

Guest Preacher- Mr Scott Macleod

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: 26 November 2023

Preacher: Mr Scott Macleod

[0 : 00] I want us to now turn to the passage that we read together in the book of Acts. And what we'll focus on this morning with the time remaining, if you look at verse 15, we'll read that verse there, it says, But the Lord said to him, Go, for he has a chosen instrument of mine, to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

This passage is one that is probably familiar to most of us. A conversion of Saul, he changed his name to Paul. And you'll forgive me if I say the wrong name in the context.

And it's the astonishing work of what God can do. In the heart of someone and the life of someone who is so turned against the ways of God.

He can take someone who is proudly going their own way, stop them, and change them to one that is then completely devoted to God.

It is the great work of conversion. For many of us know in our own hearts the lives that we once lived and the change that has taken place. And even ourselves wonder how it happened.

[1 : 36] It is not of our doing. It is the work of God's presence and appearing before us. The Spirit is working within our hearts and changing us.

Saul goes from one that is sought, that is seeking out to murder the people, to someone who then sits with them and teaches them all about Jesus Christ.

And in many ways, we don't understand how this happens. How on earth can someone like this, we can imagine someone in the world today that we may know, that may be turned and hated against God.

And you know what? God can turn that person to be one that is joined with us in worshipping him. We don't understand.

But it is a sure work of God. But Saul is not the only character in this passage. We come across someone else called Ananias. Ananias.

[2 : 41] And seemingly, he was a resident of Damascus. And he seems to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. A believer who followed the Christian way.

And as we read this passage, we find that these two men have been directed by divine authority. The Lord has appeared to both men and gave them both instructions for them to listen to.

Saul, as he was on his way, doing his own thing. He's been stopped by Jesus. But Ananias, who is one that has been living the Christian life, is told to arise and to go.

We are told here in the verse that we read that Saul is to be an instrument of the Lord. But can we not say the same thing about Ananias?

Surely he was an instrument to the Lord's purposes too. To fulfil a different purpose. But that does not stop there.

[3 : 54] But is it not true that every Christian gathered here? It can be said that we are instruments for the purposes of God. Whatever that purpose is, the Lord has his instruments in his church.

Whether you're sitting here, whether you're listening online, whether you're young in faith, whether you're new in faith, or whether you're old in faith, whether you've been walking along this way for a long time, we are all instruments when we place ourselves in the hand of God.

What does it mean to be an instrument of God? Well, what is an instrument? You can imagine a guitar or a piano or something like that.

They can play amazing music. They can also play horrendous music. What's the difference? The difference is whoever is playing it, isn't it?

You know, you can have the best instrument in the world sitting in your living room. There's a film called Greenbrück. And in it, the man was a pianist.

[5 : 08] He was a professional piano player. And he travelled across America. And he had to have a Steinway piano. That was the best piano in his eyes.

So it was the one he needed to play in, to perform for the people. But if I had a Steinway piano in my house, it doesn't mean I can play it.

It doesn't mean I can do anything good with it. It's quite the opposite. I wouldn't like you to hear it. So having an instrument does not make me a pianist.

or a musician. The difference is in the one who plays it. When someone plays wonderful music, they don't go, wow, isn't that a great piano?

They go, wow, isn't that person who played it amazing at playing the piano? And that can go for everything in life.

[6 : 10] It's not just, if I had got a doctor's bag and all these different tools a doctor would have. I'm not a doctor. I wouldn't know what to do with it. I would have all these different pieces in the bag and I would try something or pick up something else and I wouldn't know what to do.

But the doctor, who knows what to do with every piece, knows where each piece goes, knows when he should use each piece to make the person better.

You see, it depends whose hands hold it, whose hands play the instrument. That's the difference.

And the word here in the passage is not referring to a piece of musical apparatus, the instrument.

The older version says it was a vessel, a chosen vessel. That's one that maybe we're more familiar with. A vessel is just a bowl that you put things in. And if the Lord would pick up that bowl, again, in his hands, he would pick up the bowl and he would fill it with the goodness that he has and then pass it around the people so they could take from that bowl the goodness.

