

## WEEKEND Edition 09/10 July 2022 "Saul's Conversion" (Acts 9:17-19)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends on this weekend,

*We've all been there; we've all experienced it. The moment of decision... when we had to act on what we believed to be true!* Remember? Sometimes those moments are very, very powerful, for the great step of faith, the step of obedience to what you feel strongly God is leading you to do, will require every ounce of courage you can muster. Do you remember a time like that?

Come on, let's rejoin such a moment, 2000 years ago in the great city of Damascus, Syria. We're with a man who only appears on the Biblical story platform for this special event. *Yesterday we watched as Ananias, a Jewish follower of Jesus, had a vision which challenged everything he had ever believed, ever been taught, and a vision which reached to Ananias and called him to do the most courageous thing he'd ever done in his life.* We find the story in Acts 9. Saul, the angry Pharisee who was intent on eliminating any memory of Jesus from Jerusalem and had been doing it by unleashing a horrific persecution on Jesus followers there, and he had come to Ananias' town, Damascus, with the same intent. Saul had not come alone. Clenched in his fists were letters of authority, from leaders in Jerusalem, giving him power to do in Damascus what he had done in Jerusalem. At his side were several men, just as angry as Saul, ready to find and punish any and every Jewish Jesus follower in Damascus. *But there was only one problem...* three days ago, on their way from Jerusalem, Saul and these men had been stopped by a bolt of lightning in broad daylight which knocked Saul off his horse. Then a voice, which challenged Saul's mind and heart like nothing he'd ever experienced. **"Saul, why are you persecuting ME?"** The voice was loud, bold, very clear and Saul understood every word, but he was confused.

**"Who are you, Lord?"** Saul was stunned. Oh, he knew every story in Israel's history where a person encountered an angel or a vision or a voice from heaven. He had longed his entire life to have such an encounter with God, and he fully expected that if it ever happened, God would affirm Saul, and thank Saul for all his faithful devoutness as a good Pharisee. *Never, never in Saul's wildest imagination was there ever a thought that God might tell Saul he was anything less than almost perfect or doing anything that was in any way offensive to God. Never had Saul had a thought that God might tell him he was actually opposing God, actually persecuting God!* Saul's mind scrambled, trying to understand who he was encountering in this radical, powerful, vision experience!?

Then the powerful voice from heaven boldly proclaimed words Saul would never forget and words that would begin a change in his life that would eventually leave Saul radically transformed into a man entirely different from who he had been all of his life... ***"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, now get up and go into Damascus and you will be told what you must do."*** (Acts 9:4-6)

*When Saul got up from the ground, he was blind, unable to see anything.* His companions got him back on his horse and they carefully led him to Damascus and for three days now, Saul has been blind, waiting, praying, desperately seeking to understand what is happening to him!

Did you hear it? A knock at the door... the door is opened by one of those traveling companions of Saul. The visitor says, *"Hello, I am looking for a man named Saul of Tarsus, is he here?"* I imagine the response was something like: *'Well, my answer to you will depend on who you are and why you want to see Saul?'* *Time stood still. Ananias still had a moment to run...* but instead he said something like, *'My name is Ananias. Damascus is my home. I have had a vision and God has sent me to this house to meet a Pharisee named Saul. I have come only because I fear God and am deeply committed to obeying Him. I have a message for Saul from God.'*

I doubt any of us can imagine the anxiety everyone was feeling in that moment in that place. Should the man at the door allow this Ananias in or is it a trap? Saul is vulnerable, he can't see anything to protect himself if this is an ambush. He and his traveling companions know many people would like Saul dead! For Ananias, once he steps across the threshold into this house and the door is closed behind him, he knows he will be outnumbered by several men who will want to kill him as soon as he acknowledges that he is a follower of Jesus!!

The record says: ***"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it..."*** (Acts 9:17) I imagine one or two of those traveling companions of Saul escorted Ananias into the room where Saul was likely lying on a small bed, praying and reciting Scripture, desperately trying to hear from God. *'Saul, there is a man here who says he has a word from God for you.'* *"Who are you? What word do you have for me and why do you believe you have received this word from God? Be very careful what you say to me, for a word from God is a holy and fearful privilege.'* Saul has been helped to his feet by one of his friends and stretches out his hand to touch this visitor. Blindness is terrifying for someone who is suddenly experiencing it for the first time. Ananias takes a deep breath. He has no saliva to swallow, his mouth is dry, his heart is racing.

***"Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me to you."*** Ananias paused, Saul's face contorted, the others in the room stepped closer in case Saul gives the order to strike this man who had just spoken the name they disdain! How did this man know of their terrifying experience on the road? Saul asks *'Yes, we had a terrifying experience on the road here and I have been struck blind by God. The voice told me someone would come and tell me what the future will hold for me. Are you that person? If so, what word do you have from God for me?'*

***"The Lord Jesus has sent me to you so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*** (Act 9:17) Saul's face now reflects some relief, some hope that his sight may soon be restored, but also his face shows the great struggle it is *for Saul to consider that the Jesus he has been determined to totally remove from this city and*

*Jerusalem, is coming to his aide and willing to rescue him from his bondage to his pride, his devout study, his refusal to consider Jesus may be Messiah.* Further, Saul struggles to imagine that he might experience what he has witnessed in Jerusalem. That the Holy Spirit of God might do His life transforming work in Saul which Saul has seen happen in many other Jews. Could it be possible? What would it mean for Saul? Who would he become if Jesus really became his Messiah, his Savior, his Lord? And what would happen to him if the Holy Spirit really did fill him as He had Peter and John and the other apostles? And maybe the most horrific thought of all for Saul, what if the Holy Spirit did in him what he had watched the Holy Spirit do in Stephen as he watched Stephen claiming he could see into heaven, he could see God... while the stones crushed him to death!? I doubt any of us can imagine all that flooded Saul's mind and heart in these moments.

Ananias must have taken a towel and basin and began wiping Saul's eyes for a thick coating of something was keeping Saul's eyelids pasted together. As Ananias wiped Saul's eyes, the record says: **"Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again."** We have no record of what he said or did in that moment, but I can imagine Saul said, *"I can see! Brothers, I can see! All glory to God, He has restored my sight. Oh, thank you God!"* And then as Saul looks around the room he recognizes his traveling companions, but the man standing in front of him, holding the towel, he's never seen before. *'Are you Ananias? Oh, thank you, thank you for coming. Thank you for doing as you were instructed by our God! Tell me your story... who are you? What can you tell me of Jesus and how He has impacted your life?'*

I imagine they spoke for a long time, perhaps several hours, as Saul and his companions, who had come to this city to arrest, persecute and if possible, kill people like this man, *listened intently as Ananias told them of Jesus, His Savior and Lord.* Finally, at some point, Saul must have said to Ananias, *'In these past three days of prayer, I have come to understand Jesus IS our Messiah, and I have trusted Him to be my Savior, and I have trusted my life to Him. Now I want to be baptized in the name of Jesus... will you, Ananias, baptize me, Saul of Tarsus, in the name of Jesus?'* The record says: **"Saul got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength."** (Acts 9:19)

Are you almost breathless, my friends, as I am? Let's pause here and try to understand what we have witnessed... and here's a song to help you!

**Today's Scripture is Acts 9:17-19.**