

A.D. Episode 9
The Significance of Nobody
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*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. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

INTRODUCTION

Good morning!

As you know, we've been going through the Book of Acts and we're doing so in relation to the new mini-series *A.D.* It's been wonderful to see the Acts of the Apostles acted out on television, hasn't it? It's really inspiring!

Today we're going to talk about the effect of what the Lord can do with just one man. A man He chooses. A murderer.

A man who had some small notoriety, but in the grand scheme of things he was just a nobody. In some ways he was just like most of us. Some education. Some influence, but nothing really special...until God got a hold of him. And He used him to turn the world upside down.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 9 where we are going to meet that man, a man who murdered Jewish Christians, and put fear into the hearts of the disciples because of his zeal to stamp them out, even after he came to Christ. He was a truly scary man, but we almost never think of him in this way because of how drastically God changed him.

This cold-blooded killer's name was Saul.

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out **murderous threats** against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

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

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

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

“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

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. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

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.”

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

Wow! Can you imagine what this experience was like for Saul?

Here he was hunting down these Jews who thought the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth, having them imprisoned, stoned like Stephen, and murdered, and now he comes face to face with the risen Christ...and realizes he’s wrong!

Not mistaken, but flat out dead wrong! Jesus is the Messiah and is risen from the dead and has called you out for everything you’ve done against Him...and just to be sure you get the message He blinds you for three days.

Everything Saul thought he knew and believed, at least initially in these three days, was wrong. He had blatantly sinned against God, murdered his fellow Jews with a near reckless zeal, and was now completely blind, helpless, afraid, and mixed up on so many levels Freud would have a meltdown analyzing him.

Saul was a mess. He was spiritually concussed! And he had to think about it for three...long...lonely...days.

I doubt that any of us have ever been in his shoes. So wrong on so many levels it's hard to fathom. Responsible for murdering innocent people! Think of that. It's like Osama bin Laden has been beheading Christians, and then has a vision of Jesus Christ, and overnight becomes like Billy Graham evangelizing the entire Muslim world.

How do you wrap your mind around that?

And how do you treat someone like that if you're a Christian and he comes to you, like Saul did with Ananias, for help? Do you trust a murderer?

And then Ananias tells him about Jesus, and heals him!

This is the stuff people have nervous breakdowns over...massive delusions that upend your world...a complete and utter breaking point for the hardest criminal! You are face to face with God and you have been killing His loved ones with reckless abandon. He stops you, gets your attention, and then heals you for a very special mission.

And now...what if it happened...to you?

What if God chose **you** to be his instrument?

Crazy? Really? Why not?

Saul...a total nobody like you or me, whom God raised up to do something significant for Him...probably thought the same thing! Now consider Saul's wild experience on the road and tell me it's still crazy to say that any one of us could have been chosen too.

So how does God select someone insignificant like you or Saul? A real nobody...even a murderer!

MESSAGE

It's not that far-fetched that God could have picked you. The Bible is filled with examples of nobodies who became somebodies for God. It appears to be God's M.O. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:27,

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the **weak** things of the world to shame the strong.*

Moses and Daniel come to mind as big nobodies who became somebodies too, but the biggest nobody was just a kid...David.

Look at how God picked him, that smelly shepherd boy, Jesse's runt son, who grew up to be the King of Israel, in 1 Samuel 16:1-13,

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

The Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.”

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this one either.” Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the Lord chosen this one.” Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen these.” So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

So David is a kid. Nothing special really. He had a good heart though, but Saul was a murderer with a bad heart. Two extremes. It’s mind-boggling for what His criteria is for “a chosen instrument.”

Just about the most insignificant person in the Old Testament, but he went on to kill Goliath and rose to greatness to lead God's nation. I wonder why God picked him. Look at his own take on his life as a grown man praying in 2 Samuel 7:18-23,

Then David the king went in and sat before the Lord, and he said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? "And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord God, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O Lord God. "Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord God! "For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. "For this reason You are great, O Lord God; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. "And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods?"

We all know what David did for God in the Old Testament. He was a superstar for God. And in the same way, Saul went on to be the most important figure in the New Testament, devoting his life to bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. This was a very big deal in the post resurrection period when the Church was set up in the Book of Acts because before Cornelius came to faith in chapter 10...all the first Christians were Jews.

And all the Jews, from Peter on down, assumed that the gospel was strictly a Jewish message from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was their Messiah, their Law, their Temple, and their religion.

So when Saul believed and became known by his Gentile name of Paul, and took the message to the rest of the world, it was a very big deal...especially for most you in this room today...but nearly a deal breaker for many Jewish Christians.

He changed the world and flipped it on its ear. A nobody, like a smelly shepherd kid.

So who was this Paul anyway? What do we know about him besides killing Christians? He lists his short resume in his letter to Philippi in Philippians 3:4-6,

...although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Not exactly a great man of his time like Caesar Augustus or King Herod, and yet God chose him, and made him great. We may never know why God chose Paul, but He did.

And He did more with Paul than any other man in the New Testament.

And why do you think that happened? I have always wondered if there is an untold story behind this great man of God who was not great originally.

I think that there was more to it, or at least I like to *think* that there was more to it anyway.

