

THURSDAY 07 July 2022 "Waiting" (Acts 9:1-9)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

When you think of the word "**transformation**", what comes to your mind? Perhaps wonderful landscaping which has turned a wasteland into a beautiful garden, or maybe a new community where once there was only desert. *But what does 'transformation' look like in a human being and how does it happen?*

In recent days, as we've been walking with the apostles who have been telling the story of Jesus in Jerusalem and Samaria about 2000 years ago, we've seen the account of many lives changed and even entire cities impacted by these changed people. (Acts 8:8) Yesterday we watched an Ethiopian official experience dramatic life change as he trusted Jesus to be His Savior. *Today let's consider one of the most dramatic examples of a person's 'transformation' in all of history.* You'll recall the reason Philip, along with many other Jesus followers, fled Jerusalem was a great persecution led by a very angry, zealous, devout religious leader named Saul. We met him first in Acts 7:58 as he watched over the stoning execution of Stephen the deacon. Acts 8:1 tells us Saul was leading a purging in Jerusalem, as **"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison."** Soon Saul was not satisfied with only Jerusalem, and he received letters of authority to allow him to do the same in other cities!

Acts 9 is one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible, for it gives us the story of Saul's 'transformation' *as he encounters the risen Jesus Christ* as he is traveling to Damascus, Syria to purge that city from any of these Jews who are turning to Jesus as their Messiah. He had received letters of authority from the Sanhedrin and was traveling to Damascus with a group of other men equally passionate about eradicating the name of Jesus from any place where Jesus followers were telling the Gospel story. The record says: **"As Saul 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. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.'" (Acts 9:3-6)**

Look at them, Saul and probably 4 or 5 other men traveling with him, probably all on horseback, for the trip to Damascus would have been about 150 miles from Jerusalem. The letters Saul carried would introduce them to Pharisees or other Jewish leaders in Damascus and would urge these leaders to cooperate with Saul in identifying any Jews who were known to have become followers of Jesus. The letters would be like an official 'search warrant' allowing Saul to knock on the door of any suspected Jesus follower, barge into their home and question them. If they resisted, Saul and these men could bind the hands behind their back and drag them before the Jewish leaders for further questioning.

If they did not deny Jesus, if they acknowledged they were in fact Jesus followers, Saul had authority to take them all the way back to Jerusalem to face interrogation and punishment by the Sanhedrin. You remember the Sanhedrin had condemned the apostles to be flogged. People lived in fear of the Sanhedrin leaders. *As word came to Damascus of Saul's angry intentions, we can imagine fear was spreading rapidly in Damascus as it had in Jerusalem!*

But what the frightened Jesus followers in Damascus didn't know was that Saul had been knocked off his horse by a flash of lightning in broad daylight, and then had been challenged by a voice that seemed to come from the sky. Now as Saul scrambled to his feet, he was stunned. Had it been a hallucination? Was it a vision? Was it heat stroke in the hot midday sun? The record says: ***"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!"*** (Acts. 9:7,8) Within seconds I'm sure Saul called out to his traveling companions, *'I can't see! I can't see! Are you men there? Did you hear the voice? Help me, I'm blind!'* Quickly they would have taken hold of Saul, steadied him on his feet and said, *'Yes, we saw the bright light, we heard the voice, but we do not see anyone but us here. Who was the voice? Where did it come from? What does the flash of light and the voice mean? What shall we do to help you, Saul?'*

It appears after they consulted together, they agreed to all get back on their horses and continue their journey toward Damascus, seeking to find the Jewish leaders who they had planned to work with in eradicating the Name Jesus from Damascus. I assume they traveled in silence, stunned, frightened, confused, and hoping somehow God would explain what they had experienced! The record says: ***"So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days Saul was blind and did not eat or drink anything."*** (Acts 9:9) Saul was a scholar of the Jewish writings. He had memorized vast amounts of the Torah, the Psalms, and the prophets. He knew the Biblical history of the Jewish people as well or better than almost anyone alive. Saul was a man of devout prayer and meditation. He fasted often and was accustomed to spending long hours in prayer, seeking answers from God. Thus, we can imagine in these three days Saul was almost continually in intense prayer and meditation and reviewing entire chapters of memorized Scripture in his mind and heart. There was nothing Saul could do but wait... *wait for God to answer his questions.*

Have you ever been in such a situation my friends? A time of helplessness when you are incapacitated and almost immobile. Perhaps you were terrified and unable to do much of anything to help yourself? *In that desperate time did you find yourself, like Saul, crying out to God desperately asking for God's help, God's answers?* I invite you to take your journal and write a paragraph about that experience and what you learned when it happened to you... about God and about yourself?

How did your life change in that experience?

For Saul these three days would change him for the rest of his life. He didn't yet know how, but as we will see, he would never be the same man as he had been! Jesus was beginning the work of transforming a man from the inside out, and that man would be so radically transformed by Jesus that he would end up dramatically impacting the world. Tomorrow we'll see how that happened. For today, I urge you to reflect on this question: If the resurrected Jesus came to you in a bright light and He spoke to you, would Jesus ask you the same question: **"Why do you persecute Me?"** If Jesus did that, what in your life do you suppose He would be referring to as something that persecutes Jesus?

Let's do as Saul did... let's talk with Jesus right now. Let's ask Jesus to help us fully understand all He wants to do in us and then through us in participating with God in what God is trying to do in our world today.

Today's Scripture is Acts 9:1-9.