

Saul

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[0 : 00] Most of you will be aware we've been looking in previous weeks in the morning services at those whom our Lord has specifically addressed by name during his time.

As you can see, upon earth, but not explicitly or exclusively upon earth. Because as we have here in the account of Saul's conversion, we have our Lord addressing an individual by name from, as it were, heaven.

The risen Christ, and that makes Paul almost unique here in being addressed by name by the risen Christ. I was going to say unique, but of course it's almost unique, not quite.

Some of you will remember that when we began this series looking initially at Mary Magdalene and then at Zacchaeus, both of whom were addressed by name by our Lord during his earthly and then risen ministry.

And we said that there were nine individuals we'd be looking at, and if there were more, I couldn't remember any more. And if you knew of any more, you could point them out to me.

[1 : 03] And then of course, looking at this one, looking at this passage, I come across another one with Ananias, who also is addressed by the risen Lord. Because when the Lord speaks to him, appears to him in a vision, verses 10 and 11 and 12 and so on, I think, well, maybe this is just like an angel sort of thing, you know.

Because when Cornelius gets the vision in chapter 10, he saw in a vision about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of the Lord coming to him and saying to him, Cornelius. So he's addressed by name, but that's an angel.

That's not the Lord Jesus himself. But then further down, Ananias not only addresses him, verse 13, as Lord, but then when he speaks to Paul, he says, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

So the Lord that he is addressing is Jesus himself. So Jesus also speaks to Ananias by name. That wasn't in the original series. My apologies.

It should have been. But probably we'd have had to combine it with Saul anyway. So you can think of it as two for the price of one today as we look at these two individuals.

[2 : 17] It'll be mostly Saul we focus on. But Ananias, of course, is also, as we say, called and addressed by name by the risen Lord. But let's look at Saul first of all.

So he sets out, as we know the story, he's going from Jerusalem to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to try and arrest and bring to Jerusalem for trial and no doubt imprisonment or brutal treatment as many Christians as he can find.

He went to the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Now, Ananias is, of course, Jewish. He is, we are told. Paul testifies later on in one of the testimonies of his own conversion. He talks in chapter 22 of Acts.

He speaks about Ananias and he says, One Ananias, verse 12 of chapter 22, A devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there.

[3 : 21] So Ananias was a devout Jew who had become a Christian. That means he would certainly have been a well-known figure in at least one of the synagogues in Damascus.

That means that when Saul is coming to Damascus to search through the synagogues with letters to the synagogues that if any are found to our believers, that they be brought bound to Jerusalem. It means that Ananias would have been high on the list of targets. So the Lord, when he speaks to Ananias, he says, Go and speak to Saul because he's praying and he's going to be a chosen

vessel.

So Ananias says, Come on, Lord, he's come here to persecute us. That's why he's come here. And guess who's going to be high on the list? Guess who's one of the people that he's come to arrest? Me. And the Lord says still, he still tells him to go. Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me. So you see the submission of the Lord's saints here to his calling of them, to his instructing of them, when he speaks to them by name.

[4 : 27] Because Ananias is going effectively to be reconciled to somebody who has come to his city explicitly to arrest him and a whole host of other good, devout Jewish people whose only crime is that as Jewish men and women, they see the scriptures fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

So back to Saul, however. He's setting up for Damascus and he's aiming to arrest as many Christians as possible. As he journeyed, he came near Damascus. Suddenly there shined a brown about him, a light from heaven.

And he fell to the earth and heard a voice sing unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecute us thou me? Now chapter 26 at verse 14 tells us explicitly that this voice was in the Hebrew tongue.

That he is addressing Saul in the language not only of his father's, not only in his own, we might say, native tongue, although Hebrew was less of a spoken colloquial language by then.

The Jewish people in Palestine tended to speak Aramaic or Syriac, which was the language almost certainly spoken by Jesus in his earthly ministry. Greek was the sort of language of commerce and across the Roman Empire.

[5 : 49] It was the language of the marketplace, the language most commonly spoken by everyone. Paul would certainly have been able to speak Greek because he addresses one of the centurions in Greek.

He would have spoken Latin because he was a Roman citizen, but he would have been steeped in the scriptures which were written and given and taught in Hebrew.

