

**Acts 26: 19-32; “The Words of Truth and Reason”, Sermon # 88 in the Series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 8th, 2023, in the Morning Worship Service.**

Paul is still a prisoner of the state. He is actually a prisoner of the Lord as he says in Ephesians 3: 1. But during this imprisonment he has gotten the opportunity to preach to King Agrippa and the governor Felix. And he has told them a great deal about himself, beginning with his manner of life from his youth, his being a very religious Jew. He gave them a good overview of his life; of how he had been a great persecutor of the church, and how the Lord Jesus had arrested him on the road to Damascus. He told them about how Christ appeared to him personally, and had mercy upon him, and saved him from his sins, and how He had given him a new heart, to follow Him.

He also told them about how Christ commissioned him to preach the gospel far and wide. As he continued his message it was his hope that he might win them both to Christ. But in verse 24 we find Festus saying with a loud voice – Paul you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad! And Paul said to him – I am not mad, most noble Festus. I am speaking the words of truth and reason to you. It is these words that I want to preach to you from at this time. Because sometimes, if we are zealous to speak or promote the truth of Christ and the Bible, we also may be seen by people as being out of our minds.

And so, I want to show you now, that the same reasons that Paul gave these men, in defending himself from this charge, are the same reasons that we should give to people who think that we are crazy, when we share the gospel with them. Let’s see if we can learn and grow together in terms of the things that we should share with other people.

1st of all – It is the voice of truth and reason to preach that all men should repent and do good works. (verses 19-21)

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and through all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” “For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.” Now, these are interesting statements. Because, if you will recall, the reason that Paul was in the temple that day (the incident is recorded in Acts 21), was because he was trying to follow James’ counsel to him concerning his teaching; that he was a stumbling block to the myriads of zealous Jews who had come to Christ.

They had been informed, concerning Paul, that he taught, that all the Jews among the Gentiles ought to forsake Moses, and not circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. James had advised him to go to the temple, take four men with him who had taken a Nazarite vow, and were coming near the end of their ceremony of purification. They were setting themselves apart to the Lord’s service. He was to pay their expenses, even though he had not taken this vow at this time, himself and go with them into the temple.

In this way, he would show everyone there, that there was nothing to those things which they had been told, but that he himself walked orderly and was keeping the law. Paul knew in truth, that he did not have to do this. He knew that Christ had fulfilled the law, and that the ceremonial law was now set aside. But he did not want to be a stumbling block to any Jew. He wanted to win them all to a better view of Christ and what He had accomplished in His redemption. But that was when the Jews from Asia found him in the temple that day. They saw Paul and they stirred up the crowd against him, and laid hands on him.

They cried out – Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place! This was the very thing that Paul was not trying to teach. But all

of this opposition, and his being held a political captive for the whole time since that incident, had now providentially led him to the place where he would fulfill his commission. He would be able to preach before governors and kings and the children of Israel. So Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent. Paul says here that this was the reason that he was seized in the temple and they tried to kill him. It was because he had preached all over that entire area of the world the truth that men should repent and turn to God and do works befitting repentance.

In other words, they should be converted to Christ. I want you to see from the way that Paul starts out here; first of all talking about repentance, how important true repentance is to your really knowing God. You cannot really know God if you are not willing to repent of your sins. If you would be saved you must realize that you have fallen short of the glory of God in all that He has intended for your life. Repentance is not simply a one time act at the beginning, when you first come to Christ. It is that. But it is far more. It is realizing that you will follow Jesus, by and through repenting of your sins, in an ongoing sense.

That is, day by day, you will be repenting of any sins that you find in your mind or your heart, or in your actions, by faith in His help to do so. Proverbs 28: 13 says – “He who covers his sin will not prosper, but whoever confesses them and forsakes them will have mercy.” Praying to forsake sin, to leave it behind as your practice, is what is called for by God. It is a lifelong continual considering of whether your attitudes and actions are righteous or not righteous. This consideration affects your life at every point.

The Christian life begins with repentance, and it continues with repentance wherever and whenever you find sin in your heart or your life. Whatever it is that you discover that is sinful in you, you will repent of it. You will not justify any practice or habit of sin in yourself. You will not only change your mind about sin’s being somehow good, but you will really do something to turn from it and forsake it. When you begin to be serious about living your Christian life before God, if you truly have received grace, this is what you will do.

In this regard it is important for you to understand that after you become a Christian, there is still sin within your heart in the remains of your Old Nature. Yes, Christ died in order that whole body of sin might be done away with. (Romans 6: 6) And eventually it will all be done away with when you die. But these remnants of sin, what is called “the flesh” by Paul in his letters, God has given you the Holy Spirit so that you will learn to put all sinful motions in your heart to death, as much as you are able to do so. This is your responsibility in sanctification.

Since the Old Man was not altogether destroyed when you first believed in Christ, you will have to guard your heart against sin all of your days. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. (Proverbs 4: 23) Wherever sin is recognized or found out by yourself, in your thoughts or in your actions, it is at that very point that, that you will repent if you want to know the reality God’s presence and power in your life. When you first came to Christ you repented, and so, if you want to walk with God closely, you will think about how your thoughts, words, and actions are seen by Him.

Now that you know Him, you want to please Him at every point. You want to know His pleasure and feel His power in terms of keeping His commandments. Repentance unto life is a saving grace. It is an evangelical grace, which means that we do not repent to earn our salvation, but we realize that we need Christ’s redemption and His power to do acts of righteousness and to make progress in holiness. By faith we humble ourselves because we see the many things that we have not done to

please God, but only to please ourselves. We come to have a godly sorrow over our sin. We are learning more and more to hate our sin, our remaining corruption in our soul and body.