I like to think that somewhere, someone who was also insignificant who knew Saul, maybe an old babysitter or a neighbor or a friend, made an extra-ordinary effort to pray for him. I mean really pray for him. Don't you think that something moved God to pick him out of all the Jews in Israel? We know God looked at David's heart and chose him.

Something moved God to pick a murderer! How do we explain it?

What if there are chapters of the Bible unread by us, reserved in Heaven for us to read when we get there?

Like the Paul Harvey "rest of the story" radio snippets. Maybe some secret prayer chapters that show behind the scenes stuff, how He used people, folks we'll never meet until we get to Heaven, who shouldered the burden of all the greats we read about in fervent prayer...Gideon, Deborah, Mary, Jonathan, Stephen, Moses, etc.

I know it's a **What If** game, but imagine...**What If?**

I'm not talking about heresy here. The Scriptures are complete, but I'm just trying to stir up your faith a bit. I'm talking about letting your "faith imagination" run wild with the possibilities of God's work "behind the scenes" stories that were influenced by prayer.

An insignificant nobody who just prayed. Maybe an invalid, who could do nothing at all, but sit there and pray...for years.

Certainly someone was praying for Saul. His worldwide effect is too great not to have been prayed over and through and around by some sweet believer.

And now...**What If**...you could be that person for a new Saul?

APPLICATION

If you knew that you could do anything for God, if money or responsibilities were not an issue, what would you do? What dream would you chase for God if you knew you couldn't fail? Would you become a writer? A pastor? A missionary? A philanthropist who gave millions to the gospel? An evangelist?

What would you do, as insignificant as you are, for Jesus Christ if you knew you could not fail? If He chose you to be His instrument.

I'd like to challenge you this morning to consider doing this. If you're up for it, take upon yourself this challenge.

Pick someone who you think is insignificant and pray for them to make a big impact for Jesus Christ. I mean a BIG impact. I want you to take it upon yourself to pray for this person all the time, if you can, but not just for today or this month, or this year.

I'm asking you to pray for them for the rest of your life...pray for them to become significant. Be that insignificant prayer person behind an insignificant "Saul" to become a significant "Paul" for our generation.

Maybe it's an enemy of Christ, a murderer like Saul. Maybe it's a crooked politician. Maybe it's your son or daughter. Maybe it's your crabby neighbor or the kid in your English class. Maybe a rock star or actor or scientist.

Whoever it is, let your faith imagination run free and zero in on them with the cross-hairs of your prayer life.

Pray that God would bring them to Him if they do not know Jesus, to spiritual maturity, and make a significant impact for the Kingdom of God. Will you accept this challenge and see what God will do?

Crazy maybe, but so is what we see happening in the Book of Acts. God is performing miracles left and right. That's what is so fun to actually see in **A.D.**

Will you do that for the rest of your life? Will you become significant yourself in a quiet, behind the scenes way, and pray for a Saul in your life to become a Paul?

Sure there will be days you might forget, but what if you drenched someone insignificant in prayer for years and years and years and years and years.

Remember what C.T. Studd said about the man in Heaven who passed the throngs of believers on the way to God's throne? "*There goes the man who would not be radical for Jesus.*"

Won't you be radical today by committing to pray for someone like Paul to turn the world upside down for Jesus?

My prayer is that you will...hundreds and thousands of you will do that. Wouldn't that be something? To get to Heaven and meet all the people whose lives were changed by your prayers for this Saul to one day become a Paul...and thousands of us actually did it?

INVITATION / CLOSING

[optional: insert personal story]

Sound crazy? It's not that far fetched.

I recently heard the story of a man who has become quite famous as a Christian author and has influenced millions for Christ with several *New York Times* bestsellers. He told me that he was nothing special, never really was, and could not explain God's hand on his life...until one day when he recently went back to his small hometown in the middle of nowhere.

Getting on in years, for some nostalgic reason he guessed, he decided to visit people whom he had known growing up, but hadn't seen in eons. As he went about getting reacquainted with old schoolmates and neighbors who were still alive, he bumped into his childhood Sunday school teacher.

Having been kind of a stinker and not a very well behaved boy, he was somewhat reluctant to remind her of who he was, but he did.

"Of course, I remember you," she said. "You were a real handful, which is why I took it upon myself to pray for you...every day."

"Every day," he asked incredulously. No one does that and he was only in her class for a year or so. "I'm in my 80's now and you are well beyond that. You prayed for me...every day?"

"Oh yes, every single day I prayed for you because I knew that God's hand was on you and He had big plans for your life. I prayed for you every day, even when you stopped coming to my class. I knew you were destined to do significant things for Him."

My friend was stunned, but it was true. And do you know what? Now he has a list of folks he prays for every day...for life! Wouldn't you like to be on his prayer list?!

Such is the power of prayer and what God can do with an insignificant life. Yours, mine, Saul, or David.

Is there someone insignificant in your life that you could prayerfully mold into a Paul?

I challenge you today to prayerfully give that idea some real time, mull it over, and see if God doesn't put someone on your heart. Someone who just might become a somebody for Christ because you helped them with your prayers.

Someone like Saul of Tarsus.

A significant nobody.

Let's pray.