



My name is Raymond Ramos. I'm Puerto Rican. I'm from Brooklyn, so I'm wired a certain way. So I need you to give me Christian grace and Christian Mercy and be very forgiving if I step out of the lines, if I get off this podium by accident. Suppose I say something that is too strong, you know, a Brooklyn type of attitude or something. May you know that it's washed in the blood, and may you extend grace to me. We are reading Acts 9 today.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 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. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 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. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

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." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Acts 9:1-19

I want to talk to you about Saul's conversion. In Acts 9, the Bible says that Saul was breathing out murderous threats against the disciples of Jesus Christ. He had a permit, let's go with the three Ps, he had a permit. He had a plan, and he was looking for prisoners. He wanted to arrest people. He didn't care if it was men or women. Anyone who was following Jesus was on his hate list. That's important.

When you became a Christian, you became a blip on the devil's radar. People don't know that. Like you're going to heaven and you got the Holy Spirit convicting and guiding you, and the Word will be a lamp to your feet and all these wonderful things, but there's spiritual warfare and the enemy doesn't want you to fulfill your purpose in Christ Jesus. He doesn't mind if you come to church, but don't come to Jesus.

So Saul has a plan. Now it's important for you to know that God has a plan. This is the problem with God's plan. God's plan is disruptive. God's plan is inconvenient. God's plan is not like my plan. I didn't think that I would be in Foster City, preaching the gospel in Pakistan, and wherever else God has put me. That wasn't my plan. I had a plan, like Saul, and like Saul, you probably have a plan. They say I'm in Silicon Valley. I'm not sure exactly what that means. Please forgive me. I didn't go to seminary. I came from the cemetery.

So you probably have a well thought out plan and have people helping you with that strategy and that plan. There's a saying that if you don't plan to succeed, then you plan to fail. I get that. But God has a plan, and God did not bring you to Central Peninsula Church so you can fulfill your plan. I'm going to be here today and gone tomorrow. So if you don't like what I have to say, take it up with the pastor and the team. I get on a plane tomorrow, and am going to Las Vegas, praise God. But God has a plan for you. Saul has this plan, as you hear in the story.

Conversion

Now, Saul has this light come into his darkness. There's this light first that comes. Saul has this conversion experience. Every person needs a conversion experience. I promise you that. There's this thing, not everybody who comes to church is a Christian. There are people that I know, people who feel this is just a nice place. They like it. They get to do service. Not everybody who comes to church is a Christian.

So Saul has a religion. He is a religious terrorist, if it were today, and he's going on his way to Damascus to fulfill his plan. Then this light comes into his darkness, and he has this conversion experience. Now, conversion is when the sinner turns to God. It's when you change your attitude and how you feel and what you think about God.

I was an antagonist. I didn't like Christians. I didn't like the church. I never thought I'd be a Christian. I still don't look like a Christian. But Jesus Christ got hold of my life like Saul. He interrupted my miserable life. One day, the light shone into my darkness, and I was able to comprehend and understand that Jesus loves me. I was messed up, probably more messed up than I was willing to understand and admit, but I understood that Jesus loves me, and he loves you more than you can ever imagine. You are so loved that he will pursue you and bring you to church and have people bother you and invite you. He'll just continue to pursue you until he gets your attention.

Now, like Saul, I had to get laid flat on my back. Not everybody needs to get laid flat on their back. Some people have to get laid flat on their back. Hit the ground. Why? Because when they're on their back it is the only time they'll look up. Pain has a way of softening the heart and opening the mind. So I'm one of those guys who would not listen. My point is that God, the light of Christ, shone upon my life. He removed the blindfolds.

You see what happened to Saul? He becomes Paul. He writes most of the New Testament. A lot of you guys know that I like to preach simple stories that people know about. So now here's the thing, he sees the light, and then he hears a voice. I like a little bit of boxing. I like a little bit of mixed martial arts. I'm not a fighter. I like to watch it. I look at it because I'm a Christian, and I like spiritual warfare.

So God has Saul right where he wants him. He's blinded. He's on the ground. He's having a conversation with him. Paul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus says, "Yes, this is me. Why do you persecute?" So God has him right where he wants him. Now listen to me. Very important, where I come from, he should have tapped him out right there. He should have choked him out or tapped right there. He's done. Put a fork in him. But that's not what God does.

