

The Three Ananiases.

by Andrew Bonar

The sermon highlights the three Ananiases - the enemy of the Cross, the apparent believer, and the true disciple - and warns against the dangers of formalism and externalism.

Scripture: Acts 5:1, Acts 23:5

Topics: "True Faith vs. False Profession", "The Nature of Discipleship"

Description

Andrew Bonar explores the three Ananiases in the Bible, contrasting their lives and spiritual states. The first Ananias represents those who are religiously active yet spiritually dead, relying on external forms without true faith. The second Ananias appears to be a believer but lacks genuine transformation, ultimately facing dire consequences for his hypocrisy. In contrast, the third Ananias is a true disciple, obedient to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, exemplifying a life of faith and service. Bonar emphasizes the importance of true faith over mere profession, urging listeners to examine their own hearts.

Transcript

The Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 23 ; 5 ; 9.

It is sometimes useful to put in juxtaposition separate facts and characters. The three Crosses--how instructive! the three Marys, the three Centurions. Here we have the three Ananiases. Their name means 'Jehovah is gracious.' Their parents thought it a lucky name, and all professed to rejoice in what it expresses. Many make this a pillow. Let us not be deceived by names or profession, for even devoutness is not faith, and profession is not principle.

I. Ananias, the enemy of the Cross.--He was the son of Nebadaeas and succeeded Joseph, who succeeded Annas and Caiaphas. You find him with the Bible in his hands from his birth, as a Levite and a priest. He had to do with the highest forms of religion, with its rites day by day at the altar. Once a year he would be in the Holy of Holies, and see the mercy-seat, and gaze on the blood,--yea, sprinkle it. Every holy thing in word and ordinance was familiar to him. And yet he was a 'whited wall,' --only externally comely, all formalism and externalism. He hated vital religion and grew wroth at every manifestation of it. His bosom friends were Roman governors and such as Tertullus (24:1). The world, even the same pleasures that heathenism relished, was still in his heart. Josephus tells that before the last siege of the city, he hid in an aqueduct and was dragged out to die. Even so shall he try to hide under the rocks or cry, 'Mercy, O Lord!' according to his name, but shall not find it.

In our community there are many such as Ananias, persons brought up with the Bible in their hand, familiar with ordinances, with the routine of the prayer-book, or family worship, or worship in church. Nay, they go to the Lord's Table, lifting up solemn hands, gazing on the blood on the mercy-seat, and saying 'We take it.' Yet their bosom friends are men like Felix or Tertullus, they are at home with them in pleasure and trifling gaieties. They instinctively shrink from true vital godliness and the men who have it, bid them 'hold their peace'--smite them on the mouth. They never knew the new birth. Union to Christ is to them cant or nonsense. And so they die! But on the day of Christ, lo! they are dragged from the covert of the rocks and hills.

II. Ananias the apparent believer.--He was a hollow-hearted man, yet he seemed sound. It was a revival time when the tide was high. He joined the true believers at a time when faith was strong in them, when they were accustomed to live each day looking into glory and were on the wing above earth. Feeling a secret conviction that they were right, he threw in his lot with them, separated himself from former friends, took the godly as his companions, praised and admired the Apostle, and became quite zealous. But he was not really born again, the Spirit was not in him, as soon appeared. For either from a wish to be less obscure, or from partial conviction that self-denial was right, he sold part and pretended to give all. And so we see he had never quietly rested on Christ and been content with His Nazareth obscurity of obedience. He died an awful death. His name availed not, there was no 'grace' for him. He sank down--what an awful surprise!--from the very midst of the believers.

There are some such among us still. They have a secret conviction that it is safe and right to be believers, so they imitate others, attend meetings, separate themselves from the world. You may detect in yourselves a likeness to Ananias. Perhaps, when you find yourself overlooked you wish to be known or else to go back. Or when a missionary cause is pleaded you give a little, and say to conscience, 'It is all I can afford.' Perhaps you are half--conscious that it is the example of others that carries you along. Are you willing to detect yourself? Ask yourself, 'Why am I not willing to do as Jesus did at Nazareth, though unnoticed? Why am I complacent at any good thing I say or do? Are not these to a real saint as natural as streams to a spring? Am I independent of money and comforts, of name and praise for my heaven, finding it in Jesus?' The Spirit has found you out, for He never knew a time when He opened the door of your heart. Your conscience may be quiet by your profession. O look on sin as you see it in the Law and in the Cross, not as you feel it. You cannot lie to the Holy Ghost in vain!

III. Ananias, the true disciple.--One of God's happy servants. You see his life in chap.22:12, 'of good report;' he 'observed the law;' he was ready to obey (chap. 9:10-17). He learned to be a disciple first at the Cross when the voice said 'Ananias, come to Me,' and ever since he has obeyed it. Hear Christ speaking to His sheep by name 'Ananias!' and notice his brotherly love-- 'Brother Saul'.

Have you private intercourse with Christ, and are you sent on His errands? Happy Ananias! He carried rest to Paul, who thereafter carried Christ to to many thousands; and whether, as tradition says, he died a martyr at Damascus, or on his bed, his end was peace. He answered to his name. He knew God was 'gracious.' At the Great Day yonder is Ananias in his robes of Priesthood, with the breastplate on which are the names of every tribe, but no room for the name of Jesus! Nay, his robes kept off the blood of Jesus. Then, there is the other Ananias. He saw that High Priest's heart was empty, but he himself never found what filled his whole soul. He fled from Sodom only to be a Lot's wife! But you, O holy Ananias, come! Paul is getting his crown, 'but not to me only'--to him who bade the scales fall from his eyes. Yes, says Jesus, to that quiet saint with whom I spoke, and who spoke with me--to Paul with his ten talents, to you with your five. 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord.'

The first Ananias looked neither into himself to see the hell there, nor on Jesus, to see the door of heaven, or heaven itself, there. The second gave only a glance at both, and saw neither fully. But the third looked till he saw himself lost, and wrath his portion; and then upward, till he read, 'I have found a ransom' in the hand of the Father who pointed him to Jesus!

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