

PAUL'S TRIP IN A BASKET

"Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."
(Acts 9:25)

"In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands." (II Corinthians 11:32-33)

Since our childhood we have listened to sermons dealing with the Apostle Paul under various circumstances. We have heard messages about Paul on the day of his conversion, Paul on Mars Hill, Paul when shipwrecked and Paul in prison. But seldom, if ever, have we heard of Paul's going over the walls of Damascus in a basket.

Before his conversion Saul heard that Christianity was being propagated at Damascus. In his bitterness against the Christians, he obtained letters of permission to go there and apprehend and bind with chains any whom he might discover to be followers of Christ, and then bring them to Jerusalem to be punished and put to death if they refused to renounce their faith in Him. With the proper credentials, he and his companions went forth on their mission. As he journeyed and approached his destination, a light from heaven suddenly shone round about him. Saul was dazed and smitten to the ground by the brightness of the light. He heard the voice of Christ from glory saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He immediately recognized it as the voice of deity. In the blazing light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, Saul was convicted of the truth of the gospel which he had despised, of his terrible sin in opposing it and putting its messengers to death, and of the fact that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. He cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He promptly received the information which he requested, and quickly placed his life at the Lord's disposal. What a wonderful change was wrought in his life when Christ came into his heart!

After Paul was baptized, there was no delay in his witnessing for Christ. "Straightway" he preached his initial sermon for Christ in the synagogue in Damascus. Two words express the reaction of his hearers -- "amazed" and "confounded." It is doubtful if there has ever been a more amazed and confounded audience than the one which heard Paul preach his first sermon. It is no wonder that the Jews were amazed as they listened to this former hater of Christ and persecutor of Christians present his proofs that Christ, Whom their rulers had crucified, was the Son of God. In spite of that fact, Paul was not satisfied with his accomplishment. He realized fully that he needed time and opportunity for additional preparation for the Lord's service. He decided to go where he might be alone with God and really get his bearings, so into the desert he departed.

Later Paul returned to Damascus to comfort and encourage the Christians whom he had formerly opposed and hated. His ministry there revealed that the change which had taken place in him was radical, thorough, genuine, startling and extraordinary. The malignity of Paul's auditors was deliberate and deadly. They plotted his destruction, and watched with diligence for their opportunity to get rid of him. They watched the gates day and night in the hope of seeing Paul. The enemies of God hated the truth and determined to put an end to its proclamation. They decided to terminate in death the career of Paul. Not being a coward, in any sense of the word, Paul made up his mind to die only when his work for Christ was done. Therefore, he hid from his would-be assassins.

At the very time when Paul was about to enter upon the great work of his life, he found himself in a very awkward plight. At the instigation of the Jews, the governor surrounded the city with soldiers to apprehend and assassinate Paul. With them watching the gates of Damascus day and night, there was little or no hope of his escape. His death seemed inevitable.

But it is marvelous what love can do. The Christians knew that the enemy were lying in wait for Paul. Around the city of Damascus there was a great stone wall which still stands today. Upon that wall some had built houses. For the purpose of elevating food and other commodities necessary for their physical comfort and domestic care, the people had a custom of lowering a basket through a window to the ground below.

In one of those wall-top houses Paul was hiding. Suddenly a knock was heard at the door. Paul was then in great danger and he knew it. An inventive genius, who realized that the garrison had come to apprehend Paul, suggested that they let him out of a window and lower him down the outside of the wall in a basket. With the cooperation of the members of the household, Paul was placed in a basket, lowered through the window, over the wall and to the ground below. By this strategy he escaped premature decease, and lived to continue his great work for the Christ Whom he loved so dearly.

Many would have thought it beneath the dignity of an apostle to leave Damascus by night through a back window, and to be lowered in a basket which had been used for carrying the provisions of the household on the wall. Paul did not think so. This is simply another instance of Paul being able to do all things through Christ Who strengthened him.

It is wonderful that years later, when writing by divine inspiration to the Corinthian Christians, Paul was led to include this apparently insignificant experience in his great and useful life. He said, "And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped."

Had the occasion required it, all the forces of the universe would have been at Paul's disposal. The circumstances were exceedingly dangerous and apparently desperate, but not beyond the God-directed ingenuity of brotherly hearts. God helps those who help themselves. He also takes care of His ministers. A chariot of fire is not harnessed when a rope and a basket will do. Whether in trouble or at work, a child of God can expect help or deliverance, even though it may come from some humble source which most of us would overlook because it is either commonplace or seemingly inadequate.

One lesson which comes to us from Paul's trip in a basket is the importance of little things. We do not know even the name of the man who made the rope which lowered Paul from the wall. He made ropes for a living. When he wound together the strands of that rope, he little realized that the greatest preacher, except Christ, that this world has ever known would be eternally grateful to him for that rope. It was the means of holding the basket which held the man who was God's witness to the Gentiles. Imagine the result if that rope had broken when Paul was going over the wall, and he had tipped out of the basket and broken his neck. Had that happened, he could not have written the books of the New Testament which he did. The next time you read those great epistles, try to remember that, humanly speaking, you are indebted to a poor and unknown man whose contribution to the work of Christ has never been recorded by man.

When Paul was looking for a vehicle by which he might be carried to safety, God had a basket ready for the trip. Little did the maker of that basket dream of what use his work would be turned in this instance. In that humble conveyance there was suspended the theological welfare of the Lord's people for all time to come. Had there been no basket, how differently the story might have turned out.

In God's sight there is no such thing as insignificance. The great tragedy today is that many see God in the big things, the Bible and His churches, but we fail to see the hand of God among the ropes and the baskets, and thus our appraisal of things and of people becomes faulty. We need to remember that what counts with God is faithfulness, and whether we are one-talent, two-talent, five-talent or ten-talent Christians makes no difference, so long as we are faithful with what God has entrusted to us.

A second important lesson which comes to us from this incident of Paul's trip in a basket is the blessing of seeing God in the little things. You will never fully enjoy your salvation until you become aware of the fact that your life in its every detail is important in the sight of our heavenly Father. You will never be happy as a Christian until you see the hand of the Lord in the little details of life. That is why Paul said, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Just think, that woman throughout eternity will be able to say, "It was from my home and in my basket that Paul went over the wall of Damascus to accomplish mighty things for God." What a reward! God rewards His children who are faithful in the discharge of their duties for Him. So, go back to your task and carry on nobly for Him. You will never be insignificant in His eyes.