

## Sermon Transcript from 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025 – Filled with the Spirit

References: Saul's Conversion, Acts 9:1-31 & Romans 8:11-17

Speaker: Brian Smith

### Sermon TLDR

This sermon explores the biblical account of Saul's conversion and Ananias's role, using these narratives to illuminate the process of being **"filled with the Holy Spirit."** The speaker emphasises **the dramatic transformation of Saul**, an enemy of Jesus, into a devoted follower, highlighting his **crucial choice to obey** when confronted by Jesus. Concurrently, the sermon stresses **the often-overlooked obedience of Ananias**, who, despite initial fear, chose to minister to Saul. Ultimately, the core message is that **being filled with the Spirit is not solely about sensational experiences but a continuous, active choice to listen and respond obediently** to God's voice in daily life, as exemplified by both Saul and Ananias's pivotal decisions.

### Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

[https://youtu.be/05Dqd66\\_g6c?t=2690](https://youtu.be/05Dqd66_g6c?t=2690)

### Sermon Transcript

Good morning everybody. Lovely to see you all again. It's always a pleasure to be here.

Thank you for the readings, the plays and everything that we've had so far.

I don't know what you Let me just tell you about this morning the talk, right? The topic I was given was being filled with the Holy Spirit. All right, that's a vast vast fast topic for 25 minutes. All right, we're not going to get through anything and everything that's even remotely possible. But what I want to do is just talk first and foremost about the story itself and therefore what we can learn from it.

I want to talk about Saul. I want to talk about Ananias because Ananias I think sometimes gets overlooked in the story about Saul but he's actually quite a key figure in this part of Saul's life and then draw from that what we can learn because this is an episode.

It's a conversation. It's a series of events over a few days that took place along time ago which is historically true but what we need to think about is what can we learn from that for today and how can the church be built how can we as Christians, as Paul just said, be built individually and as a congregation I also just want to if I can talk about in a way the theme of being filled with the spirit because I think sometimes there are some myths all right and some misnomers and misunderstandings about what that is principally about all right so we'll deal with to that um as we go through.

However, let us start with an incredibly staggering story. Imagine this for just one moment.

Who here has heard of a guy called Putin? Hands up if you've ever heard a guy called Putin. And hold the other hand up if you've heard of a guy called Zalinski. What do you reckon if the two of them met face to face right now? Would they be best buddies hugging each other, saying, "Come on, it's great to see you, pal." Or might they [try to] kill each other? We know what will probably happen, don't we?

Now, you've had enough exercise this morning, but imagine the same for Mr. Netanyahu is Netanyahu, who is the guy who is the current president of Israel and the Ayatollah who leads the country of Iran. Are they going to be best buds when they meet? They will never meet, I suspect.

Anyway, well, actually, if you think of arch enemies and arch rivals.

Saul and Jesus are kind of in the same camp.

Saul has set out fundamentally to at best imprison Christians and at worst get most of them killed if he can. Just think about that for a minute. Paul, as he became known or saw as he was in this episode, has set out from Jerusalem having been persecuting Christians in Jerusalem having seen Stephen martyred and going more of the same boys and girls he's then after going up to Damascus and said let's get them out up there take them back to Jerusalem and see if we can get the same outcome as we got for Steven.

This guy is consumed with rage and anger towards Jesus and his followers. He's got nothing more than his head than murderous threats against these people. He is an out and out enemy of Jesus. And being a fairly senior rabbi or teacher or leader in uh the Jewish religion of the day, he's got a bunch of people accompanying him to go to Damascus and arrest these people and bring them back to Jerusalem for prosecution as much as just general persecution.

This is a dramatic dramatic story.

I don't know if you've ever fallen out with someone so bad that you felt that much rage and anger that it basically consumed every waking thought.

I was chatting to a dear friend of mine just last Saturday. This is a nice story by the way, this part of it because it's a nasty story to start with, isn't it? He said to me, "Brian, I need to tell you something." And I said, "It's a girl, isn't it?" He goes, "How do you know?" I said, "It always is." When any bloke says to me, "I need to tell you something," you think, "Yeah, I know what's coming." It's always a woman. In the nicest way, is by the way because he said I can't think of anything else I know your head's consumed with her isn't he goes how do you know I said because it always is.

