

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Radical Obedience

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Well, I love the old story of a man named Alfred and as the story goes he was rich, he was successful. And he picked up a French newspaper one day, he was going to read the obituary because his brother has passed and accidentally the newspaper had gotten their names mixed up. And so we actually picked up the newspaper and he read his own obituary. So at the top, the headline said, the merchant of death is dead. And it talks in this article about how this man had built his wealth on the backs of helping people be able to kill one another. And he and his brother and his father had invented dynamite. They invented it for the purposes of construction, but he read this and he was so dismayed. He was so deeply hurt and disturbed at this glimpse of his legacy. And it's believed that this was the pivotal experience in him making a decision, a life altering decision to give the majority of his wealth away for the betterment of humanity. I think it was 94% of what he had, he ended up giving away and it's the story of Alfred Nobel, the founder of the Nobel Prize. Now in hindsight, we recognize the work of Nobel and how it has bettered, how it has helped to develop and strengthened humanity over time. But if you go back a hundred plus years ago when he was still alive you would hear and you would see a very different story from his life. His epitaph was literally written, but one shift, one change, change the entire narrative of his legacy.

We continue our new series and titled *Unsung* today as we look at those throughout scripture that made huge impact on our faith while receiving very little recognition; it's often the person behind the person that we forget to read about. One of the spiritual giants, someone who does get great recognition in the scripture is a man by the name of the Apostle Paul. And he's widely recognized as one of the most influential writers of all time. And he penned almost half of the New Testament and over generations and thousands of years, he influenced people of faith. But in Acts chapter nine, there was no Apostle Paul, there was only a man named Saul of Tarsus. And Saul was a Pharisee in Jerusalem and he was making a name for himself because he was going after this new sect or this new church called *The Way*. And so even to the point where he went to the high priest and he got a commendation, he got a letter written to him so that he could go out and arrest these believers. In fact, we see in early Acts that they went out and they found Stephen. They didn't just arrest him; he was stoned under the leadership of Saul.

And so we see Saul in his early days in his early life, and we see him as this executioner with a warrant, Billy the Kid with a badge. This terrorist with government backing and he's making his name, he's known for this. His purpose in life was to make early believers extinct; this is the Saul in the scriptures. But on the road to Damascus Saul and his companions were struck down by this blinding light. And while they're on the ground, he hears this voice call out to him, Saul, why are you persecuting me? While he's on the ground he calls out, who are you? Who is this that's talking to me? And the voice responds in verse five

⁵ *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.* ⁶ *"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

Saul was blinded and he goes into Damascus and he goes to this house. And while in this, house he doesn't eat, he doesn't drink for three days. So how did Saul go from executioner of Christian to one of the most well known and influential believers of all time? Enter stage left, a man named Ananias, little known, don't even know his name, but a man of powerful faith. We find his story in Acts chapter nine; Pastor Marion is going to read that for us today.

¹⁰ *"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he said.*

¹¹ *The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.*

¹² *In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

¹³ *"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.*

¹⁴ *And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."*

¹⁵ *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.*

¹⁶ *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

¹⁷ *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

¹⁸ *Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength."*

Thank you Pastor Marion.

Ananias, he wasn't the face of of faith was he? He wasn't the charismatic leader. He wasn't the guy out speaking to thousands on the hillside. No, he was just this man who obeyed God and went to the most dangerous man in the entire country armed with nothing but a weapon of prayer. That's who we're talking about in the scripture today. Look at the scripture and we see that it wasn't an angel who brought sight to Saul, was it? It wasn't one of the 12 disciples who showed up and brought a miracle into the house. No. It was a little known man named Ananias, a man of faith who wasn't loud, but he was faithful. It's this man that we want to look at today and learn from and unpack who he was. First he was a man of deep conviction and ultimate submission. Could we just imagine for a moment the emotional place that Ananias went through when he received this vision. He hears and he sees this vision and then that name is said, Saul of Tarsus. Are you serious? Are you kidding me right now? That name, he knows that name. He

hears this name and his stomach has to drop it that moment, right? His hands maybe start fluttering a little bit. His jaw maybe drops. Him, him? All these emotions start rushing in, and anger and fear and resentment and confusion. And even, it's almost like he's going through the different stages of grief. When we read this scripture and he's bargaining with God. He's saying have you heard the reports, God? Have you not seen what he's done to your people?

