



**LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**Brian Mitchell**

**11<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

***The Man in White***

**Acts 9: 1-20**

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I wonder how many sermons you have heard in your life. Think about it, how many years have you gone to Church? Are you there every week during those years? Twice a month, even once a month, it adds up. Maybe you've heard more than one a week if you come here and watch other services online or on TV. Do the math. I bet some of you have heard hundreds, maybe many more sermons. You may have heard good preaching, bad preaching, loud preaching, quiet preaching, preaching from the young, from the old, from those you agree with and from those you disagree with. Lots of sermons.

Next question: How many do you remember?

I'm sure there were a few that stuck with you, maybe for a few days, maybe longer. But most end up floating into the distance, disappearing from our memory. Usually when it come times for the sermon, we check our watch. It's important to know how long this will be and settle back and listen. Of course, our mind may wander a little. We might start thinking about where we are going to lunch, what is coming up that day or week. At this time of year, our minds may wander to the Jags game, which will lead us into prayer. Maybe we'll read the bulletin. It is even possible some of us, and we can see you up here, will have a small nap. But for the most part we listen. And even when we think it was an incredible message, we will retain only a thought or two of the 15 to 20 minutes we heard. I've seen a few famous preachers in my time. I saw Billy Graham a few times, saw hundreds go forward at the end of his message, but I suspect they were going anyway, whatever Billy said. I've also seen unknown preachers who have made a huge impact on me,

The sermons I remember from my youth at church usually had some visual attached, or when something went wrong, I remember my minister stumbling and falling on the steps during a sermon, then very quickly turned it around and used it in his message...maybe he meant it all along. I remember another time, we had a young visitor preaching, and he went on a little too long. You could tell everyone was thinking about lunch; I could see an older lady getting restless across the aisle, so I am watching her out of the corner of my eye. As he kept speaking way beyond when church was usually over, she stood up to let this guy know he

should be wrapping it up. I thought this is going to be good. Her friend pulled her sleeve saying shush. The lady said loudly, "Well someone needs to tell him church is over at 12!" I wonder how many of you have wanted to do that through the years. That sermon was over pretty soon after that incidentally. But I can still remember what he was talking about.

We know that the Apostle Paul must have preached powerful sermons, but I am sure none had as dramatic or powerful a visual as his initial experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus that Fulton just read for us. It is certainly a message from Jesus that Paul, then known as Saul, never forgot. But there is another encounter in this story, less dramatic and less well known, between Jesus and Ananias.

We are quite familiar with Saul's encounter with Jesus, but perhaps less familiar with Ananias' encounter. But I think the encounter Ananias had with Jesus may teach us as much.

But first a little on Saul. Saul was a Jew born into Roman citizenship. He was a Pharisee, a student and adherent of the Law, highly educated. Back in Jerusalem, according to Acts 7, Saul watched over the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. Now he is on his way to Damascus, to round up the believers there. We read he is blinded by a light from heaven, and the voice of Jesus. Saul fell to the ground and could not see. For three days he did not eat, or drink and he was dependent on his men to lead him by the hand. It's as if this young man, who would go on to be perhaps the most influential person in the rise of Christianity beyond Jesus, had to be humbled before he could rise once more. He had to be blind before he could see, he literally had to be transformed. This dramatic encounter with Jesus is in stark contrast to Ananias encounter with The Lord.

Continuing our reading from verse 10.

*Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision<sup>[a]</sup> a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my*

*name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul<sup>b</sup> and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*

Ananias is relatively unknown; he is mentioned one more time in Acts 22 when Paul calls him a devout man. The Lord didn't blind him with a bright light. As far as we know, Jesus didn't send him to faraway places where he would suffer imprisonments and shipwrecks. The Lord did not give him an assignment to preach to the world.

But the Lord did give Ananias an assignment to change the world for one person. And, for that reason, it's worth paying as much attention to this account of the encounter between Ananias and Jesus as to this account of the encounter between Saul and Jesus. You and I may never be asked to change the world, but you and I will be asked, from time to time, to change the world for one person.

We have been talking about stewardship over the last month and we have been thinking about how we give, not just our dollars, but ourselves. It can be daunting to think about giving ourselves to the work of the church, the work of Christ. We quite often feel that we are not up to it. We have two different encounters with Jesus in our passage this morning, one pretty big, one more low key. The dramatic encounter is amazing and changes the life of the church and those encounters still happen today and I encourage you to look for that. But I think the more low-key encounter, the encounter of Ananias is probably more relatable to most of us. I also think the low-key work of the Christian is the real, world changing work.

I was in Statesboro, Georgia yesterday for the Committal service for Jim Tillman. Many of you knew and loved Jim. I shared the story of my experience with Jim. Quite often, when you stand here sharing a message, it comes with apprehension and insecurities. You're never sure if it is any good. If anyone will hear it. You trust that God has given you the words and God will communicate, but you never know. I don't know about Pastor Joy, but when I'm up here, I am usually looking for the smiling faces or the nodding heads for encouragement. When I first got here, and shared a message, I noticed Jim. His resting and listening face, could be a little serious looking. I thought, “Oh this guy is not

impressed.” Then Jim started writing me little notes about the sermons. Words of encouragement. We’d communicate a little. There are a few of you who do this, and I hesitate to speak of this because the purpose is not to fish for compliments, the purpose is to be a little vulnerable and tell you those notes from Jim meant so much to me. Now I am willing to bet, none of you knew he did that. Which is how he would want it. It was a small thing on his part, but a huge thing to me. And I should tell you if I gave a message and I did not hear from Jim, I knew that one was to be put away, never to be looked at again. I got the chance to thank Jim for those notes a few weeks before he passed and I hope that moment meant something to him, as it did me.

You do not know the difference the smallest kindness, the smallest act of obedience to God’s call, an act of love or grace may make to the life of another. Now I encourage you to think big about changing the world for Christ, but please know the biggest change may come in the smallest act.

Though he had reservations, as he knew Saul by reputation, Ananias followed the call and was obedient He went to Saul and prayed for him. Ananias himself did not change the world, but Saul, also known as Paul, did. And Ananias changed Saul’s life.

For a moment Ananias stepped into the spotlight in response to God’s call, and then he stepped into the background again and went on with his life. But that moment was instrumental in the future of the church. I wonder what moments in your life will change things forever. The kid you taught in Sunday school who goes on to a life of faith, the grace you show a stranger that restores their faith. We may not see Jesus in a vision, but we usually know when an opportunity arises to share love and grace, to give of ourselves. Stewardship truly never ends does it?

Most of us probably can’t be a Paul, but we can be an Ananias. My suspicion is there is more to be accomplished in the small things anyway,  
Amen.