But this guy Saul was totally consumed in that sense by rage and anger with God and hatred towards Jesus it is possible we don't know factually and I can't say this is true or not true by the way Saul and Jesus's time in Jerusalem probably over overlapped didn't it whether they knew each other or had seen each other or even came across each other. I don't know. But their time over overlapped and something about who Jesus is and was and Saul certainly was around at the time of Jesus' resurrection, and he would have been aware of all the events and all the title that was going on.

Something inside him completely at away and he wanted to destroy this character Jesus. So how dramatic is it that he's on his way to get rid of probably get rid of a bunch of Christians and Jesus intervenes and says stop.

Now I don't know if we have the whole conversation recorded by the way because it's possible that more words were said by Jesus because there was no words being said by Saul other than who are you? But Jesus intervened in that man's life and completely changed him and turned him round from archenemy to arch servant.

And that's what happened.

Saul meeting Jesus became a moment in Saul's life where transformed his heart from archenemy into arch servant.

Saul listens to this voice and at that moment Saul has a choice. choice, doesn't he? Saul has a choice. He decides, do I listen to this voice and follow it or do I ignore it?

And he had a choice. But he heard a voice, didn't he? Saul was a broken man. He was on his knees and he was blind. And he needed all those guys who had gone with him to arrest all the Christians to physically lead him into Damascus by the hand because he couldn't see.

So dumbstruck [ ] was he by Jesus that he didn't eat or drink for three days. That was the impact in his life. And all of a sudden he knew that he needed to change because he heard the voice of Jesus in his life. And from that moment on Saul who later became Paul became one of the most ardent followers and fervent followers of Jesus that probably [has] ever walked this planet.

And Jesus used him massively.

But just think about this for a moment. If Saul had not followed based on listening to the choice he was offered, how would history, especially church history, have panned out?

Saul had a choice, and he humbled himself albeit from a very weak position and he followed Jesus. Ananias, I don't know whether he's a resident of Damascus or whether he'd fled Jerusalem or some other part of Israel, Galilee, who knows where on account of the persecution that was going on.

In Ananias's day, there was no internet. There was no X. There was no other form of social media or even a mobile phone. So, how did he know who Saul was and why Saul was there, because but I don't imagine many people were traveling faster than Saul at that point in time.

But somehow Ananias knew who he was and what he was there to do. And clearly the people the Christians in Damascus, I imagine not other people knew too Saul had got a reputation, but there's no social media to spread the news.

So this was all [tattle] and gossip. But Ananias was there under whatever circumstances he was in Damascus. And Jesus also intervenes in his life. And he also has a conversation with Ananias as he had had a conversation with Saul. One of the remarkable differences between Saul and Ananias is this. One recognised the voice of Jesus. The other did not.

Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?" It was a voice he did not recognise even if he may have over overlapped in Jerusalem or they brushed shoulders at times. Ananias the moment the Lord spoke instantly recognized and knew it was him.

I love the Pip and Grandma *[reference to an earlier part of the service]*. Was it Pip and Grandma story we had earlier on? Wasn't that a good illustration, and great songs by the way? Good choice of songs, Paul. Well done. And also a great story that we've had illustrated. I don't actually need to do this sermon. You've already got the point in truth if you were listening. Good. I'll sit down there.

But the truth is Ananias knew the voice of God because he knew who it was that spoke instantly to him. And you know what? I don't blame Ananias. And you probably don't either for having a few reservations. He probably thought he was safe in Damascus or possibly safe in Damascus. He was being persecuted probably. He was about to lose his freedom. His freedom was under threat of going.

And God said to him, "I want you to do something that is almost inconceivable and unimaginable. I want you to have courage on my behalf. and go and be a link in the chain in this man's life, who by the way will have this enormous ministry."

He only revealed that of course after Ananias pushed back on the Lord's voice when he said, "Hold on a minute. You're actually asking me to go and talk to Saul personally one-on-one in the room. Is this a good idea, God?"