And we are told explicitly that the Lord addressed him not only in the language of his fathers, but in the language of sacred scripture. He spake unto him in the Hebrew tongue.

Chapter 26 tells us, verse 14, when he's recounting his conversion, later on we read, when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying, in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Now, Saul would have been in a position to distinguish which language somebody the Lord was speaking because being able to speak Greek, being able to speak Latin, being able to speak Hebrew and probably Aramaic, maybe other languages too.

[6 : 55] But certainly these ones, he can tell the difference. Now, if the Lord speaks to most people individually, he'll speak simply the native language that is theirs.

If they know more than one language, they'll be able to discern which one it is. Saul is able to tell us, or Paul is able to recount for Luke, as he writes the Acts of the Apostles, that it is Hebrew. It is the only language which we have explicitly recorded as God ever speaking. We know that he speaks to other people, of course.

We know that he speaks to them in their native tongues, no doubt. And if they were Greeks or Corinthians, and we're told that when the apostles have the Spirit poured out upon them in Acts chapter 2, everyone from all the different places hears them speaking the wonderful things of God in their native language.

So God, of course, speaks all the different languages of the world. But the only language we're explicitly told that God speaks or spoke is Hebrew. We're explicitly told it in Scripture.

[7 : 56] Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? Now, the use of the term Lord here, at verse 5, is not necessarily, at this stage, an acknowledgement of this as God.

It's simply, if we could put it, if you were to put it in ordinary language, it would be Lord with a small l. It's just a term of respect for one who is clearly greater than him, more powerful than him, but he doesn't quite yet know who this is.

So who art thou, Lord, or Master, or Sir? You know, that would be an understanding of it. And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.

Now, in the original Greek here, there's a touching kind of emphatic in both the I and the thou. They're both individual, they're both personal, they're both singular, of course.

I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. So that not only is there the emphatic in both of these, but also there's the contrast. You know, that's who I am, and that's who you are persecuting.

[9 : 03] I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Now, the sense of that illustration is of like oxen pulling a cart, or a plough or whatever, and being just pricked by the little goad, by the person driving the plough or whatever, so it's even a little bit faster.

If an ox or an animal or a beast or whatever was really sort of rebellious, that was a kick against the plough and try and turn, but it couldn't because it would be fastened into the plough.

It would be fastened to the wagon or whatever it was it was pulling. And it's difficult for the beast to turn this way or that way. It has to go in the direction that it is being pulled or being driven.

It's hard to kick against the pricks. And what the Lord is saying is, look, I know what I want from you. I know which direction I intend you to go.

And all the time you're fighting against me, but it's hard. It's hard for you to kick against the pricks. So in other words, submit to me and go the direction that I want you to go.

[10 : 09] I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. So it is the risen Christ who is speaking to him here. Not only, however, is the risen Christ speaking to him, but the scriptural evidence would suggest that although he is blinded to all else after the vision has gone, Paul actually sees, has a vision of Christ in glory, in heaven, the risen Christ, and that he actually sees this.

Ananias testifies to this, brought us all, verse 17, the Lord even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way. Not just spoke to thee in the way, but appeared to thee in the way.

Again, in chapter 22, verse 14, where it says, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldst know his will and see that just one and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth.

So he has seen the risen Christ. And of course, he testifies to that himself in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 1. Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?

Are ye not my work in the Lord? Now the only occasion when Paul would have physically seen the risen Christ or seen Christ Jesus himself would have been in that vision on the Damascus road.

[11 : 35] And a couple of verses, a couple of pages further on, of course, when he is recounting Christ's resurrection, we read in chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians of all the people he appears to, he was buried, he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures, he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of about 500 brethren at once, from the greater part of the mainland to this present, and some are fallen asleep.

After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles, verse 8, and last of all, he was seen of me also as one born out of due time.

So this bright light that he sees on the Damascus road, this voice that he is, it's not just a voice in the blind brightness. It is a vision of, or a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

Just as, for example, Stephen has a sight of the same thing. When Stephen is about to die, then he kneeled down, he said that he saw heaven open.

I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. And he cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon it with one accord. And Saul now sees Christ in his glory.

[12 : 50] It's not just a voice. It is also a vision, a sight of the risen Christ. And this is what sustains him, that he has been spoken to and seen Christ. This is what partly qualifies him, you might say, as an apostle.

