

FRIDAY 08 July 2022 "Ananias" (Acts 9:10-16)

Hello my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Have you ever argued with God?

Perhaps you were in a situation you simply could not understand and in your frustration and growing anxiety you cried out to God for answers. *And what did you do if there seemed to be no response from God or you felt the response you received was not what you expected or wanted?*

Today let's step into exactly that situation in Damascus, Syria about 2000 years ago. A man named Ananias, a devout, Jewish, follower of Jesus, has had a growing sense of anxiety in recent days. He and others have heard the zealous, sometimes violent Pharisee named Saul was coming to Damascus from Jerusalem and with him were other angry men. *They were coming with one purpose... to eradicate the name Jesus Christ from Damascus.* Word on the street was that Saul was planning to do in Damascus what he had done in Jerusalem... go to the home of any Jewish person who was reported to be a follower of Jesus and interrogate them, as aggressively as needed. And if they did not renounce Jesus, Saul would drag them before the Jewish council in Damascus demanding they be punished. *Fear was running through Damascus like a wildfire.* Some had already closed up their homes and left, going to stay with friends in other towns, at least temporarily.

And then suddenly Ananias's life was turned upside down by an unexpected experience. The record says: ***"The Lord called to Ananias in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord?' Ananias answered.***

'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.' (Acts 9:10-12) Ananias was stunned, shocked, terrified. *Such action would mean certain arrest and probably a beating, maybe even a flogging as the apostles had received.* Saul blind? In Ananias' mind that sounded like great news. Short of being dead, a blinded Saul was certainly much better news for the Jesus followers in Damascus. Maybe his blindness might stop his terrible persecution, especially if Saul understood it was God, blinding him in judgment for his actions!?

But Ananias had evidently learned the danger of going too far down the path of assumptions or uninformed conclusions, and so Ananias engaged this vision seeking to get more details. ***"Lord, 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!?"*** (Acts 9:13, 14) I very much appreciate Ananias' boldness with God. He's not refusing to obey God, like Jonah did.

He's seeking clarity from God, considering all he has heard from other people about this angry, vicious man Saul. He's not making excuses like Moses did, Ananias knows he will be taking his life into his own hands by obeying God's instructions. He's willing to do so if he's sure he understands his mandate correctly. While I don't know if Ananias was married, can you imagine the conversation he'd be having with his wife prior to going to meet Saul, especially if her life was in great danger also? Do you see an important life lesson here my friends, IF it is your ambition to 'walk with Jesus'? *Clarity, with great faith in the authenticity of your relationship with Jesus, will give you great confidence and courage.*

The record of the vision continues: ***"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."*** (Acts 9:15, 16) I would imagine Ananias sat and pondered that for a while. Ananias knew of the 11 apostles whom Jesus had personally selected as His disciples. *Jesus had taught them, trained them and then commissioned them to take His story and His Gospel to the world.* They were doing so quite effectively in Jerusalem, with Jews, but as far as we know, none of them had come to Damascus. *None of the apostles were intentionally proclaiming Jesus to Gentiles, and certainly none were seeking audiences with Gentile kings!* Ananias knew Saul was a Pharisee. The thought of Saul intentionally seeking a hearing with Gentiles, and especially with a Gentile king was beyond preposterous. *Saul, and any Pharisee would rather die first.* For this remarkable statement to become true in Saul's life would require a total transformation of his thinking, his training, his life purpose, his values... *everything about Saul would have to change!* I'm sure Ananias wondered if any person could change that much and still keep their sanity!?

But then Ananias thought about that last statement of the vision: ***"I will show him how much he must suffer for My name."*** I wonder if even for a brief moment there was a flash of satisfaction, maybe retaliation, maybe even holy justice in Ananias' heart *as he thought about Saul possibly being beaten?* Undoubtedly Saul had been part of the Sanhedrin leaders who watched the apostles being flogged. Many Jerusalem Jewish followers of Jesus had been imprisoned and beaten under Saul's direction. Now Saul had come to Damascus to oversee the same punishment of people like Ananias here in Damascus. So how could it ever happen that this Saul, highly respected by the Jewish leaders throughout the region, this Saul with great authority, *how could possibly happen that HE (Saul) would suffer for Jesus' name?!*

Ananias was left with a monumental decision. The vision was over. No further instructions or explanation. It was time to act. Either disregard the vision, tell no one about it, ignore it and try to forget it. Or discuss it with others he trusted and seek their opinion and counsel and then do whatever seems best to everyone from whom he seeks counsel. Or obey the vision, confident it was Jesus Himself speaking to Ananias... the Jesus Ananias claims is Lord of his life!

What would you have done my friends, if you were Ananias? We know what Ananias HEARD. We don't know if it was an audible voice and what it sounded like. We don't know if Ananias also SAW something, like an angel or some divine form. We don't know if a cloud enveloped Ananias, like that into which Moses had walked on Mount Sinai when he met with God? All we know is what Dr. Luke records for us in Acts 9:10-16. *Ananias faced what was likely the biggest decision of his life. What should he do about the vision and the instructions he has received?*

I have an important question for all of us to consider... **do such "visions" still happen in our world in 2022?** *Does the risen Jesus communicate, from His throne room in heaven, with people on earth today, as He did with both Saul & Ananias in Acts 9?* Both men understood exactly what they had experienced. Both men were convinced it was the Risen Jesus who had spoken with them. Saul was left blinded, incapacitated, waiting... for his vision had told him to wait in Damascus until he would be told what to do. Ananias was left challenged to do something that seemed like certain suicide. It would be like walking into a lion's den. But Ananias also understood Jesus was sending him to Saul for the purpose of helping Saul regain his sight and his courage. *With his sight restored, the first Jesus follower Saul would see, standing right in front of him, would be Ananias.* What would happen then? Can you feel the heavy weight of Ananias' decision as he contemplated what his response to the vision should be? What would you have done?

Let's pause right here. What do you think about my question whether Jesus communicates similarly in our day? I see nothing in God's Word which says Jesus no longer communicates with humanity directly as He did here in Acts 9. We know the Holy Spirit has guidance, counsel, direction, teaching, revelation, explanation, instruction all as His role in the life of any true Jesus follower. *So yes, my friends, yes, true followers of Jesus can live in 2022 expecting to receive communication from Jesus, especially through His Holy Spirit at work in our lives.* Are you living informed, taught, guided by Jesus through His Holy Spirit and are you living obedient to what Jesus is speaking into your life?

Now, my friends, I've found a wonderful, powerful song of worship that expresses our call to Jesus inviting Him to speak to us...

Today's Scripture is Acts 9:10-16.