How many of us have sometimes been asked by God to go and do something and going, "Are you serious?" And that was Ananias's perspective on life, wasn't it? Really? Is that really God? It can't be God. It must just be my own thoughts. Saul followed Jesus. What would have happened had he not? Ananias also had a choice, didn't he? Shall I go to the house of Judas on Straight Street? or not. He had a choice

and an opportunity to follow or withdraw. He chose to respond to the voice of God in his life and follow through with obedience to God and following Jesus. What would have happened in history had he not?

Now, all of you will come and say to me over a cup of tea in a few minutes, time. Well, of course, God would have sorted it out and someone else would have come along and it would have been fine. Or Saul would have just delayed the moment and would and it would have been fine. Yes, full stop. Possibly full stop. Don't know. Might have done probably in the end, but I wonder how much longer it might have taken.

And I wonder what other things would have happened and what damage actually in Saul's case might have happened had he not. And what would have happened if Ananias had not intervened? Would Saul have been there hanging, fasting for a week, two weeks, blind for longer? I don't know. Could God have sent someone else?

But you know what? God knew in that city full of fear among Christians who was going to listen to him because he knew the heart of Ananias. And he knew that Ananias knew how to hear his voice. And he picked Ananias. because he knew Ananias in his heart loved Jesus above all and he overcame the fear and risk to his own life by saying your will be done not mine.

It's what he did, wasn't it? And he said, you know what? Whatever the risk is, I'm following you. I'm choosing Jesus. And that's what Ananias did. And the Lord knew his heart, which is why I suspect He picked him. Let me talk about the process of being filled with the Holy Spirit and then I'm going to come to us and then I'll wrap up for you.

I'm in my mid-50s. I've been going to church since I was less than one. Probably before I was born in my mother's womb. In fact, I was a regular church go still is church leader in Penn where I live. In fact, Wendy, you probably know the congregation very well. over the short years that I've been alive because some of you have been alive a lot longer than I have and with much greater maturity than I have. So, this is a conversation we can all have, right? But over the years that I have now lived and spent my life in church circles, there have been fads in how we think about life and Christian experience.

And I remember in particular as a young man in my early to mid-20s in the mid-90s, for those of you that can date this period, It was very very fashionable to want to go and be filled with the spirit. And it was seen really as something that you needed to do and go and have done to you by someone laying their hands on you and praying for you or being in some sort of service or ceremony where there were lots of Christians singing lots of songs and it was all about how you responded emotionally in the moment.

Lots of Christian festivals do the same, don't they? They offer the coming forward moments, etc. Not just about the decision to follow Jesus, but come forward if you want to be filled.

In my experience, being filled with the spirit is actually much more about my willingness to open my life to have him do his will in my life than a sensational emotional experience that is an electrically charged moment in my life that lasts a few days. Those things happen and when they do, they're great because they feel sweet. Am I anymore a follower of Jesus? Jesus or any more obedient as a result sometimes maybe possibly but it don't last all year round.

I think what Ananias had done he knew the words of the last song we sung already. It's what Paul talked about as well. It's what Grandma told Pip. It's much more about connecting with the God who loves you. the Jesus who loves you and the Holy Spirit who indwells you from the moment you become a Christian you give your life to the Lord and saying let's let me open my life to you to take over every part every word every thought and I'm sure that all of us if we've been Christians particularly for a number of years there are ups and downs there are moments of greater intensity there are moments of actually is it even true is it even there for some of us.

But it's a walk. It's a journey. It's a relationship.

It's much less about a specific intervention.

And I think one of the challenges that we face when we have stories like this before, so I don't mean story as in made up. I mean it's a fact. Okay? It's a historical episode. All right? Is that you see something that's so dramatic in the life of Saul and so unexpected that we equate that with but that is the pinnacle and the goal and peak of Christian experience and even for Ananias for whom none of us I think in this room who've been Christians for a long time would say it's impossible to have some form of dream vision word from the Lord that says go and do that.

