

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



Yes, Lord, I will

Ananias stood at the door and greeted his guests warmly as they entered his house. "Peace be with you," he said as he shook their hands.

They were all followers of the Way — members of the new Church that believed in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God. Every night these followers gathered for prayer and fellowship. Ananias was one of the leaders of the church in Damascus. Tonight he was clearly troubled about something, and he tried to compose himself before he spoke to the fellow believers.

"Friends in Christ," he began. "I have sad news from the church in Jerusalem. As you know, the Jewish leaders have strongly opposed our new Church. They have arrested many of our members for preaching the good news about Jesus. The Jewish leaders have brought them to trial before the Sanhedrin."

Ananias paused a moment and watched their faces for some kind of response. They waited anxiously for him to continue. As their leader, he must show faith — not fear.

"But now," Ananias continued, "I must report that one of our Church members, Stephen, was arrested and tried by the Sanhedrin. Stephen didn't weaken for a moment in his faith in Jesus. His beliefs enraged all who heard him speak. Stephen was stoned to death and now is the first follower to die for his belief in Jesus."

A hushed sense of disbelief fell over the group. It was Ananias who broke the

silence. "Stephen is just the beginning of a new wave of persecution that has begun against our Church. It doesn't surprise me. Jesus said that we would have to suffer, but He also told us that He'd never leave us. Faith in Jesus will keep us strong. We still have much to be thankful for; the Church continues to grow despite the persecution."

Ananias led a prayer service, and the meeting ended. One of the followers, Benjamin, waited for the others to leave so that he could speak to Ananias. "Ananias, you seem very worried," he said. "It's going to get much worse for us, isn't it?"

"The Jewish leaders are perhaps as determined in their lack of belief in Jesus as we are in our belief," Ananias admitted. "There is something else that I didn't mention to the others. A man, Saul, is tireless in his search for followers of the Way. He intends to arrest all believers and bring them to trial. I have heard that he plans to come to Damascus from Jerusalem where he has been responsible for the persecution of many of our Church members."

"But, Ananias," Benjamin said calmly, "we must remain committed to bringing the message about Jesus to people everywhere. This is our mission as His followers."

"I know, Benjamin. And we can do nothing less. Please pray for me. Pray for us all," Ananias said sadly.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Saul began a house-to-house search for the followers of Jesus. He went to the high priest and said, "Many of these criminals have fled to Damascus. I will go there and bring them back for trial. Please provide me with a

letter of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus."

The very next day, Saul set off for Damascus. Suddenly, as he approached the city, a brilliant light shone down upon him from heaven. Saul was very frightened and fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul tried to see who was calling him, but the light was so bright that it had blinded him. He called out, "Who is speaking to me? Who am I persecuting?"

The voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now go into the city of Damascus and await further instructions."

The two men traveling with Saul had to lead him by the arm into the city because he could not see. They took him to a house on Straight Street. Saul neither ate nor drank for three days. Instead, he prayed silently to the Lord. "Oh, Jesus," he said, "I am sorry for all of my sins against You. Please forgive me. I give my whole life over to You; I am Your servant."

In another house in Damascus, Ananias was praying, too. "Please, Jesus, increase my faith. I want to be a strong witness for You. Help us to survive this persecution."

As Ananias continued to pray, the Lord spoke to him in a vision. "Ananias, I want you to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. There you will find a man named Saul. He is praying to Me right now. I have shown him a vision of you coming in and healing him of his blindness."

"But, Lord," Ananias replied, "we have all heard about the terrible things Saul has done in Jerusalem to our fellow believers. Now he has come to Damascus to arrest all of us here who believe in You."

The Lord answered, "Go and do as I say. I have chosen Saul to take My message to all nations. He will suffer much for Me."

"Yes, Lord, I will," Ananias said in faith.

Ananias went to Judas' house where he found Saul praying, just as the Lord had told him. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Saul, you will now be known as Paul. Jesus has sent me to restore your sight so that you can serve Him as a witness to the truth."

Instantly, Paul could see, and Ananias baptized him. After Paul had eaten and was strengthened, he went to the synagogue to tell everyone about Jesus. Benjamin and the other believers were amazed. "Ananias," Benjamin said, "this is truly a miracle. The Church will survive the persecution just as Jesus promised."

When the Jewish leaders heard Paul preaching about Jesus, they were very angry. "Has he gone mad?" he asked. "This man came to Damascus to arrest these followers and now he has joined ranks with them. We will not allow him to escape. Guard the city gates day and night and arrest him."

When the believers discovered these plans, they helped Paul to escape. During the night, they hid him in a basket and lowered it over the city walls. Before Paul left, he turned to Ananias and said, "Thank you for all of your help. I don't deserve it after all of the trouble I caused. But know this, wherever I go, I will tell everyone about Jesus."

"Goodbye, my friend," Ananias said. "God certainly does move in mysterious ways. There is much work to be done. I will pray for your success."

For Discussion:

1. What does it mean to be a follower of the Way?
2. Jesus spoke to Paul and Ananias in dramatic ways as they prayed to Him. How does Jesus speak to us today?
3. Did Jesus answer the prayers of both Paul and Ananias?

For Further Reading:

The story of Paul's conversion is found in the New Testament in Acts, Chapter 9:1-25.

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