

# Sermon: Small People Big Impact

## Acts 9:1-20

*Rev Dr Jos Strengholt*

Nick Watts, a British documentary filmmaker created a fascinating documentary The Human Footprint released in the UK in 2007. According to Watts the average person will speak 123,205,750 words in a life time.

That is 4,300 words per day.

Ananias is one of those characters in the bible whom we may easily overlook. If you count the words that he says, it is not more than about 70. Easy to miss really.

I do not know what about you, but I often wonder about the value of my life. We are born, we study, we work, we grow old, we die. We share the world with billions of people and we are part of a long world history.

Ananias shows us how a small man can be very important at the same time.

If Ananias had not faithfully obeyed his Lord at his particular moment in time, we might never have heard of Paul, the persecutor of the Christian faith, who became one of the greatest architects and evangelists of our faith.

Without Paul we would not be sitting here; without Ananias, there would have been no apostle Paul. A small man had great impact on church, yes on world history.

And we, little lights in a large dark world - we are like Ananias. We have lasting impact. The question is, whether our impact is good or bad.

I do not think Ananias ever dreamt of changing the course of history. And if that had been his goal, we might actually never have heard of him.

His goals were much more humble and down to earth. And I think that is why God used this man of 70 words only, to do something remarkable.

What was the secret of Ananias' positive impact?

Ananias was a real Jesus-man. He knew his Lord Jesus, he overcame his fears because of the words of Jesus, and he loved others with the healing love of Jesus.

## 1. Knew his Lord Jesus

Ananias is called a disciple. This means, he wanted to follow his Lord Jesus Christ. And one particular day, he had a vision of Jesus. And when in that vision, only his name 'Ananias' was mentioned, he knew it was his Lord speaking.

Ananias knew the voice of Jesus; when he heard it, he said, "Here I am Lord".

That is the right mentality. He knew his Lord, and he was available to him.

Are we available, so that when our Lord wants us to do something, we actually do it?

God directs our lives in many different ways. In Paul's case it was through a blinding light and a thunderstorm. In the case of Ananias, it was a vision - though it is not clear what he saw.

For us, much more common, is that God speaks through the Holy Scriptures. A particular verse or passage comes alive with a fresh relevance to our current situation.

Sometimes we hear his voice during worship. We open our hearts to God, and God opens up some new possibility for us.

Sometimes he speaks to us through a conversation with somebody that wakes us up to what we have been missing.

It can be a song on the radio or a scene in a TV show or a movie that resonates in us.

There are those instances when God has a particular purpose for a person's life and the communication becomes so direct that it can't be ignored. That's how it seems to have been in the case of Ananias.

The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes Lord," he answered.

Ananias knew that it was his Lord Jesus speaking to him. We hear so many voices around us, how can we know that this inspiration to do this or that truly comes from our Lord?

How do we know whether what our friends tell us, whether that idea you get from a book, or that sense that you have to do this or that, comes from God?

I think the simplest answer is, know your bible and know the common teachings of your church. And I do not mean your local church, but your church worldwide and throughout the ages.

God has revealed himself in his Word and in his Church throughout the centuries. So if you wonder whether you hear his voice or just your own, make sure it is never outside the pale of what his Word and what the whole worldwide church says.

The voice of Jesus will not whisper in your ear that you have to kill the director of an abortion clinic. And he will not whisper in your ear that if you just give money to this or that preacher, God will make you rich.

He will not tell you in a vision that you can ignore the needs of the poor. And he will not tell you that all religions are fine. He simply won't.

And we know this because God in his Word and in his Church, has been crystal-clear about these things.

So when our Lord spoke to Ananias, he knew it was Jesus. He did not like what he heard and it scared him, but He knew his Lord well, so he knew that it was Jesus who was speaking.

The small man Ananias - the 70-words-man - was great because he recognized the voice of Jesus Christ in the midst of the many voices.

## **2 Overcome fears through the word of Jesus**

What did Jesus say to Ananias?

Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

Ananias knew it was Jesus but he did not like what he heard. I love his honesty. It is much better to admit that you know what God wants you to do, and then to also admit you do not like it at all.

Better than to adapt your theology, and to deny what God is asking of us. Ananias knew Jesus, he knew what he asked. But it made him fearful and he discussed that with the Lord. That is a very mature attitude.

Well Lord, I am happy to be available to you, but how can you ask this of me!