Put yourself in an Ananias' shoes just for a minute today. This is the last guy on earth that he wants to go see. This is the last guy on earth that he wants to go pray for. There's nobody else that he wants to be alone in a room with, right? I mean, this is like getting in to the octagon with Anderson Silva. This is like getting in to the ring with Mike Tyson with no gloves on and he's angry, right? Like you do not {inaudible}. Pain is going to come up from this experience right here, nothing good is going to come from this. And Saul was the guy who went and he actually made legal his ability to persecute these people and he's coming at me? My pain is his gain. That's the guy I'm talking about. I'm thinking there's two options that are going to happen here, I'm going to go there and he's going to kill me or maybe that doesn't happen, I'm going to kill him. All this range of emotions are happening and are stirred up in this scripture. Try to step in and experience it and feel this scripture today, but this is the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ that redemption was brought to the sinner.

Redemption was brought to you in the middle of your mess. Redemption and grace was brought to me in the middle of my mess, and God chose to give us grace in spite of our problems. Thank you Jesus, today. Can I get an amen right there? He brings us grace, but guess what? His grace isn't done when I use it. That same grace that I received and accepted, no, his grace is still good for those around us. I love what CS Lewis said. He said, "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive".

Do you know what I've discovered in DC roads, maybe you'll relate with me right here. When I need to merge into a lane, there's no better car to find than somebody who has just merged into a lane, right? Like I'm trying to get in and I look up ahead and I look up way ahead and a car got in way up there. So you know what I do? Sorry, I zip around all these cars and I go up to that car at the front and I look over and it's always, oh yeah, come on in, right? Every time I never get anger right there, you know the rest of the guys are giving me that one finger salute. But no, that guy who just got in, he's ready to give out some grace. Why? Because he just had to get some didn't me. And he got his and now he knows, oh yeah, I got mine, yeah, you come on in, I'm accepting. I'll take you in right here.

By the way, if you ask someone to rate their driving skills, studies show that the majority of people will rate themselves above average. And you know, I find this very ironic, don't you? Because when I'm driving around our city, it doesn't feel like there's an overabundance of above average drivers, right. Maybe that's just me. Like y'all, you know, maybe out in Virginia or Maryland or northwest DC, maybe you got the A plus drivers around there. But as for me and my quadrant, right, northeast, I'm just saying we could use a little help. That's all I'm saying.

Psychological scientists, Michael Roy and Michael Liersch of New York University, they found in their study that people rate themselves above average and they rate others a much lower scale. The results of the study suggests that even though drivers are aware that others are using

different standards for good driving, people often view their own standards as superior. Am I right about this right?

I'm going to get crude for just a moment today. My coach used to say it this way. You think your poop don't stank. You think you're driving's perfect. You think your sin don't hurt. You think your actions don't cut somebody else's heart. We face up to who we truly are. Jesus brought grace and redemption to our door and it's good for those around us. God will often call us to offer restoration and redemption to the very people that hurt us and hurt our family. I knew I was not going to get a single amen right there cause that's hard stuff, isn't it?

Years ago, I remember watching a little known little publicized documentary was called 'As We Forgive' and followed Rosaria and Chantal two Rwandan women coming face-to-face with the men who slaughtered their families during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Overwhelmed by an enormous backlog of court cases, the government they returned over 50, 000 perpetrators, 50,000 people engaged in genocide faults back to the very communities they helped to destroy.

And so victims became a part of the perpetrators of the felons process to reintegrate into society is this fascinating case study with three pillars, repair, restore, and establish responsibility. And it was this case study to try to help victims find peace and forgiveness, but at the same time it would help these felons find their way back to responsibility and also restoration and also reconciliation.

