

## **Acts 9:1-19a**

### **Read Acts 9:1-19a**

This is perhaps the most famous of Christian conversions, that of Saul to Paul. Our current sermon series on belonging, extending hospitality, invites us to reflect primarily on Ananias as the one who extends hospitality to an enemy.

1. From the details of the text locate how Saul and Ananias may be thinking / feeling leading up to their interaction.

*Saul – The last words of Jesus to him were "go into the city and I will tell you what to do". It sounds rather ominous doesn't it? He has gone in a moment from believing he is right at the center of God's will to knowing he has missed the boat entirely. He goes from feeling he was building the people of God to knowing he is persecuting the people of God. He goes from believing Jesus was no Messiah to encountering the living God as Jesus. He is undone. He is under the judgment of God. Likely he is sitting in abject fear. The imagery of God's judgement that he likely leveraged against his fellow Israelites to motivate obedience now animates his fears.*

*Ananias – Incredulous. Really? Your grace and mercy are extending to Saul of Tarsus? Do you know how evil this man is? What he has done to your people? What he has come to do to me? Alongside this incredulity there is likely fear. What will Saul do to me?*

2. It appears that Ananias took his feeling and his thinking and made the gospel a conversation partner. What likely was his internal conversation with the gospel to lead him to come to Saul with confidence and familial affection?

*There are likely more threads you can reflect upon here but these are the three I pulled on in the sermon. This is an unedited section of the sermon that is framed as an internal dialogue – so it may require some imagination:*

*Perhaps his internal dialogue followed these threads - Don't you know how evil this man is Jesus – he doesn't deserve your grace and forgiveness – he deserves judgement – oh yes – but so did I before your grace found me – yes but I have never done anything near as bad as Saul – oh but if I go down that route the currency of my relationship with you is not grace but works – and then I'm done for - for your holiness demands perfection – and no one can stand before you – I guess – I guess - Saul and I are the same - both on level footing at the foot of the cross – both adopted into your family by grace.*

*With every step closer I wonder if the fear grew – what if he turns on me once he receives sight – you may have touched him – but what about those temple guards – oh – but you have promised Lord to never leave me nor forsake me – you did not spare your only son but gave him up for me assuring me of your love and goodness*

*toward me always – not necessarily assuring me of my temporal safety but certainly my eternal safety – In my fear I will rest in your love and goodness Lord.*

*I wonder if as he stepped closer he's becoming more and more overwhelmed by the task before him – how can a man spewing murderous threats – sadistically enjoying mob violence against Christians become the kind of person who suddenly makes you known – proclaiming faithfully in word and deed your love and goodness – what words can I use – power can I demonstrate – logic can I muster to bring about such a thing – stop right there Ananias - that's my job – all I am asking you to do is go to him and lay your hands on him – I'm only asking you to be faithful in this one moment – leave the rest to me.*

3. What does Paul learn about the core of the gospel in the interaction between them?

*On the road he had been exposed as an enemy of God. One on whom the judgement of God should rightly rest. It was his enemy who embodied the good news to him. By embracing him as brother Ananias is revealing to Paul that there is nothing he could do, nothing that he had ever done that could leave him outside of God's grace love and forgiveness. By grace he has been adopted as a son, making him and Ananias brothers.*

### **Read Luke 10:25-37**

In a way this parable of Jesus gives us a similar picture. A man beaten, mugged and left for dead opens his eyes to behold his enemy, the Samaritan, wiping blood from his face and attending to his every need.

4. For Jesus the picture of an enemy coming in love was at the core of the gospel. Discuss.

*This text from Romans I believe will be key in reflecting upon this aspect of the gospel.*

*<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Romans 5:8-10*

*We are enemies of God in our sin and yet it is God our enemy who comes and lays down his life for us on the cross in Jesus. By grace adopting us as children, by grace making us heirs of new creation. This is the core of the gospel. Illustrated in the parable, and in the interaction between Saul and Ananias.*

5. Ananias reveals to us that extending hospitality is about becoming an embodiment of the gospel to another. Discuss

*This is some ways is the central truth of the series – feel free to linger here.*

6. What does our reflection on Ananias teach us about how we might be shaped to be an embodiment of the gospel for others?

*Here is an unedited section of the sermon that might help frame your discussion:*

*As a Christian – a church leader – Ananias likely had countless interactions where he'd extended such hospitality – embodied the gospel for the sake of another – and had likely done so without giving it much thought - this encounter was different only in who the other was – in this case an enemy – one who wasn't safe – one who didn't in any way stir up natural affection – in fact quite the opposite.*

*Everyone of us have encounters with people who don't feel safe – with whom we have distance – estrangement – brokenness – people who don't in any way stir up natural affection – and in the face of their need – the face of an unavoidable interaction – we are often tempted to either recoil in fear – lash out in anger – or pass by with indifference – but the question the Spirit lays before us through his word this day is – how can I embody the welcome – grace – love – forgiveness and mercy of God for them in this moment? How might the gospel be embodied here?*

*But I don't feel like doing that – none of us will feel like doing it – Ananias didn't feel like doing it – but it seems he took hold of what he was feeling – the gospel became a conversation partner – when you don't feel like doing it - take hold of your feelings – your thinking – and apply the gospel to them – ask the Spirit to press the love and grace mercy of Jesus down into those places in your heart – not just for the other's sake – but for your sake – for in so doing the glory of the gospel – the immensity of his love – will become that much more real to you.*

*But it's too much – how can I possibly? – if I do that in this moment - I'll be required to do more – say more – be more – I'm not sure I have the resources for that! Or even want that! Do you know who this person is?*

*Who says you need to give more – say more – do more – be more? I remember early on in my life as a minister – hearing heartbreaking story after heartbreaking story – encountering deep need after deep need – often in those who didn't in any way stir up natural affection - the knowing of these stories left me with the feeling that I was now responsible for journeying to wholeness with them – it was overwhelming - laying the ground work for burnout – but as I prayed – as I suffered - I got the sense that God was saying to me – stop trying to do my job – I don't ask you to do what only I can do – I'm only asking you to be faithful in that one moment of encounter – how can you embody the gospel for this person - at this time?*

*We have no idea what one simple act of embodied gospel hospitality will have on another – none whatsoever – all Ananias did was put his hand on Saul and call him brother – that's it - and in God's hands that one moment had incredible impact on not only Saul – but on the entire history of the world – that one touch - one word – brought the gospel home to a man who ultimately brought the gospel to us – when invited to gospel hospitality - don't worry about what comes next – that's in God's hands – simply ask - how can I in this moment embody the gospel?*

What will be the impact upon us as we do?

*As we embody the gospel the love, grace, forgiveness and mercy of God will become that much more real to us. The glory of the gospel overwhelming our senses, as we are immersed in the immensity of his love for us in Jesus.*