[7 : 31] It depends who fills it. It depends whose hands hold the vessel. And everyone here should realize that we are to place ourselves in the hands of God.

The Christian especially should place ourselves in the hands of God. Even the unbeliever must realize that in the hands of God, we fulfill our purpose to glorify and enjoy him.

It's what the first catechism says, if you know it. It is in God's hands that we are put to the most effective use and fulfill the purpose of why we are here.

And we honor God when we do so. So looking at this passage, we can see there are two instruments in it. Saul and Ananias.

Both vessels or instruments that glorify God and know their obedience and individuals that are used for different purposes.

[8 : 37] Saul, as he goes on his way, is first to stop. Ananias, maybe he was stopped, the believer. He was told to get up and go.

So Saul stopped. What do we know about Saul stopping? Saul was on his way. He was trying to catch the Christians, to stop them, sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

And he had a letter from the high priest that gave him authority to take them with him. he was on his way with a company of men, almost like a small army, to catch all these people.

And it seems like no one could stop him. Who could stop this man with the bad things that he was doing? But as we, as we, as they went, we read in verse 3 that as he went on his way, as he saw, as he approached Damascus, he's nearly there, suddenly a light from heaven shone around him and stopped him.

Now such was the light that he fell. And he collapsed, is what the word says. He collapsed before this light.

[9 : 55] He could not stand before this light because who was it? Jesus. Who can stand before Jesus Christ?

He has a greater authority than Paul had in his pocket. No one can stand before the presence of Christ if Christ is not within them.

And from this light Saul heard this voice. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Now we would assume that for all the things that Saul was doing, catching all the Christians and persecuting them, that Jesus would be angry with us.

But it doesn't come across in the words that he says. Jesus says, Saul, Saul. And when a name is repeated in the Bible, it's an expression of compassion, an expression of love, affection, concern.

You may recall other times where that happens. Samuel, Samuel, when he calls them when he's in the night. Or times when people aren't doing the right things, like here.

[11 : 15] Martha, Martha, he was busy not listening to Jesus. Simon, Simon. It is far from anger that Jesus expresses in the passage. It is his compassion.

Saul saw asking, why do you persecute me? Saul did not have an answer for that. For he knew, surely, that there was no sufficient answer to give before this authority.

And although he asked by saying, who are you, Lord? I believe he knew just to confirm who he was speaking to.

He was answered with, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Jesus stopped this man. Jesus was the only one who could stop this man. And after this account here, where the light shone and blinded him, he was given direction to go into the city and essentially wait.

Stop for a wee while more. And for three days he waited there without seeing, without eating. Can you imagine what Paul, Saul, was thinking for these days?

[12 : 33] He had been persecuting the people of Christ. Christ appeared to him. And although it was a message of compassion, I still believe he would have been going through everything in his head.

I've killed people because they believed in Christ. I've persecuted all these people. What is Christ going to do to me? What is Jesus going to do to me now?

And he's waiting there for three days. I believe he would have almost gone mad. Not been able to do anything. And going through in his head what Christ was going to do in revenge.

But it wasn't like that. He got a vision. He got a vision of Ananias coming to him. And I believe this is why he got the vision. To keep him and to give him a hope beyond his understanding.

With his sight removed I believed he was forced to look within himself. When he was stopped it's a good thing to do. Look within ourselves and consider who we are before Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

[13 : 49] Who am I? Saul understood whose hands he had been placed in. whose hands had been playing his life out.

It was the devil that was in control of him. As he persecuted the Christians as he looked within himself he understood that he was living a life against Jesus Christ and that his vessel had not been filled by Jesus Christ.

But the Lord was here to meet his need. to fill his vessel with compassionate love, mercy and abundant grace.

And that is the point here for Saul. And though he lived a life turned against God in the most horrific ways we can see that the Lord saved him nonetheless.

And though he may have expected death for all the things that he had done he expected punishment of some sort in return return, the Lord did not administer that to him but gave him hope and eternal life.

[15 : 03] I am fully persuaded that he knew that he should have died but he was saved because of all the things that he had done.

there's a great compassion of Jesus Christ which is the same Jesus Christ today. We may not be opposing the church but we may well be living a life without Jesus and for this moment maybe he has stopped you to come under the light and power of the gospel regardless of how you have lived your life up to this point.