And all that is in light take that and now let's look back at the scripture. Look at the genius of what is happening in this scripture. God is inciting restorative justice as a part of rebuilding Saul. Listen to the fact that Ananias chose to go from retribution to restoration it incited something Paul didn't it. I keep going from Saul to Paul, I can't help it. But a Saul turned into a Paul because of the grace of God. That is good. And so Saul receives this Ananias makes this hard decision to go from retribution, no, I choose reconciliation and what does it do? It incites in Paul to go from hunter to humble, to go from preying to praying. And a change occurs in his life.

By the way, for those of us who are in need of redemption, it's no accident who God will bring to offer redemption in your path, right? Sometimes it's that person that you hurt. Sometimes it's the person that you don't want to receive it from, but it's no accident who God chooses. Look at who he chooses in the scripture. He chooses two men whose names were horrible in the New Testament. He tells them to go to Judas house, right, and that a man named Ananias will show up. Judas was the betrayer of our Lord; Ananias was one of the first great hypocrites in the church who stole money from the church. Remember Anna and Sapphira? These are the two men that he chooses to bring reconciliation, to bring redemption. God uses names that Saul would know as failures, and he says in the process of your restoration, I will show you redemption to these other names so that you might know that my grace is sufficient for your failures, for your misses, for your sins.

Can I just talk to somebody today? Maybe you're in a need of saving and you're drowning in debt. You're hurting from broken relationship. You have squandered opportunity and you're living in accordance with the bad decisions that you have made in your life, and this is where you're at. You're in a place of pain. You're in a place of need, of salvation from the King.

Whether Christ finds you this day in high place or in hurt, in hell or in high water, His grace is still good. His grace is still alive and it's for us today. And so can I encourage you to heed the advice of the Apostle Paul that he says to the church at Philippi in Philippians chapter three verses 13 and 14 it says, to forget what lies behind and what? And to press forward to lay a hold what is ahead, which is Christ.

He that is our living water, the past is no barrier to Christ. Somebody needed to hear that today. Your past is no barrier to Christ. Don't let the past be your prison. Don't let your past paralyze you. Don't let condemnation or those things that might pull you down or those hurts that have captivated you. No, step into Christ, walk towards Christ. Have you walked away from him? Today is the day to come back. Come on, today is a fresh opportunity. What does this scripture say? His mercies, they are new every morning. Guess what today is? It's a new day. It's an opportunity for us to step in towards Christ and to receive his grace. Ananias was a man of deep conviction, of ultimate submission and of radical obedience.

After Ananias reminds God of who Saul is, right? He had to remind God, God, did you know who this guy is? And then he gives a whole boatload of excuses and what does God say? He says, okay, thank you, go, right? Sometimes we got to get that stuff out to God and we want to argue our way out of it, but God's objective is clear. It says, go, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. In sharing grace with someone who didn't deserve it, Ananias accomplished what could not be accomplished. And sharing God's grace with somebody who did not deserve it, Ananias accomplished what could not be accomplished, the sharing of the Gospel to the entirety of the world, right? That's what happened through Paul. Then the Gospel went to the Gentiles. It went outside of the nation and the Kingdom of Israel. God used that moment. We asked for God to come and we want him to come and, and this was his multiplication moment, right? We seek God for that moment and we seek God for God take my five loaves and two fish, Lord. But we've got to remember and count the costs to that little boy it wasn't five loaves and two fish. It was everything he owned right? To Ananias it wasn't just going to somebody's house and praying for him. It was putting his life on the line.

What is God asking of you? Your multiplication moment will be painful. It'll be a hard decision. It'll be sacrificial on our parts. When that multiplication moment comes, what decision do we make? If we obey God will show up. Just put a face on it right now, just a moment. Who's the person in your life that if God asked you to go to them today, your stomach would drop? Come on who's that face? Who is it that your mouth would be wide open, your hands and start to flutter a little bit? You'd feel him or her, no impossible. Who's your impossible? Impossible is just an opinion, is it not? God's grace can overcome that.

