : 09] He also brought him to the apostles. Now, if it was a plot, you're going to kill the whole church in Jerusalem. Right? You're going to be the sinner of sinners.

Barnabas. That's a big responsibility. But Barnabas, in Acts 4, it says, he was, his name, actually Barnabas was his nickname.

It was given name by the other disciples. His original name was Joseph. Right? And because the name Barnabas, because it actually was, it really meant encourager.

And it was actually the same name as the, when Jesus described the advocate of the Holy Spirit. You know, the second, the new advocate that I will send.

It was the same word, parakletos. So Barnabas was filled with the Holy Spirit. And he was a good man. And he knew that Saul was chosen by God.

[31 : 15] And he took the courage, and brought, took him in, and he brought him to the apostles. And in verse 27, just, just, just read those phrases.

You know, he did not just brought them to the apostles. He studied it, how, how actual, what sort of encounters, and how God has dealt with Saul.

He explained very, very, very, very, very, very, very, to the church. So that, the church in Jerusalem, accepted Saul.

And we all, I think, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, God chooses Saul. There's not too many Saul in that sense, all right?

And Ananias, is, we need, we need more Ananias, says, in our church, to follow up, those with specific callings. But I believe all of us, need to be barnavous.

[32 : 24] To recognize, what's doing, in our church. this guy, you know, and later on, we'll read, Acts 11, about the church in Antioch.

When the Gentile church was born, in Acts 11, the Jerusalem church, wasn't sure, is it actually, the word of God?

So he, so the church in Jerusalem, sent Barnabas, and sent, and he went all the way to Antioch. And the Bible says, he was there, and he saw the grace of God, and he was glad.

And he knew there were needs, and he knew that, I can't do that, all by myself. So he went, all the way, up to Tarsus, and found, Saul.

He was there, at the time. And he brought him back, to the church, in Antioch, and they served together. And this, first, Gentile church, because, of them, and because of the teaching, of Saul, they became, the first, mission church, in the New Testament.

[33 : 50] I mean, if you were Barnabas, if the mother church, in Jerusalem, sent you over, to this, church in Antioch, whoa, I'm sent by the, mother church, Jerusalem.

I'm here. I'm the, I'm the saint one. I'm the apostle, in that sense. I can be here. I, I, I can entitle myself, Bishop Barnabas.

I do whatever, I want you guys to do. You listen to me, because Jerusalem church, sent me here. No, he didn't. He saw the needs.

He knew that, now Barnabas, is a very good encourager. He might not be, a very good teacher. He knew his, shortcomings, and knew, he knew, there were resources.

He didn't mind, to go all the way, to find, and find Saul. And you know what, when Saul, when he, when he was, the, the, when he, initially, he wasn't an easy guy, to get on with.

[34 : 54] Right? It took him a long time, for God, to shape him. Right? When he was, first called by God, even though he had, about two, three years in Arabia, and trying to, integrate his theology.

Right? But when he, he first came, to serve, came out to serve, he was a hard case, to follow. You know, he was hard, to get on with. He would even, rebuke Peter.

He's that kind of guy. Right? And Saul, was willing to work with him. Barnabas. Surely, there are a lot of, people, we don't, want to get on with.

All right? There are people, yeah, okay, I mean, he can be in, this group, but don't, don't send him to my group, Pastor William. I don't want, I don't want him to come into my group.

You know? Surely, I mean, being, pastor for this church, for 20 years, there are, there are still, some people, ah, wish God, could send him to another church.

[35 : 58] You know? But God wants them to be here. It's not my choice. It's God's choice. If you haven't, haven't heard, Pastor, Dr. Tucker's message, last Wednesday, or the Wednesday before, please, please, go, and, and, and listen to it.

As a Baptist, we do not just commit, our lives to God. We are, as we commit, our lives to God, we're saying, telling, we're telling God, God, I want to commit my life, with, to your people here, in this church, whether I like it or not.

This is, this is our response. God's work amongst different people in this congregation, in this church, Saturdays, Sunday mornings, in this community of churches, churches in this nation, in this church, in this church, in this church, we are, we are called, to commit, to one another, to recognize, God's work, amongst his people, though they may be different from us.

So, we see, chapter nine, the encounter of Saul, right, the willingness, of Ananias, and the recognition, of the church, and we are, called to be Barnabas, as well.

And the result of this, see, that's the encounter of Saul, the willingness, of Ananias, and the recognition, of the church, the result was, in verse 31, then the church, throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, enjoyed, a time of peace, and was strengthened, living in the fear, of the Lord, and encountered, by the, encouraged, by the Holy Spirit, it increased, in numbers, and the, better things, was to come, and Saul, was the one, that chosen, to take, the gospel, beyond, the realm, of Samaria, to, firstly, Asia Minor, and then, crossed, to Europe, Greece, and then, the end, of chapter 28, it reached, Rome, that was the plan, of God, but not, just to Saul, to everyone,

[38 : 51] God, how, how, would you, respond, to God's, calling, in your life, what is this, calling, what's God, calling us, calling, calling me, as a pastor, but calling you, maybe, maybe, yes, God's calling, call you, for full time ministry, let's, discern it together, but, if there are others, being called, in specific ways, of, of full time, we are called, to stand alongside them, to encourage them, to recognize, God's work, God's will, in our church, together, let's pray, Father, thank you for, yeah, for, your ever, calling, to, for us, to respond to you, to your kingdom, to the sake, for the sake of the gospel, and thank you Lord, that, in your wisdom, in your, in your love, that you call us today,

Lord, help us, to really, discern, your will, in our lives, Lord, in our church, as a corporate, as a body of Christ, that, we respond, in a loving, and in a humble way, so that, your will, be done, in my life, and the lives, of our brothers, and sisters, here in this church, may your will, be done Lord, in your mighty, and wonderful name, we pray, Amen.