

ANANIAS OF DAMASCUS

"There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias." Acts 9:10.

There was a great task which needed to be done. Someone was needed to do it. Our Lord, as usual, had His man for the job. That man was Ananias of Damascus. Whether he was a native or a fugitive who had found shelter in Damascus, we do not know.

Ananias was a Christian, as well as a pious Jew. He was the Lord's man in the right place and at the right time. So the Lord used him mightily. Ananias is an inspiring example of Christian godliness to all who are called to live the Christian life amid the ordinary circumstances of workaday life. So many long to live at their very best for Christ, but feel that their circumstances keep them hidden away in an obscurity which prevents their being used for Him.

The ordinary life is often the most difficult. One great need in these days is for Christians to live the ordinary life in a really out-of-the ordinary way. Our Lord derives a special pleasure from His servants who are "faithful over a few things." Let us never undervalue the so-called commonplace. It is the aggregate of commonplace things which constitutes the greatest of all influences in the social life and unfolding history of mankind.

To all Christians who feel that there is a disappointing sense of ordinariness about their lives and surroundings, Ananias is a silver starlight of encouragement. He shows us how the glory of the upper world may be brought to flash upon the dismal details of our daily tasks. He is certainly a sparkling gem of Christian discipleship.

I. His Readiness.

1. His discipleship.

He was called "a certain disciple." He was not an apostle. He was not one of the seventy. He was not a great preacher. Nor does he appear to have been a leader or an official or even an outstanding personality. Perhaps we would not have heard anything about him had it not been for the part which he played in Paul's career. But God knew all about him. No depth of obscurity can hide anyone from His gracious gaze. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." Ananias was just an ordinary, humble disciple, who sought to glorify Christ Jesus by a consecrated life amid the unexciting usualness of customary Damascus ways and doings.

2. His devotion.

We are told that he was "a devout man according to the law" Acts 22:12. That is saying a lot. See here his devotion to principle. He had wonderful principles. He was devoted to that which was highest. Our devotion to that which is highest should show itself everywhere in our lives.

3. His discreetness.

"Ananias had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there." The ordinary Jew in Damascus would not have eulogized Ananias overmuch had he not been winsomely discreet in his Christian piety and witness. It is no small thing to have our character praised by those who strongly differ from us. Such a reputation as Ananias had is not gained in a few days.

Ananias was well known in Damascus. Whether or not he was a native of the

place we do not know, but he had been there a long while. Those with whom he had lived and worked and transacted business thought very highly of him. Such people are grand sermons. Such life sermons are far more convincing than mere lip advertisements. In a very drab environment this disciple of our Lord lived excellently. In the eyes of the world he was a Mr. Nobody, but in the eyes of God he was one of the aristocracy of heaven.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." One of the best things we can have in this life is a good name. It is better than riches, better than position, better than influence, and better than friends. One who has a good name can always get plenty of friends, but a bad name robs us of friends, position, and influence.

A good name grows out of good character. It is earned by right living. It is the result of looking out for the welfare of others. It is a source of real satisfaction. And, a good name never dies. Think of how many people live for years and almost as soon as they die they are forgotten. They are forgotten because they did not do anything worth mentioning while they lived, and now that they are gone there is nothing to remember them by. They lived to themselves, by themselves, and for themselves. They never thought about God. They never tried to help the right nor hinder the wrong. Is it any wonder, then, that their names are forgotten?

But the names of those Christians whose lives are fragrant with little deeds of kindness and little acts of love can never be forgotten. The glorious thing about a good name is that it goes with one to his grave and embalms his memory ever after.

II. His Willingness.

It was not an easy thing which Christ commanded when He said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus." One would not have been greatly surprised had Ananias shrunk away in fear from such an ordeal. Saul was the most notorious oppressor and persecutor of the Christians in all Judea. Had he not come to Damascus on this trip on a mission of anti-Christian persecution? How dare Ananias fling himself into the eager clutches of this infuriated ringleader of the Saviour's adversaries! Must the lamb walk right into the very mouth of the lion? Would it do any good to preach Calvary to this bitter foe of Christ? But the Lord said to him, "God thy way, for he is chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." Without further delay, "Ananias went his way." He obeyed willingly.

Ananias was obedient as to time, as to place, and as to result. He was willing to go just when and just where the Master directed. We should learn from Ananias the important lesson of yielding exact obedience to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

III. His Faithfulness.

1. His Christian love is seen in his attitude towards Saul. He goes in to the arch-persecutor with the eloquently affectionate greeting, "Brother Saul!" Moreover, "he put his hands on him," a very gracious act, for, whereas Saul had come to lay the hand of violence on Ananias, Ananias now lays the gentle hand of brotherliness on Saul. There is not a trace of resentment in the entire demeanor of Ananias. Christian love displays itself in gracious and full victory.

2. In Christian loyalty.

His loyalty is seen in his attitude toward his Lord. After saluting Saul, his first word was, "The Lord, even Jesus hath sent me." Ananias would not let his expression of brotherliness toward Saul cause him to shrink from affirming the Lordship of Jesus, even though that was the very thing against which Saul had been fighting so madly. So, after saying "Brother Saul," he immediately proceeds, "The Lord, even Jesus hath sent me." What a choice blend of discretion and devotion!

3. In Christian lowliness.

Ananias did not obtrude himself into his message. The very opposite was the case. His only reference to himself was the only one that was needful, "The Lord, even Jesus hath sent me." He did not start explaining who he was or what he was. He was content to be the faithful anonymous messenger of his Master. This is the kind of servant God always uses.

There is a real sense in which Christians should never be under circumstances. The indwelling Saviour can give us a liberating independence of exterior environment. Nor need we live "in the limelight" to do true service for our heavenly Master. A rose need not be seen before its fragrance can be appreciated. Oh, the power and the value of those lives which, although they are never mentioned in newspaper columns, transmit the love and life and grace of Christ among neighbors and fellow-workmen and friends in the ordinary walks of life!

Publicity is not an essential either to faithfulness or to true success. Service in secret has "house top" results, even though the connection may not always be detected. We may feel out of sight, but we are never out of God's sight. He is watching to see whether, like Ananias, we are faithful in our present circumstances. He may have much wider fields of service for us in the future, but the determining factor is fidelity in the present.

Like Ananias, live for Christ at your very best, just where you are, and a day at a time. Seek no longer the elaborate and spectacular forms of service for Christ. Seek purity of heart, humility of spirit, preparedness for any and every call of our heavenly Master. Seek to distill the fragrance of the Rose of Sharon in your present environment. If you will glorify God today, just where you are, there is no telling how He may glorify you tomorrow. In the most unlikely surroundings there are opportunities for serving Christ as plentiful as daisies and buttercups in the meadows during the summer months.

You perhaps have heard of the farmer who for the first time saw the beauty of a bluebell under the microscope. He gazed and gazed at it, and then exclaimed, "Heaven forgive me; I've trodden on thousands!" If only we have eyes to see, we soon find it is the same with opportunities: they are everywhere. By how we live, by what we do, by words we speak; by actions and reactions; by discreet witness for Christ, and in various other ways, we may be making a contribution to the eternal well-being of souls every hour that we live.

Let Ananias, with his readiness, willingness, and faithfulness, be both an example and an inspiration to us. Let the beautiful way in which Christ used this ordinary and obscure man give such solid comfort to us as shall cause each of us to determine to be more loyal and faithful to our Master in the days which may still be ours on earth.