Because remember, the apostles had to include those who were witnesses of Christ's work and ministry and resurrection. Witnesses explicitly of his resurrection, as we see in chapter 1, when Matthias is appointed as the replacement for Judas, then those sort of witnesses of his resurrection. If Paul is seeing Christ in glory, then he needs must have risen from the dead. I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the quicks.

And he, trembling, and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

So, in other words, carry on with what you are going to do, but once you get there, what you're going to do is going to be quite different. Now, you see, we often think in terms of that if we submit our lives to the Lord, oh, it's going to be a complete change.

[14 : 02] I'm right, he's going to stop me doing this. I won't be able to do that. I'll have to do something different. What the Lord is saying, even to Saul, is not turn around and go back to Jerusalem and forget you ever came here, but rather, go on into Damascus.

Go as you were going to do. Go to the place you were going to go. Go to the house you were going to go. But, then you'll be told what you're going to do. The purpose for which I brought you to Damascus and will later on use you is going to be quite different from what you thought it was going to be.

It's hard for you to kick against the bricks. You've been trying to go your own way, Saul, but now you're going to go my way. So, go back, go on.

It arise, go into the city and it shall be told thee what I must do. And to Ananias, of course, the Lord says, you know, he is, that is, Paul is, a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

So, the high and the low and the indifferent, those who are complete pagans, the Gentiles, whether Romans or Greeks or the Lycaeans or whoever it may be, that Paul will take Christ and the message of Christ to all these peoples that Ananias couldn't possibly reach and perhaps the other apostles in Jerusalem couldn't reach.

[15:23] Paul is going to be used of the Lord a chosen vessel to bear my name. Now, a vessel is something, whether it's a dish or a jar or a bottle or whatever, something in which you carry something else.

You don't have a vessel that's, well, you could have something that's purely ornamental, but if it's ornamental, then it's really no earthly use other than purely decorative. And Saul is not intended to be just decorative.

He is intended to be a vessel into which something else will be put and in which something else will be born. What will be born? To bear my name.

Now, that's not just like a luggage label to have said in the past. The name of Christ, the name of God, it contains all the power and force of his character, of his identity, of the nature of what God is like and of the power to change lives.

The name of Christ is that which the apostles used when they were going to heal people or raise the dead or when they were going to cleanse lepers or open the eyes of the blind.

[16:27] It is the name of Jesus, the name of Christ, the name of the power of God. And that is to be born in this vessel. He is a chosen vessel.

Paul would be the first to say that there's no power in himself. When he writes to the Corinthians, he says, you know, all his lepers, they say, are full of power and authority, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible.

You know, what is Paul? He says, what's Apollos? What is Seabrus? We are just nothing. We are just servants. The real power is of Christ. We are just the vessel, the jars, in which you carry this product, this product, which is the power of God unto salvation.

He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles. And as we say, that doesn't just mean, oh, Jesus of Nazareth, like a little label you stick on somewhere.

No, it's the power. It's their life. It's the authority. And to bear this before the Gentiles and to kings and to the children of Israel. And amongst kings, amongst the Gentiles, amongst the Israelites, there will be those who would reject it.

[17:38] There will always be those who will reject it, but there will always also be some who will receive it and who will believe and be saved. It is for their benefit that Paul is sent out.

Now, of course, the name Saul means asked for. And in the original context, of course, Saul the Benjamite, the tribe of Benjamin.

The Benjamites would be extremely proud of the fact that the first king of Israel was King Saul. And he was the king that the people asked for, that they wanted a king over them. So Saul is asked for. They'd have been proud of his warrior heritage, that he was the first king of the kingdom of Israel, how he never lost a battle until the last one. He was a great and mighty hero to them. And yes, okay, he didn't treat David all that well, but then David, of course, then inherited the throne and became the next king of Israel.

But the Benjamites were proud to call their children Saul. But Saul means asked for. And in the scheme of things from all eternity, you could almost imagine, you know, that the Father and the Son, if we can say it, reverently, deciding amongst all the multitudes of humanity that were going to be made and all the identities, choosing out whom they would have as their elect.

[19:00] And as though the Son were saying to the Father, I want this one. He's going to be so steeped in the Scriptures. He's going to be so equipped. He's going to be so zealous for the inheritance and the heritage and the glory of his fathers and his people, Israel.