What's God asking you today? Who is he calling? Who's he putting in your heart today that you'd say anybody but them God. Ananias was a man of deep conviction, ultimate submission, radical obedience and unwavering devotion. It's Acts 22 verse 12 that describes Ananias as a devout man. He was a man of devotion. We need some more men and women of devotion. We need some men and women of prayer, some men and women who get on their knees and seek the Almighty who dwell in the shadow of the Almighty. We need some men and women who don't just accept hell in their house, but go after some heaven, who go after God and seek him and true

devotion. Not every person has the musical talent of the musician. Not every person has eloquence in their speech, but every person is called to ... every person who seeks in calls on the name of the Lord is called to be men and women of devotion. This is a calling that we have and in that devotion lies the formation of boldness and qualification for God's working. Ananias knew the Lord. He walked with him on a daily basis. He walked and he lived in the word of God and the scriptures, and he might argue a point, but at the end of the day, he was devoted to the purposes of God.

DL Moody said, this, he said, every great movement of God begins with a figure on their knees. Do you walk with the Lord or are you acquaintances with God?

There was a recent report in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships by Kansas Professor Jeffrey Hall that found it takes a minimum of 200 hours to go from acquaintance to good friends. The study showed that you can't skip the hours to build depth of relationship, so if your relationship with God consists of touch points here and there, a service or a sermon or a prayer every once in awhile, you're not close with God. By definition, you are acquaintances, right, by scientific definition. There's no microwave faith. There's no replacement for time in God's word. Oswald Chambers said be aware of saying, I haven't time to read the Bible or pray, say rather, I haven't disciplined myself to do these things. That's true, right. Some things you don't do when you have time, you make time for those things.

Ananias responds to God by saying, yes, Lord. I love the way that King James says, it says, "*behold, I am here*". How many of us are fully present when the Lord speaks? How many of us are fully aware when the Holy Spirit of God drops something in your spirit? We seek God's work, yet we ignore his way. And here's the problem with God, whenever he speaks, whenever he prompts, it always throws off my plans, right? Are you with me? I've never had a prompting of the Lord come that doesn't...it's like not inconvenient. It's always inconvenient when God shows up, when God speaks to me, when God prompts me to try to do something. But here's the thing, don't ask God to guide your steps if you're not willing to move your feet. He speaks. What do we do? We listen and then we turn around and we listen and we stay where we're at and we do nothing. This was a man of obedience, Ananias was a man of conviction, of submission, of radical obedience, of unwavering devotion, and he was a man of pastoral healing.

He didn't just come along and talk to Saul across the room, right? Okay, here's what's going on. I came here, I showed up and here's ... no. Ananias walked across that room, he took his hands and he put his hands on Saul's face. He put his hands on his eyes and then he didn't just say something. No, he said, Brother Saul. This is public enemy number one he's talking to. The man that has brought pain and hurts to his spiritual family this is the man that he walks up to and he calls him family. Brother Saul the Lord Jesus who spoke to you he sent me so that you might be filled with the Holy Spirit and he touches him and he's healed y'all. Saul is healed the scales, fall off of his eyes and he's baptized and he's made family in that moment.

If you pass on pastoral love and healing touch to anybody around you today or recently, maybe it's the person that God's calling you, that you're begging for him not to. Hmm. Maybe it's just the person that God has placed in your path. Maybe it's the person that's sitting in your row, a person that's near you. But God has something to say through you. Somebody near you needs

your encouragement. Somebody near you needs your healing touch they need the word of the Lord that God has placed within you. They need that prompting. They need that exhortation that God has placed within you. Sometimes we'd go to church, but we never actually show up to church. We don't bring our giftings. We don't bring our love. We don't bring our resources. We don't bring our awareness and our sensitivity to the spirit of God and the kindness of his spirit. Someone says well, maybe I'd go to the wrong person. Listen, you can go to 20 wrong people and if you bring some encouragement, that's okay, they won't mind it. But guess what? When you get to the 21st person that is the right person, woo the Holy Spirit's going to show up and show off in that moment and he'll do something that cannot be done in the flesh and he will bring encouragement.