Regardless of how you have lived your life up to this point he has stopped you to call you by name not once but twice and all his compassion is extended to every single one of us here.

On the cross he died for you and he's asking every single one of us here why are you living your life without me?

What are you going to say to him? What reasons can you come up with? He has offered you the riches of his love and inheritance to come with him and to come into his hands.

[16 : 33] What are you going to say to him? He's saying to you I am Jesus whom you are rejecting. There's no answer.

why would you reject this man who gave his life for you? Before his glory we will not have an answer for every reason that we have will collapse.

It will fall flat in his face. There will be nothing to say other than fall before him and confess where every knee shall bow and every tongue.

Confess that he is the Lord. So stop and consider who you are in the light of Jesus Christ. Is our vessel empty? Is it filled with the things of the world?

Well, what are they worth? Pour it out and come to Christ. Pray. Pray. God knew this man was praying.

[17 : 39] He heard his prayer and he sent him Ananias. Ananias as a believer.

Ananias arise. Ananias was told to go. With all understanding Ananias was a mature Christian. But the Lord spoke with him also.

And it is interesting to note that as a disciple of Christ he was only addressed by name once. I don't know why but it's maybe something that you can look at yourselves.

And it is worth noting that Ananias was not the instrument to bring conversion. God used him as an instrument surrounding his conversion to confirm his conversion.

He was an encouragement to Saul who had this vision and then he had this man come to him after having the appearance of Christ that had all tied together and it was surely the work of God before before the heavens in his own vision and in his own people.

[18 : 57] Ananias spoke the Lord spoke with Ananias and said to him to go when he spoke to him first he said Ananias said here I am.

Essentially saying to the Lord I am willing to go and then the order comes there in verse 11 and the Lord said to him rise and go to the street called straight and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarshish named Saul for behold he is praying and he has seen a vision a man named Ananias come and lay his hands on him so he might regain his sight but Ananias answered Lord I have heard from many about this man how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem although he was ready to go here I am Lord as soon as he heard Saul of Tarshish he recoiled then it's not what he wanted he knew all about Saul of Tarshish his infamous reputation towards the treatment of Christians Ananias essentially responds to God you can't be serious not this this can't be right I can't do this he has authority from the chief priest to bind everyone who call on your name it would be certain imprisonment or death for me but he saw us to be a man that would no longer bind his name the difference is that he would carry his name Ananias though he was so resistant to listen and obey what had been said before him and telling him to go it's quite often what we're like it's quite often what happens in fact when God comes to us telling us to go we don't think we can do it whatever it is that he tells us to do often it doesn't make sense in that head to do it nonetheless he tells his people to go God has a plan for each of us it may surprise us in what direction he will take us it may surprise us at the time of the life that he tells us to go for some there is a time to stop and reflect for others there is a time to listen to his word and act upon it to go but if we are a believer and we walk in his way we are instruments in his hands we are vessels in this world to be shared that others would take out and see the glory of God that has been placed and the riches of his grace placed in us we as a people of

God on this island are particularly privileged to have the rich inheritance that we have that we have had years of sitting maybe listening at the feet of Jesus what have we done to it what have we done with it we're instruments we're to do something we're a tool for a purpose whose hands are we we're not ornaments to sit and look at in your house we're instruments to be played for a purpose to be used why for the glory of God Paul as we go on in the passage he was killed for his faith as we go on reading about Paul he counted everything that he knew in his life as rubbish compared to knowing

Christ Jesus the world was nothing to him after Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus he was an instrument that brought glory to God in such an extraordinary way until he himself was poured out as an offering but according to tradition Ananias was arrested by Roman governor Lysinus because he was the head figure in Damascus of the Christians there and apparently he too paid the ultimate price forbearing the name of the Lord it is said that he was stoned to death outside the walls of Damascus we know we don't we're not told this we don't know about this about the work that