And I'm going to take that and use that and make it an instrument in my hand. I want this one. As though he is asked for explicitly by Christ.

Saul, Saul, why persecute us thou me? He is addressed by name. And the fact that Saul is, of course, so well qualified to take the Gospel out with all his knowledge of the Scriptures, his heritage, and so on, as he wrote to the Philippians.

You know, if anyone is caused to boast in the flesh, I more, circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. that what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Elsewhere in his testimony, he specifically states that he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.

[20 : 20] Now, Gamaliel is the Pharisee leader in the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, who says, don't fight against the apostles. In Acts chapter 5, he says, this might be of God.

You don't want to be attacking God, so leave them alone, and if it's just of men, it'll fade away to nothing. If it's of God, then you can't stop it, so don't deal too harshly with them.

So Gamaliel was known for great wisdom, and Paul writes in Acts 22, well, says in Acts 22, verse 3, he was brought up in Tarzan, it's a city in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, was zealous toward God as ye all are this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

And again, in chapter 23, verse 6, when he perceived that part of the authority of the gathering were Sadducees and others fantasies, he cried, I said, I am a fantasy, the son of a fantasy, of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called in question.

And again, in chapter 26, verses 4 and 5, where he says, you know, my manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation of Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning if they would testify that after the most straightest sect of our religion, I lived a fantasy.

[21 : 46] As fantasies went, you couldn't get more strict, more zealous, more determined than Saul of Tarsus. He knew the scriptures, he could quote the scriptures, he was zealous for the law, he was so zealous for the purity of that law, he hated what he regarded as the heresy of the Nazarenes, believing that this Jesus of Nazareth could somehow possibly ever be the Messiah.

He was looking for something so much more great, so much more noble, so much more honoring to his people. But he had to learn, as we all have to learn, that however much we may love, the heritage of our nation, or our own branch of the church, or whatever it is we have grown up to love and appreciate, Christ is more than all these things.

Christ is more than Scotland. Christ is more than our own branch of the church. Christ is more than the heritage that we love and are devoted to, and more important than all these things which are simply, if you like, the furnishings of a house we have loved to live in, is the fact that we live full stop.

We only live because Christ lives in us. And Christ is the message that they need the Gentiles, the kings, the children of Israel, the Scalpucks, the Scots, the Irish, the English, we all need this Christ, and without him we are lost.

Now, Saul was going to be used, as you know, used of the Lord to take this gospel not only to Damascus and to Jerusalem and Antioch and then throughout what is now Turkey and across into Europe, Macedonia and Achaia and Greece and then on to Rome where he was used to witness of the Lord there too.

[23 : 40] But he was used all over the Roman Empire to spread the message of the gospel.

Ananias wasn't used for that but he too is called by name because the Lord said to him in a vision Ananias and he said behold I am here Lord and he says brother Saul the Lord even Jesus hath sent me so it is Christ who is addressing him it is Christ that he answers.

Ananias is not going to go to Europe or Macedonia or Isomai or Antioch or whatever Ananias as far as we know lives and dies in Damascus but in Damascus he has a reputation for godliness for being devout and faithful according to the law and yet he through his understanding of the law recognises that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfilment of all the scriptures he would be one of the prime candidates that Saul had come to arrest but still here he is being used as what?

Being used as a vital link in God's chain. Some of you will have heard me mention in the past John Kennedy as you know John Kennedy of Daywall the great 19th century prince of the preachers as

he was called who preached from many parts of the highland he was so anointed of the Lord and used of the Lord Dr. Kennedy of Daywall a great hero of the 19th century Free Church but there was another John Kennedy of course who was used of the Lord to bring about the ministry of this Dr. Kennedy of Daywall same name as his son because John Kennedy Senior was also Minister of the Gospel in Killernan in the Black Isle there he wasn't quite so famed and quite so spectacularly widely known but he was a faithful minister of the Gospel he brought up his son in the knowledge and love of the Lord who became used of the Lord in a far far mightier way if you say John Kennedy 19th century oh yeah everybody thinks Dr. Kennedy of Daywall but there was another one before him Minister of Killernan who was a far quieter no doubt individual less well known less widely celebrated or known but used of the Lord to do what to bring on into the world and there's a link in the chain one who would be so mightily used of the Lord throughout the Highlands and throughout Scotland and here's Ananias this link in the chain this link in the chain who lives and dies as far as we know in Damascus but he is the one chosen of the Lord to bring Saul of Tarsus into the kingdom of God it is the most significant thing Ananias will ever do in his life it is specifically recorded for us in scripture and it is done so in the knowledge that he is having to overcome all his own fears and prejudices because he has been chosen and named and personally addressed of the Lord to do this