Out of nowhere, God has Saul right where he wanted him, blinded on the floor. He's having a conversation with him, and

then the Bible says, "In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias." Why did God not finish the job right there? He had him. You see, if you know the Bible, he's healed people in one second and cast out demons in one moment. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He stopped the storm in one word. Why doesn't God finish the job right there?

Now, I'm just going to share my perspective. Every now and then, God allows one of us to be a part of his incredible, amazing, miraculous work. Isn't that wonderful? The text says that in Damascus, there was a disciple. Now, I don't know who cares about words, but does anybody know how many times the word Christian is in the Bible? Three times. And one time, it is not like a nice term. It is an antagonistic term.

Does anybody know how many times the word disciples is found in the Bible? Okay, depending on your translation, it is over 250 times. So the word Christian appears three times in this library of books. The word disciple, 269 times, depending on your translation, that might mean something. So Saul has this encounter with God, and I pray that you have an encounter with God. And then he goes and gets Ananias.

Now, Anani is a disciple. So an In-N-Out burger is a Christian. A disciple is fillet mignon. What's the difference between fillet mignon and In-N-Out Burger? Maturity, substance, and quality. So think about a Christian. It's good to start. Conversion is wonderful. But to be a Christian is not that deep. I come from a drug addiction and higher power celebration. Many people get saved. People need the Lord to be a Christian. If you see that cross over there, Jesus died a horrible, horrendous, bloody death on that cross because he loves you. You know that you've committed sin. We also know the glory of God, but the wages of sin are death. He died a miserable, horrendous death on the cross for me and you. He paid the death penalty for us. You can be converted. He can he'll wash away all your guilt, all your shame, and remorse.

When you have guilt, shame, and remorse, it messes up your emotional status. It messes up your mental health. When you have shame and guilt, you have to hide. You put on leaves, you put on images, you put up money, property, prestige, gangster, machismo, bravado, whatever. You're hiding. You're not free. But if you understand what he did on the cross for you, you can express conversion and be set free. He who the Son sets free is free indeed.

It's possible that they are freer than people in Silicon Valley because they have a relationship with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. With all due respect, Christian. What Jesus did on the cross, receive and believe. Confess with your mouth, believe with your heart that Christ, Lord, was raised from the dead, and you shall be saved. To be a Christian, where I come from, is not that deep. You did the crime. He did the time. I like that deal. I like that deal. He paid the death penalty that you and I owe. I need conversion. You need conversion. Don't settle for a nice

church experience. Don't settle. Paul/Saul had religion. He was a Pharisee. Don't settle for a title in a church. Don't settle for a position in the parking lot. The Bible warns us. Listen, be careful because the people who are in ministry are going to say to me one day, Lord, Lord. And he said, I didn't know you. Be careful that you don't come to church and miss Jesus. Amen.

Called

Think about this. Ananias has a conversation with God. God says to Ananias, a disciple. I know that there's somebody here who says, God can call me at any time, and I'm willing to go to anyone. I'll go anywhere. He paid a high price for my life. Royal Blood was shed at Calvary for my sins. He chose me. He arranged my life. He healed my heart. He gave me a purpose. I have the truth of God's word.

The Spirit of the Living God is indwelling inside of me. I know there's somebody who says, "I'll go, send me." Somebody says, "My life doesn't belong to me." Ananias is a disciple. We have too many Christians and not enough disciples. We have too many people who say, Oh, Jesus died on the cross. Thank you. He died for me. Thank you. But we don't get enough people picking up their own cross and understanding that once you get converted, there's a call. You didn't just get saved from hell and saved from guilt and saved from sin. You didn't get saved from stuff. You got saved for stuff. God brought you to Central Peninsula Church because he wants to transform you.

God wants the people who come here, who press in and don't play religion, to be transformed. They're going to encounter the living God. The word of God is going to pierce their soul, and it is going to hide in their heart. They're going to be living testimonies of Jesus Christ and his power and glory. And those transformed people at Central Peninsula Church, who are called to be transformed, are going to form the Central Peninsula and beyond. But conversion is not enough.

