

## TUESDAY 12 July 2022 “Basket Rescue?” (Acts 9:22-25)

Hello my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

*What do you do when something you hear just doesn't sound right?* Remember when you were a student in school and your teacher said something that just didn't sound right to you or when your boss told you to do something that didn't seem right or honest? Or what do you do when you read or hear something via the media, any media including social media, which seems wrong to you? *What about when you hear something from someone you highly respect, but it seems wrong in your mind, how do you respond?*

Join me back in one of the Damascus Synagogues where I left you yesterday. The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus has come into the Synagogue and has been invited by the Rabbi to speak to his students. Fully expecting Saul to expound some of his great learning which would fully support everything the Rabbi has been teaching these boys, the Rabbi instead is shocked to hear Saul proclaim the most outrageous heresy, blasphemy he could possibly utter. *Saul had just said that he had changed his mind and he was now convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the long-awaited Jewish Messiah!* This Saul, who had come here to Damascus to find and persecute ANY Jewish person who had defected and turned to Jesus, **was now proclaiming that HE had defected!** Saul was clearly stating that he had an encounter with God which totally changed his mind, and he was now boldly proclaiming Jesus is both Messiah and the Son of God! The Rabbi was standing speechless, so shocked he didn't know what to do!

Finally, I imagine the Rabbi respectfully interrupted Saul, and told his students to take a short break and dismissed the boys from the room but told them not to go far. The Rabbi would need to fix this mess, clear the confusion before these boys went home to tell their parents what had happened in Synagogue school that day!! As the boys hurried outside, I can imagine the Rabbi, red in the face, staring at Saul. Both confused and angry, the Rabbi wondered... had the lightning bolt damaged Saul's brilliant mind? It's not difficult for me to imagine their conversation as the Rabbi questioned Saul and Saul explained the dramatic and total change of his heart and mind about Jesus.

*Saul was certain he had in fact encountered the risen Jesus! Saul was further convinced that he had, for three days, been instructed by God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, teaching Saul the truth about Jesus and so much more.* It was as though Saul was claiming the same type of God encounter, God instruction experience, that Moses had experienced when he spent time with God on Mount Sinai! Saul was explaining that he was a totally transformed man, and further, His life mission was totally reversed! No longer would he seek to find and persecute followers of Jesus. No longer would he oppose anyone who spoke of Jesus. No longer was his mission to eliminate any mention of the name of Jesus, anywhere in Israel. **Saul now had a new life mission. A God given life mission!** *It was now his purpose to PROVE to any Jew, any Rabbi, even*

*any Pharisee... that Jesus is in fact their Messiah, and further, that Jesus is the Son of God.*

The record says: **"Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by PROVING that Jesus is the Messiah."** (Acts 9:22) This tells me that Saul spent several days in Damascus engaging in these types of discussions and debates with the local Rabbis and Jewish leaders, and even normal everyday Jewish folks, and further, that no one could compete with Saul's arguments. Saul PROVED that Jesus is the Messiah... using their Jewish Scriptures he had studied for so many years; in combination with his recent blinding experience on the road to Damascus; AND his three days of reflection, prayer and being taught by the Holy Spirit! I doubt any of us can imagine how quickly the Jewish community in Damascus, Syria was turned upside down into chaos. But unlike the chaos in Jerusalem, as Saul was leading a persecution against Jewish Jesus followers, this Damascus chaos was because Saul was entirely different from what everyone expected. *Rather than refuting Jesus followers he was celebrating them and encouraging them and claiming that he was now one of them!* And rather than joining with local Rabbis and Jewish leaders to purge Damascus of these traitor Jesus followers, Saul was now arguing, debating with the local Jewish leaders and proving to them that Jesus should be embraced and celebrated as their Jewish Messiah! *Saul was actually trying to CONVERT the Jews and Rabbis in Damascus to become FOLLOWERS of Jesus!! This was so radical, so beyond understanding, something had to be done!*

The record says: **"After many days had gone by, there arose a conspiracy among the Jews to kill Saul, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept a close watch on the city gates in order to kill Saul. But his followers took Saul by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the city wall."** (Acts 9:23-25) Well, this gives us a good picture of the turmoil, the chaos, the mayhem in Damascus which resulted from Saul's dramatic conversion! Jewish leaders were beside themselves. They had probably sent word back to Jerusalem both informing the Sanhedrin and Pharisees of what was happening with Saul in Damascus, but also asking for advice. *What should they do about this Saul who had become such a problem?* Somehow it appears the Jewish leaders concluded the best course of action was... to kill Saul, by any means, as quickly as possible. And you'd think as highly visible as Saul was, it sure wouldn't be difficult to find him and carry out their plan!

But it appears before they could kill Saul, a rescue plan was devised. By whom? *By the Jewish followers of Jesus in Damascus! The very people Saul had come here to persecute, and arrest are now the people protecting Saul and finding a way to get him out of Damascus alive.* I've often wondered if Ananias was a part of this effort to help Saul. Damascus, like all larger cities in those days, was surrounded by a thick, very high, city wall. Probably at least 25 feet high and about 8 feet thick. Guards were stationed on top of these walls, especially near city gates, keeping a close watch on travelers coming in. Then as now, cities were prime targets for those people with less than honorable intentions! City gates were closed whenever danger seemed imminent, and usually at night. With such a high wall and closed city gates, cities like Damascus

would have been impenetrable. *But closed gates also hold people IN who want to get OUT, and that was Saul's problem.* With the gates watched so closely by day, his only opportunity for escape would be at night.

I wonder who came up with the idea of lowering Saul down the outside of the city wall in a large basket?! It worked... and I presume as Saul's feet hit the ground that night outside the city wall, he ran off into the night heading toward Jerusalem. Perhaps his traveling companions, with whom he had come to Damascus a few weeks before, were outside the city with horses waiting for Saul, and off they rode down that same Damascus Road, 150 miles toward Jerusalem. *Do you suppose they stopped when they came to the place on that road where they had been blinded by the lightning bolt?* Maybe they even spent the night there, sleeping on the side of the road, reflecting on all the changes which had occurred in Saul, and in their lives, and in Damascus, since that day of encounter with the Risen Jesus! I imagine their conversation soon turned toward Jerusalem. Where would Saul go? Where would he be safe? The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders would be on high alert looking for Saul. What had happened to him? The apostles and other Jesus followers would be very, very skeptical and suspicious of Saul. He would likely be hunted by the Jewish leaders as soon as he entered the city. They would have a serious, full Sanhedrin interrogation waiting for Saul. He had so much explaining to do. **The hunter had become the hunted!**

Let's pause right here and ponder what Saul now faced. *No longer the zealous Pharisee intent on eradicating the name of Jesus from every city and town in Israel, Saul was now apparently intent on proclaiming this Jesus as Messiah and his Savior in every town.* Can you imagine Saul and his companions discussing and devising a plan for their arrival in Jerusalem? Tomorrow we'll see what happened when they arrived, for today, let's just thank God for what He did in this Saul and how Jesus is still doing it every day, all around the world, in our day! Can you praise Jesus for how much He has changed your life?

Now here my friends is a great song to help you celebrate IF Jesus is your Savior! It might be just the kind of song Saul and those guys were singing as they approached Jerusalem that day!

**Today's Scripture is Acts 9:22-25.**