When I was 16 years old, our church used to hold a Tuesday night prayer meeting. It was at, I think it was one 29 West Benton downtown and this tiny little white church with stain glass windows, the old church. And we would go there on Tuesday we would pray and that season I was in a season of despair, of doubt, of depression. And I was praying to myself and I was seeking the Lord and I was those sharing with God, I was talking. And a friend Steve Andres came up behind me. He had a hand of healing that day. He put his hand on me and he began to pray some of the things that I was speaking to God. Have you ever had your mail read in prayer before? He read my mail and he prayed and it was that moment that God spoke to me. I know you. I see you. I know your name. I know your stuff. You are not alone. I am with you and my people are with you.

Somebody around you needs to hear from you. They need to get some of your encouragement. Listen, from time to time, as I pray, as I'm minister, I give to others, you know what it from time to time somebody will have said, man, you read my mail. Every time it's said I give God thanks. Thank you God that you sent somebody to me to put a healing hand on my shoulder to read my mail to remind me that you know who I am, that you know my name. Every time I hear that, I wonder if every time Paul Saul, Paul ministered, I wonder when he heard a story of can God redeem me? No, you don't know my path. Every time he heard that if he would go back and say, God, I give you thanks. Thank you. Look, you know what he does? He prays it forward, doesn't he? I pray it forward every time I hear that.

What is your story that needs to be replicated, that needs to be prayed forward into somebody else? Saul, prays this forward in a moment in verse 18, excuse me, Ananias praise that into him in verse 18

¹⁸ *"Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized."*

Both literally and figuratively scales fell off his eyes. What were those scales in the figurative place? Maybe they were scales of prejudice, scales of hate that began to fall off is that scales of doubt that began to fall off of him and the Holy Spirit came upon him. When you step out in faith, God shows up in power. For some of us will never see the multiplication, this is what hard. Steven, he never saw the multiplication of his faith, did he? Because it was in the dying moment that Saul was at the lead of stoning of executing young Stephen and Steven in that moment he prayed a prayer. In Acts chapter seven verse 60 he said,

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Saul's conversion was an answer to the prayer that Stephen prayed when he was dying. He would never see his multiplication. But that day would come, would it not? And we live in this right now moment of praise for a back then prayer that was prayed and the multiplication happen right here and right now. Some of us, we do something, we step out in faith and then we say it didn't work. I got no, I didn't do the right thing or God, you're not here or that wasn't a prompting. No, hold on, the seed's still underneath the soil. Give it some time because the Holy Spirit is a good gardener, isn't he? He waters well, don't discount the fruit that will come through a simple act of courage.

I want to invite our worship team to come and it all of our locations, you can begin to play. I started out the sermon by telling the story of this incredible turnaround of Alfred Nobel. He was able to change his legacy from one legacy to another and for good late in life. And it was in 1873 that the daughter of an impoverished Austrian field marshal, her name was Berta von Suttner. She worked as a secretary, housekeeper for Alfred Nobel and she decided to apply for this job because she disagreed so vehemently with the way that he lived his life and what he was doing. So she applies, she gets the job and she was there for a season. I don't know if it was to understand or if it was to influence, but she was there for a season. She got to know him. She ended up getting married and moving away, but began this 20 year correspondence with Alfred Nobel around the idea of peace. And it's largely credited to her the reason that Nobel decided to include the Nobel Peace Prize. The most celebrated and influential recognition of peace never would have existed without the work and influence of a seemingly inconsequential woman, a woman who stepped out in faith, who decided to serve someone opposite from her beliefs. What miracle is on the other side of your obedience? What testimony is on the other side of your bold action? What does God want to say through your life?

Leonard Ravenhill said, “The early church was married to poverty, prisons and persecutions. Today, the church is married to prosperity, personality, and popularity.” Faith will cost you something, but it will gain you everything.

So Lord Jesus, I come to you and I pray over us as a church today. I pray that you would incite boldness, that you would help us to live in radical obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit of God as we become more aware of your presence that is all around us. Blind us, so that we can see. We submit ourselves to you today. And I pray in every hearer today that a bold action would be incited in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Amen.