Ananias and he said behold I am here Lord arise and go into the street which is called Straight and it was perhaps for up to this day for all I know there may still be such a street in Damascus but there certainly was it ran for about three quarters of a mile from east to west in old Damascus and there inquire in the house of one of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he prayed now this Judas with which Saul would have been staying if he was coming to Damascus specifically to harangue the synagogues and to arrest the Christians there then you can pretty much take it as read that this Judas in Straight Street was not sympathetic to the Christians a man who is coming to Damascus with the authority of the chief priests and the word has gone ahead of him the news has gone ahead of him is not going to be lodging with somebody who is a Christian he's going to be lodging with somebody who shares his persecuting point of view

[28 : 09] Judas in Straight Street and it's a very common name Judah Jude it's the same name we shouldn't read too much betrayal into the name Judas here this Judas would be one sympathetic to the old Saul the old Saul of Tarsus one with whom he had probably sent on ahead and arranged to stay in his home perhaps with his followers as well because they would be the kind of people where the old Saul of Tarsus would be welcomed that's the house that the Lord wants Ananias to go to Ananias known to be a Christian known to be yes well respected for his devotion to the Lord perhaps an elder statesman in the Jewish community but at first you never know this he is to walk effectively into the lion's death but then perhaps that's not inappropriate because the name Ananias is in fact just the Greek form of the Hebrew name Hananiah and as some of you know Hananiah is the name of Shadrach it's the Jewish name of Shadrach in the book of Daniel chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 among these were of the children of Judah

Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar and to Hananiah of Shadrach and to Mishael of Meshach and to Azariah of Abednego so Hananiah is Shadrach and the name Hananiah means whom Jehovah hath favoured and so Hananiah has you know we'd say quite a proud heritage here but his the person who bears his name in the book of Daniel is one of the three faithful men who stands refusing to bow down to the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar prepares so Hananiah is a faithful witness then in the Old Testament and Hananiah is a faithful witness here in the New Testament he is called by name to go as it were into a house where he will be the enemy as far as he can see where he is to go to one who is his sworn enemy who has come to Damascus to destroy people like him and to receive him into the kingdom it's not an easy thing to do you have to overcome all your fears all your prejudices all your anxieties all your natural enmity against this individual and perhaps even to Hananiah it would have taken an explicit named commandment of the Lord from heaven because the Lord speaks to him in a vision

Ananias and he said behold I am here Lord arise go into the street which is called straight inquire in the house of Judas the one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he prayed and he had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand in him he might receive his sight and Ananias protests but the Lord says to him go thy way in other words go don't argue go under he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel I

will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake and Ananias went his way in many ways these two men although they are called to such very different ministries one completely home based as far as the Lord the other spread all over the world as it then was known to be and yet both called and chosen and used of the Lord the one a link in the chain to bring the other one into the kingdom and how many more souls are brought into the kingdom through Paul's ministry which would not humanly speaking have been in the kingdom at all the likes of Timothy and Titus and Onesimus and goodness knows how many others in all different places when he preached they wouldn't have been brought into the kingdom of Ananias had not first acted in obedience and faith to the Lord perhaps we could speculate one stage further and perhaps speculate that the Lord chose Ananias specifically because such was his faithfulness and humble devotion that maybe amongst all the Damascus Christians he alone would have the courage and faithfulness to act on this particular mission and go and bring Saul humanly speaking into the kingdom remember when Saul went to Jerusalem even the apostles were frightened of it and they didn't believe that he was actually converted until Barnabas went and explained everything to that but Ananias is chosen maybe he's the only one who would have been prepared to do it and even he needed a vision of the Lord naming him by name telling him to do it perhaps not another one of them would have done it but he is called by name he whom Jehovah hath favour and Saul accused of the Lord yes but asked for and in each case both these cases called explicitly by name so