First of all, church is definitely not enough. Make sure that you're safe. We have a woman named Gemma. She went to be with the Lord. Gemma was a drug addict, higher power type of drug addict, prostitute, jumping in and out of cars, doing this, doing that, all types of things. She got saved. She had an encounter with God. It wasn't a church experience; it wasn't a great sermon. It was the power of the Holy Spirit. There's a difference. She gets saved. She changes. How does somebody's conversion bring change? If there's no change, there might not be a conversion,

There's a lot of false conversions. That's why God warns us. Listen, "Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, but I don't know you." You talked the same. You acted the same. You didn't share the gospel with anybody. You were not salt. You went to church, and you had the coffee. You might have given some money. That's great. Easy. You got a lot of money. Give some money. That's great. But you didn't sacrifice. You didn't serve me.

You didn't share the gospel. You were not my disciple. We were not in a relationship. God did not die for religion. He died for a relationship.

If you hang out with me, you're going to know that Raymond wants to eat Puerto Rican food first. Take me to the Puerto Rican spot. If that's too far, I like sushi. If you hang out with me, you're going to realize that I don't like broccoli too much. The more you have a relationship, the more you know about someone. I'm allergic to peanuts. Ginger gives me heartburn. If I call my son right now, he'll say, Dad, what's going on? If I call my grandkids, they'll say, Pop, Pop." Why? Because they know my voice. The Bible says my sheep know my voice.

So Ananias has this argument with God. Now, as a disciple of God, it's okay to wrestle with God. God told me there were some difficult things I had to do. I went to Pakistan, and they were promoting me to be there. I said, "You cannot promote me." We want the power of guidelines. They're burning buildings. So I had two guys with AKs 57s on me, and I had a gunner in a truck with a gun. It didn't look good. This was not what I wanted. I'm from Brooklyn. I almost got arrested for giving somebody a track. God uses everyone and anyone who says I'll go. It's not about how great you preach.

If you think about Saul, what did he do when Stephan got murdered? He was antagonizing, holding the jackets. If God can use Saul, that's evidence that he can use anyone. If God has the grace and the mercy to use Saul, he can use anyone and everyone who says, I'll go.

So Ananias has this conversation with God. It was a rough call. I didn't want to go to Pakistan. It was dangerous. Ananias says, Listen, this guy. We heard about him. He's an antagonist. But God will give you something. He'll be like, I want you to go pray for him. I want you to go invite him to church. It's not the devil telling you to invite somebody to church. God will tell you, your neighbor, your uncle, your cousin, your co-worker, whatever, your employee, God will give you.

Now this is something that's important to realize before. God had already set up Saul. That's the big deal. God had already prepared Saul. He even gave him a vision of a man named Ananias who was going to come and pray. Sometimes when God wants to give you an assignment, and God says to open our mind and heart, it can be disruptive and inconvenient. It might not sound practical. Know that God's already at work. He already set up Saul. So all Ananias had to do was go and obey God. Not in his power, but God's power.

Like Moses, like Joshua, I will be with you in the name of Jesus, not in the name of recovery, house of worship, or the name of higher power—only in the name above all names. In the power of the Holy Spirit. So I went to Pakistan, and we baptized over

a hundred Muslims. I didn't want to go, but over a hundred Muslims got baptized. I went there.

Look at what Paul did. He planted the most churches of the New Testament. What can God do? So Saul became poor, and a dirty drug addict preached internationally. Preaching all over the world, leading people to Christ, sharing his story. We had a bunch of people get saved yesterday. I don't know if they're here today, but hopefully they'll connect with someone to come to church.

What can God do with your life? So there's conversion and then there's a call. What is the call? The call, first of all, is to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. First and foremost, God wants you to join him. Spend time with the word of God. Spend time in prayer. Come to church every week. Master your spiritual disciplines.

So God used Saul. God uses me. God wants to use you. Ananias says that this guy has a permit to arrest Christians. This guy doesn't come with good intentions. God tells him that Paul is his chosen instrument. No Christian likes the next line. "I will show him how much he must suffer."

Now I come from Brooklyn. I suffered for a neighborhood. I suffered for drugs. I suffered for money. I suffered for this crazy thing we call a Scary Mary. I suffered for Scary Mary. You suffer for different things. For the name above all names, anyone who finds his life will lose it, but those who lose their life in Christ Jesus, they will find true life, the abundant life. John 10:10, he gives the abundant life, purpose, contentment, fulfillment, peace, joy, and love. The world will promise you it, but it doesn't deliver.