It's a bit out of the ordinary bit out of the everyday and what we sometimes think is actually it's about those moments that prove or demonstrate and when people talk about them because we love them and they're sensational and they're a bit different we go I wish it's never happened to me, won't happen to me, am I somehow a bit of a lesser follower of Jesus.

Te answer unequivocally, by the way my friends, is no.

All right, got the Holy Spirit living in you going to read some words about that to wrap up in a few seconds you listen you if you're a Christian if you're a follower In fact, him living in you is what marks you as a Christian.

All right? So, if the spirit of God lives in you, you are a Christian.

Whether you have visions from the Lord and words of knowledge or gifts of prophecy and tongues and healing or not, but the space for the Holy Spirit to come in and make and form the life of Christ in you is a choice that you have. And you may have some sensational almost electric feeling when things happen, but you may not.

But taking up your cross daily and following Jesus and picking Jesus first in every decision is something that rests with you and it rests with me. And the ability to hear him speak and to discern his voice from all the other voices, including [in] my own head; by the way is something that comes through practice and it comes over time.

Sometimes there's initial burst and flurry isn't there and then it kind of we get into normality and sometimes it doesn't and we just crack on.

Let me sort of start to wrap up because I'm conscious of time.

Has anybody here ever heard of Edward Kimball? And do you know who he is and why I'm referencing him? Hands up if you do, don't be bashful. If you do, it doesn't matter. I'm not trying to be clever or catch anyone out. Just tell me if you know who he is. No. Okay.

You might know this name. Albert McMakin. Anyone know who Albert McMakin is? Okay. All right. Has anyone here heard of Dwight Moody? Some of you have.

Has anybody here heard of Billy Graham? Most of you have.

Dwight Moody would attribute the fact that he became a Christian and a major evangelist in late 19th century America down to Edward Kimball because he led him to the Lord. Some of you have heard of Moody. You ain't heard of Kimball.

Billy Graham became a Christian because Albert McMakin asked him to drive a bunch of girls to an evangelist session run by Mordecai Ham. And when he heard Mordecai preach, Billy Graham became a Christian.

You've heard of Billy Graham. But you haven't heard of Albert, have you? Or most of you hadn't. How many people here have heard of Saul? [renamed] Paul.

Of course, you would have because you read this morning. I hope you've been listening. How many of you have heard of Ananias? Well, most of you because his name's in the Bible. But it's the only time that Ananias appears.

Actually, that Ananias, there are other Ananias'. It's not the same Ananias. Just if anyone's asking those questions, right?

But you know, had Ananias not been in a position where he was listening to the Lord, I don't know what would have happened to Saul.

Had Albert McMakin not spotted an opportunity to get Billy Graham along to an evangelist meeting. I don't know what would have happened to the guy who preached to more people on the planet than even Jesus by the way in terms of actual numbers because of the population and media that Billy Graham had to use.

Would Moody have transformed Northeast America, God through him obviously as an evangelist, had Kimball not taken him and brought him to the Lord? I don't know.

So, to encourage you but to ask you the question is this. We have examples in scripture of the highly dramatic, highly sensational and jaw-dropping moments like Saul meeting Jesus and Saul's life being turned around. It's a Putin Zilinski moment.

You might think that doesn't look like my life. And I reckon you're right. My life don't look like that either.

But the power of the Holy Spirit to use each and every one of us every time we listen and respond positively remains the same because you don't know that you ain't an Edward or an Albert in some cases.

And who knows if you don't or didn't what might or might not have happened. And when it comes to God's great big economy and God's great big fabric, you and I will know I believe one day how it all fits together and the role that you play in obeying and listening to and following the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life will become apparent.

Your job in the meantime is to listen as my French teacher at school used to tell me a listen well and then she never had another phrase for this bit follow well. We need to listen and act.

Sometimes we are asked to act immediately, aren't we? do it now. Sense of urgency. And other times we're told in advance, this is coming and I'm preparing you for this so that when the moment does come, you know which way to turn or you know how you're to react or respond or who you meant to talk to. And either and both are possible. That's not to do with personality. That's just to do with listen well.

So I encourage you but ask you a question at the same time this morning.