[24 : 19] Ananias did in Damascus we don't hear about his death you know we're told to go for different purposes Paul was extraordinary in what he was told to do Ananias stayed in Damascus and taught the people but he wasn't ashamed of the name he still placed himself in the hands of his master to play the tune that God had purposed him to play for his people and he was willing to give his life in the same manner as Saul or Paul did the world was now compared to knowing Jesus Christ they were so willing to die for him so what does it mean to be an instrument of God to be obedient to what he says to us whether it's stop sit down arise or go to carry the name of Christ often to the most difficult places maybe to a far away land it may be to the people of Scotland it may

be to be a equally difficult place where someone is sitting at home mourning where someone is struggling with anxiety or illness that we carry his name for his glory like I said at the beginning when you hear a great piece of music the piano is not praised the person who plays it is praised we are instruments if we believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ and wherever we go as instruments whatever we do as instruments the return of praise from the people and everyone else should be to the glory of God isn't God good but what we have to do is place our hands into his which is difficult for us to do we need to submit ourselves and say Lord I am yours are we willing to place ourselves in the hands of Jesus are we willing to be instruments in his hands today tomorrow and for the rest of our lives are we trusting in him with everything that we have that he will lift us and guide us and use us for his glory

I want to conclude by reading a poem some of you may know it it's a poem about a violin that went to auction I'll just close with this it was battered and scarred and the auctioneer thought it was hardly worth his while to waste his time on the old violin but he held it up with a smile what am I bid good people he cried who starts the bidding for me one dollar one dollar do I hear two two dollars who makes it three three dollars once three dollars twice going for three but no from the room far back a grey bearded man came forward and picked up the bow then wiping the dust from the old violin and tightening up the strings he played a melody pure and sweet as sweet as the angel sings the music ceased and the auctioneer with a voice that was quiet and low said now what am I bid for this old violin as he held it aloft with its bow one thousand one thousand do I hear two two thousand who makes it three three thousand once three thousand twice going and gone said he the audience cheered but some of them cried we just don't understand what changed its worth came the swift reply the touch of the master's hand and many a man with life out of tune all battered and bruised with hardship is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd much like that old violin they enjoy their life a glass of wine a game and he travels on he is going once he is going twice he is going and almost gone but the master comes and the foolish crowd never can quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that is wrought by the touch of the master's hand whose hands are we in this morning

Jesus Christ died for you because you are worth it in his eyes though battered and bruised though we are living lives that are lives of our own making following the things that we want that we would place ourselves in his hands and all glory and all praise would be to the change that the master made in our lives may that blessing may these thoughts be a blessing to each and every one of us this morning we'll conclude by singing in psalm 143 i'll conclude with prayer afterwards i find that on page 440 of the blue book that's the second version of psalm 143 just concluding verses from verse nine from my fierce enemy and safety do me guide because i flee to thee lord that thou mayest me hide my god alone art thou teach me thy righteousness thy spirit's good lead me to the land of uprightness o lord for thy name's sake be pleased to quicken me and for thy truth forth take my soul from misery and off thy grace destroy my foes and put to shame all those who my soul annoy for i thy servant am the concluding words they are of the psalmist with everything drawn before his concluding words are for i thy servant am let us sing to god will stand from my future enemy and safety do me guide for my fear should be in safety do me guide because

I plead to thee Lord the love is behind my God alone are love ditch me thy righteousness thy space could lead me to the land of the fight mess O Lord for thy name sake be pleased to quicken me and for

[33 : 38] I could forsake take my soul from misery and of thy grace destroy my foes and put to shame all who rise to my soul and I for I I serve and am to the word of prayer our heavenly father as we still ourselves and have stilled ourselves before your word may it speak to us may it have a profound influence in our lives by the power of your spirit Lord may we be people who are willing to put ourselves in your hands and that our lives may be a life played out to the praise and glory of your name and though many may not understand that we know within our hearts to whom else can we go the one that died on the cross for us at

Cal gives me hope and assurance for I do not know what is ahead of me whether it be to stop or whether it be to go that it will be a life of obedience to the words of Christ Jesus be with us as we part remain with us and bless the preaching of the service this evening forgive us our sins Jesus sake Amen Don't put the People First I know what do you wanna pray or you gonna write