So there's a call of God to a relationship first and foremost because the Bible says that God called disciples to be with him before he called them to do anything else. He wants to love you. He wants to heal your hurts. He wants to renew your mind. He wants to fill you with his power. He wants to change your character. He wants to give you a biblical, eternal perspective. He wants the surgery of the soul, like he did for me, like he did for Saul. He wants to use you in ways that you might not even understand.

I didn't go to seminary. I come from the streets of Brooklyn. I didn't know the Bible. I didn't know there were 66 books. I didn't know: Do I pray to Jesus? Do I pray to God? Do I pray? What's this thing? Three people, three persons, one God. I didn't know anything. I just knew that Jesus Christ removed the blindfolds. And I said, "Yes." You'd be shocked at how one yes can change your whole life. I went from seventh grade to jail. Now I'm preaching in all these wonderful places and in front of all these people. God is not a respecter of man.

He's looking for people who will say yes, who will surrender whatever they have to him. Open hands, open heart, open

mind. It's adventurous, dangerous, and powerful. You think you're having fun? I'm out here in Pakistan. I'm in the Kingdom of Bahrain. I'm in England. I'm in places I cannot pronounce. Preaching the gospel in places where it's never been brought. It's incredible what God can do in somebody who says yes. I was told Christianity is the most dangerous spectator sport for people doing nothing. So there's a call.

Great Commission

The call is the great commission. The call is an incredible relationship. The call is the transformation. The call is to be the salt and the light. Maybe you can teach, or maybe you have a servant's heart. Maybe you could be in a parking lot and just have that beautiful anointing of God. Maybe you can impact somebody's life with God's glory for good here. Serve here. Maybe you could be at work and lead somebody to the Lord and then bring them to church for discipleship. What about school?

As you spend time with the Lord, as you grow in his presence, God will tell you exactly what he wants you to do. He'll make it very clear. But everybody has something to do. And there's nothing more fulfilling. I get to work with famous people because of alcohol and drugs and stuff like that, and porn addiction, and sex addiction.

I get to work with a lot of people who have it all. I got a guy, he says, I got everything. I'm on TV. I'm wonderful. He says, I'm fabulous, Raymond. He said, I'm fabulous. Look at me. He's got millions of dollars. He's on TV. How can I be powerless? I said, you can be fabulous and powerless and need Jesus. Jesus is what everybody's looking for.

So there's a commitment. Paul immediately makes a commitment, and you know what all Paul goes through. He will get shipwrecked, and he will get beaten. He will get bitten by snakes. He gets betrayed. This stuff happens, but he doesn't give up. He is committed. Many of us have been committed to other things, and now God is saying he wants us to make a commitment to him. The Bible says if you delight yourself in the Lord, he'll give you the desires of your heart. If you put him first, all your needs will be met. He gives you a recipe for success and the abundant life and fulfilled living.

You can store treasures in heaven where nobody can steal them. It won't rust, it won't collect dust, and it won't bust. I want to encourage you. I never knew life could be like this. We just baptized 48 prisoners in Maury County Prison in North Carolina. God is moving. God is not about how great you are, how articulate you are. It's not about your ability; it's about your availability. Can God interrupt your schedule? Can God use some of your money to further the kingdom in this place, or missionaries, or whatever, however God leads you. Can God use your time, your treasures, and your talents to reach the next Paul? He'll blow your mind if you let him.

I told you about Gemma, who was coming to give a testimony at one of our conferences in England about how God had freed her. She was on fire. She was praying for drug addicts and volunteering in the food ministry. The tire popped on the van that she was coming to the conference in, and it rolled over, and she died. She didn't make it to our conference. She made it to a better conference. So you don't know when your time is coming. Are you sure you're going to heaven if you should die tonight? If you're not sure, they have a prayer team that can say a prayer with you. It's understanding that Christ died on the cross for you. He was buried in the tomb. He rose from the dead, and he's coming back again.

If you are a Christian, you're saved. You know you're saved. God brought you here for a reason. It's not an accident. There are many churches out here, I can imagine, but God brought you here. He wants you to plant your flag. Use your time, your treasures, and your talents in this house to glorify him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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