Are you listening well?

Do you hear the voice of the Lord?

And if you do, how do you typically respond? Do you resist? I sometimes do. I know that to be true, but I don't want to do it because it doesn't suit me. And that's a bad place to be, by the way. And then sometimes when you start to resist the old ears get blocked and it's harder to listen.

So, if as the precursor to the children's song that we sang earlier on Samuel speak Lord your servant is listening. If the precursor to that in your life this morning is what is written in the Bible.

The word of the Lord is rare in those days. i.e. if you're not hearing God speak to you often, can I invite you in the next few moments to ask God to forgive you and unblock your ears again. And be Samuel this morning. Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

Now Samuel as a young man needed Eli the high priest. to tell him that it was God who was speaking. And a bit like Pip had to tell, sorry, Grandma had to tell Pip, I'm getting these right way around.

You know what? Listen out and make sure it's God speaking.

Maybe all of us just need to do that for each other this morning to pray that it will be God that we hear speaking because it's dead easy other thoughts flood your mind, isn't it? Dead easy. But the transformation for your life, for this congregation and this area in this world where when we listen and follow because we allow the spirit to form Jesus in us and complete the work and the will of God in our lives will be profound for our generation and for eternity.

The question is do you want to play your part? So, whether you're asked to do something that's a bit out of the ordinary and maybe even a bit risky that requires courage like Ananias or maybe it's just [leaning] back and saying we need to go again because I need a reset.

Lord, please forgive me for having blocked ears. The opportunity is there for all of us today to say, take me further and help me listen and help me to obey. And as we do, we will find that the Holy Spirit starts to not only dwell the space we give him, but point out other areas where he would also like to go.

And that and in love of itself becomes the part of and process of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

He is there to form Christ in us and to do through us the work that God has enabled us and given us to do in advance. Ephesians 2 verse 10 if you want a reference.

All right, let me just finish with these words and then I'm sure you'll be glad that I'm done and we're off to tea and coffee and maybe some biscuits. I don't know. The tea is made beautifully, isn't it? Anyway, we know what that's about, right?

And by the way, even if any of you say, "I'm never going to be an Ananias and have all those fancy words of knowledge and all those visions," let me just remind and reassure you of these things because these are true of all Christians throughout all of God's people. All right?

And Paul is talking, this is Romans 8 I'm reading from, so for those particularly that are watching online, this is Romans 8, [verses] 11 through 17. And Paul is really trying to reassure some Christians about the truth of who they are and their status in him. Come what may?

And we should be encouraged by these words...

*<sup>11</sup>And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.*

*<sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

*<sup>14</sup>For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup>The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup>Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

So whether you're someone who has the types of experience that Ananias has or not, I don't know. And do you know what? I'm going to say this with a degree of humility before the Lord. I actually don't mind or care because at its cornerstone and its root and at its foundation, what is true of each and every one of us and binds us together is what Paul just wrote in Romans chapter 8.

And if he lives in you, you are a child of God. And though your experience does not match or compare to some of the other people you hear about, and you're not given this or that gift, you've still been given gifts to fulfil to use to fulfil his will in your life.

And by the way, you've all been given two ears. The question is, will you use them?

I often do a lot of training and I say to every one of every group of people that I ever teach or spend time with, God created you with two of these and one of those, one of them is meant to shut, two of them never do. Use them well and use them in that proportion.

And you'll find that in my professional world; your performance is transformed.

In our spiritual realm, maybe we'll see even more differences happening as a result of listening to God. So, I'm going to be quiet for a moment. I'm going to let you respond in your heart to God. And a bit like grandma said to Pip, and let's all pray this for everybody in the room and those listening online...

Let us all hear what God has to say to us through the Holy Spirit right now.

And let us discern the voice of God. And then I'll hand back to Paul if that's right.

*[Brian closes in prayer]*

Lord, as Samuel said, to you two plus thousand years ago, 2,700, 2,800 years ago.

Speak for your servants are listening.

Thank you for speaking to us and please continue to do so and please help us listen and then have the courage to follow and obey.

Amen.