

Blessed Uncertainties

Օրհնեալ Անորոշութիւն

Acts 9:10-30

During the civil war of Lebanon, we lived a time of full of surprises and uncertainties. We did not know if we could have a normal day, could go to school; or to work; or could we have peaceful day... all these uncertain situations. Sevan was taking a course in AUB, and the professor was from the US who during the lecture asked, "Where would you see yourself in 10 years?" Sevan said everyone was confused and did not know how to answer this question. Why? The context of their life was so unpredictable; people were living day by day, they could not answer the question.

I think about this question now. Where do you see yourself in the coming 10 years? This is a very good question. It is a question of planning, setting goals and striving towards those goals.

The issue with our life now is that we have made so many plans and pursued so many goals that we have eliminated God from them.

-How about plans that you have, then those plans were interrupted.....

- Saul, an educated man, a Zealot, a devoted Hebrew, a Pharisee's Pharisee, an expert in the law, got hit by the resurrected Christ.

- Saul had plans, and his plans were changed, drastically changed...

Did you have such an experience in your life?

You made a plan, but God had a different plan for you?

Last week we examined the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He lost his sight; he was knocked down to the ground. He was humbled. He saw the risen Lord and had a conversation with him.

- He was commanded to go to Damascus, not to persecute the Christians, but to start a new path in his spiritual journey.

- How much did Saul understand all these events?

Saul is thinking: "God, what are you doing in my life? There are too many uncertainties, I am in the dark, I cannot see, but I will obey and go..." "**Blessed Uncertainties.**"

It is like what Prophet Isaiah said:

“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.” (Isaiah 42:16 NIV11)

- Next, Saul obeys and goes to Damascus. We are introduced to a new disciple of Jesus, Ananias:

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹ 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. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” (Acts 9:10-12 NIV11)

Saul remained in a state of blindness and didn't eat or drink for three days. Luke does not say why, but I can imagine how Saul was feeling. All his convictions about Jesus were changed. Saul found the Messiah. Saul was persecuting the followers of the Messiah. Now he is worshiping the God whom he was chasing....

- Here we have **Ananias**. His name means: *Hananias* in Hebrew: **“Gracious is Yahweh, the Lord is gracious.”**

Well, we don't know much about this man, except that he eventually obeyed Jesus's command. Indeed, he was gracious to Saul by accepting this difficult task. William Barclay says that he was one of the forgotten heroes of Christian church.”¹

-Go to the **Straight Street**. By the way, until now that street exists in Damascus (the capital of Syria), I have been there often.

¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:13-16 NIV11)

Ananias is well aware of Saul's reputation through the persecution of the Christians. In my words, "Are you sure? Do you really want me to do this ministry?"

Blessed uncertainties, oh Lord. Where are you leading me?

Jesus' answer is profound:

"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

My words: "Ananias, you are preparing, discipling a man who is appointed to be the evangelist for the Gentile world, not only the ordinary people, but also to the kings and rulers of that world, as well as to people of Israel. Also, this is not going to be an easy task, he will suffer while doing this."

N. T. Wright says: "So you're calling him a new and greater Moses? And the person you've chosen to spearhead the work of proclaiming good news to the pagan world, will be a hardline, fanatical, ultra-nationalist, super-orthodox Pharisaic Jew?"²

Wright concludes saying: "and then they say that God doesn't have a sense of humor."

¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:17-19a NIV11)

I don't know how Ananias obeyed and went to see Saul. Most likely he straightaway went to the Straight Street to Judas' home where Saul was staying, and first placed his hands over Saul.

John Stott discerns a wealth of kindness in Ananias' embrace of Saul:

"I suspect that this laying-on of hands was a gesture of love to a blind man, who could not see the smile on Ananias' face, but could feel the pressure of his hands. At the same time, Ananias addressed him as **Brother Saul**, or **"Saul, my brother."** I never fail to be moved by these words. They may well have been the first words that Saul heard from Christian lips after his conversion, and they were words of **fraternal welcome.**"³

The Result: sight to his eyes, he was baptized (I assume by Ananias) and he finally started to eat. God gave him **new vision, a new life, a new physical strength.** Saul is a new man.

-Saul moves right away to ministry:

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. (Acts 9:19-25 NIV11)

- Saul spends “many days” in Damascus. We don’t know exactly how many days these are.

- What we find is that Saul already is on the mission of preaching and evangelizing. I don’t know how much he figured out about theology; yet Saul had a relationship with the RISEN Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, which means he had a lot to preach and teach.

- He preached: Jesus is “Son of God”, the Messiah whom we were waiting for our salvation

- Saul knows the OT very well. I assume he started to make sense of what **deacon Steven** was preaching that day...

Not everyone is happy with what is going on.

- We read “**Saul grew more and more powerful.**” I think he grew in his faith day by day.

- Please notice, he stayed in Damascus and not in Jerusalem. Not just Damascus, but Arabia as well.

He himself talks about this in Galatians:

¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to

consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. (Galatians 1:15-18 NIV11)

Saul was journeying between Damascus and the deserts of Arabia. “This was Saul’s seminary.”

“His trip to Arabia and his return to Damascus must have occurred during this time—probably doing both meditating and preaching. He spent almost three years in Arabia. Arabia was ruled by the Nabateans at the time, and Damascus may have been either part of it or bordering it... In 2 Corinthians 11:32 Paul says that he had to leave Damascus in this way because the governor under the Nabatean king Aretas was guarding the city in order to arrest or kidnap Saul. In other words, both the Jews and the Arabs were now after him!” ⁴

Some Christian friends in Damascus helped Saul and lowered him down in a basket, and sent him to Jerusalem.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:26-27 NIV11)

We will continue next about his life in Jerusalem and Barnabas’ role.

Application:

1. The God of Compassion, Mercy, Hanan, the gracious One, gives a second chance.

My friend Pastor Brian Morgan says:

“Everyone gets a second chance because “the Lord is gracious.” Think on these names—**Ananias, Saul and Judas.**

We see other people with those names:

In each case the name reminds us of failure—Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit in search of prestige and was killed; Saul was a wicked king who controlled his people through murder and ended his life in suicide; Judas betrayed our Lord and hung himself.

Don't you love our God, how gracious He is?

Saul of Tarsus, the man who witnessed the stoning execution of Stephen, now is forgiven and welcomed to be brother Saul.

2. In our weaknesses, God does amazing work.

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me.³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands. (2 Corinthians 11:30–33 NIV11)

Saul felt humiliated when he escaped from Damascus. But he also saw how God worked in his weakness.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

Remember who Saul is, a highly educated man, a top, top person...God humbled Him.

He is a smart man with high ambitions. But God needed something else.

What God needs is an empty jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7) so He can fill it with HIS SPIRIT.

One commentator has said about Saul: **“When God wants us to do an impossible task, God takes an impossible man and crushes him”**.⁵

You know God changed Saul's name to Paul which means small, humble.

3. God has plan for each of us.

Some of us can say, “I am weak. How in the world will God use me?”

We all are called to be his disciples and servants.

Surrender to him, and you will find out how God will use you.

1. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World*, p 175

2. N.T. Wright *Acts for Everyone (book1)*, P 145

3. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World*, p 175

4. Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 301
5. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*. P136.