Your goal in all of this is to walk more closely with God through faith in Christ. You love Christ and what He has done for you, and so you study to know the commandments of God. Jesus said – If you love Me keep My commandments, and I will give you a Helper, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will better help you to keep the 10 commandments and the 2 commandments which summarize them all. Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. As you read of your many responsibilities in relation to loving the brethren and being devoted to God in the letters of Peter and Paul, the Spirit will be helping you to keep these commandments better.

If you would know whether yours in a true repentance ask yourself whether you are doing works befitting repentance. This is the positive side of repentance. The purpose of Christ's saving us is that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2: 14) The purifying is His showing you through His Spirit's illumination of your mind in accordance with His word, how you might serve God better. He teaches you to have the best of motives for helping others and serving in the church.

Titus 3: 8 – “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” “These things are good and profitable to men.” And verse 14 as well – And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” It is good to realize as a Christian that this is what Christ has called you to do. Resisting sin, overcoming sin, putting away sin, and learning the importance of engaging in good works. This will show forth the fact that your mind has been renewed to a true knowledge of Christ by walking uprightly and keeping His commandments.

2nd – It is the voice of truth and reason to preach that Christ would suffer, and that He would be the first to rise from the dead. (verses 22-25)

“Therefore, having obtained help from God to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” ‘Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself!’ “Much learning is driving you mad!” “But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’” Now, it is very interesting here that even though Paul is speaking of things most reasonable to believe, Festus believes that he is a madman.

Much learning is driving you mad he says to Paul. Let us ask some questions here. Is it unreasonable to think that all human beings need help from God? No. It is only if they do not believe that there is a God, that will they think that they do not need His help. For those people who do not want to believe in Christ, it is a matter of their figuring out life for themselves. This they claim that they can do, as Festus here. Festus is evaluating Paul's mind and his words but he doesn't like to hear what he is hearing.

Many unbelievers are this way today. They accuse Christians of being weak in their thinking; weak in their understanding. In this case, Festus attributes this to Paul's much learning. He could see that Paul was a student of the Scriptures. But he thinks that Paul is a man who had studied them too much. And so, since Paul was attempting to prove something to him and Agrippa from the Scriptures, that God had helped him to see; and had given him grace and power to preach about it. Festus thinks that this is madness.

Festus says this with a loud voice. Paul, you are mad! As if he could get Paul to stop preaching what he thought was disturbing to himself, and to King Agrippa. Paul had only said that Christ's suffering and His rising from the dead was nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said

would come. And that Christ did these things in order to proclaim light, that is, the light of truth to the Jewish people and the Gentiles that they must believe in Him to be forgiven of their sins and have eternal life. These were very reasonable things. Brethren, if you are serious about preaching Christ, or witnessing for Christ, some people will think that you have lost your mind.

I remember that when my father was converted to Christ, the first in our household, both my mother and I thought that he had lost his mind; that he needed to see a psychiatrist. Why? Because he loved us and he did not want us to perish for lack of a knowledge of what the Bible says that each of us needs. We need to repent and we need to believe in Christ. But by nature none of us really thinks that we need this. We may or may not be willing to be religious, we do not care whether people around us are Christians or not, unless they are determined to share with us the truth of the gospel or the Bible. Then they think that we are mad.

It is too much for worldly minded people, even worldly minded professed Christians to take in, that they must believe that they are sinners who need a Savior. This is especially problematic with people who regularly go to church and think that they are being saved by having been baptized and having done many good works to help people around them. That is, in the earthly sense of providing for their needs. I have just told you a few minutes ago that the real evidence that you are a true Christian is that you will do works befitting repentance.

But the people who I am speaking of, who are professed Christians, but they are unsaved, they think that they are saved because they are religious, they go to church, they partake of the sacraments, and they do good works. This is why they are offended. They think that they do not need to be converted to Christ and repent of their self-righteousness. They believe that they are fine just as they are. Brethren, do not be surprised if those of your own household think of you as mad, when you share the gospel with them. Remember, you are speaking words of truth and reason. Conversion to Christ is a very reasonable thing for those who see themselves as sinners.

3rd – It is the voice of truth and reason that we would make an appeal to people that they might trust in Christ. (verses 26-29)

“For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.” “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” “I know that you do believe.” “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’” “And Paul said, ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether as I am, except for these chains.’” So Paul made his appeal to King Agrippa even though Festus might think him insane.

This shows us that we too ought to make our appeal for people to believe what we are saying about Christ and the gospel when we can perceive that they are listening to us with some real interest. Paul discerned Agrippa’s interest. He also may have had some knowledge of Agrippa’s belief in the Old Testament prophets, either having heard about this from others, or having a gift of discerning spirits. But he knew that Agrippa was an attentive discerning man, humanly speaking. That he was aware of Christ’s having given every indication that He was Israel’s promised Messiah. And he was aware of how Christ died, and had heard that some believed Him raised from the dead.

You almost persuade me to become a Christian, he says to Paul. What an awful statement. He came so close and yet went away simply almost persuaded. This shows us that it does take divine grace to bring any person to saving faith in Christ. Let us not lose heart over people like this who are almost persuaded. Let us continue to hope and to make our appeal to them, that they might become altogether such as we are – Christians by the grace of God. We have the words of truth and reason.