Ananias knew that Paul was in Damascus with a letter from the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, to take any follower of Jesus captive. He knew how Paul has enthusiastically helped in the murder of Stephen.

Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem! And he has the authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.

I guess Ananias was truly scared.

By the way, in passing Ananias uses two new terms to describe the followers of Jesus. They are "the saints", and "those who call upon your name".

They are the saints - because they belong to God. And they call upon the name of Jesus. So the early church prayed to Jesus Christ.

Imagine these Jewish followers of Jesus. They knew the verse in the Old Testament - in Joel 2:32 - that says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord - that is, Jahweh - shall be saved.

Peter in his pentecostal speech repeats that verse exactly, and applies it to calling upon the name of Jesus. And that is what the early Christians did. They prayed to Jesus as to God, as to Jahweh.

That divine Lord Jesus is speaking to Ananias. And we listen to that same Lord. And even though he is our Lord and God, we can tell him that we do not like all what he asks of us. He invites us to such a dialogue of honesty.

And in such an honest dialogue with God, He patiently helps us.

The Lord had already told Ananias that Paul had had a vision in which he saw Ananias come and pray for him to regain his eyesight. Maybe Ananias preferred Paul to stay blind. Was that not his well deserved punishment for his evil behavior?

But now Jesus adds that Paul will be a chosen instrument for him, "to carry my name before the gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

Paul is a chosen instrument of Jesus, he will proclaim the name of Jesus worldwide.

This Jesus-ministry of Paul was still in the future; But Ananias trusted his Lord and he went to the house where Paul was.

Whenever you or I do something new, or when we take some personal action believing that God is calling for that, God does not give us the full road map with every stop and every obstacle clearly marked.

It has always been that way for people of faith. Hebrews 11:8 tells us that 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.'

By faith Ananias acted upon the Word of God, not knowing for sure how everything was going to work out, yet trusting that God had it all under control.

That made the 70-year-old man truly great. He knew his Lord, he knew what God asked of him, and even though there were reasons to fear - He trusted his Lord.

### **3 Ministering with the healing love of Jesus**

So Ananias went to the street called Straight - which even today can still be found in Damascus. He went to the house of Judas. There he met with Paul and the miracle happens.

Ananias laid his hands on Paul, and Paul could see again. A miracle.

But a greater miracle is how Ananias approached Paul. What are his first words? In Greek, the sequence is: "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus".

Here we see how Ananias has been touched by the healing love of Jesus, and how he approaches Paul with the same healing love.

He might well have approached Paul with suspicion, he might well have begun with a few curses, but no; his first words were 'Brother Saul'.

"Saul, brother." That must have sent the shivers through Paul. He was now adopted by the people he had until a few days previously persecuted - he was accepted as one of them. He was a brother now.

That Ananias was able to do this, is a miracle. It goes completely against the grain of our natural inclinations. 'Let Paul first feel how wrong he has been. Let he first us prove that he has really changed. He must be disciplined first.'

Nothing of that sort. He is embraced by the words of Ananias. He is touched by the hand of Ananias.

And Ananias immediately brings Jesus into the conversation.

This man of few words, whom we do not meet again in the Bible, is truly great.

We do not have to be very special people in order to touch the life of someone else with our words, our hands, our love.

And that simple gesture, that simple word, can have amazing impact on the life of someone else who needs it.

Do you remember some of the negative words people said to you? I am quite sure you have some of those sour memories. And the person who said those words or who treated you unkindly, probably does not even remember.

A few words, a bad look, the feeling of being ignored by someone, you can remember some of those moments for a lifetime. People who pushed you away, you remember the moments. And they continue to be painful.

If those people had such impact on you, it is reasonable to think that you have similar impact on others.

And therefore, how important it is that when our life touches the life of others, it builds them up, it encourages them, it points them to our Lord Jesus Christ.

You do not have to be a leader; you do not have to be a person of many words; but what you do and what you say, does impact others, often far beyond what you will ever know or imagine.

## **Conclusion**

So, we small people, we impact others. May our lives be informed by the voice of Jesus Christ and let us be available for him.

And even when what he asks of us is not easy, he can take our fear away.

And what he asks of us is that we adopt more people into our brotherly fellowship, through our love and kindness.

That truly heals people, as it healed the apostle Paul. A small gesture had great, worldwide, historical impact.

**Amen**