

Good morning and welcome to SP 218 – the Dynamics of Interpersonal Communication. ... May I ask... “How many of you are in your first year here at Central Oregon Community College...?” OK... Great! It looks like most of you are in at least your second year...

Today my lecture concerns itself with the dynamics of perception. Each of us live by our own perception of the world... which can be independent of one another... and quite different realities.

A Dutch Philosopher and graphic artist... by the name of M.C. Escher in 1953 attempted to capture this truth... with his now famous drawing... called “Relativity.”

Try not to make yourself too dizzy... but study this drawing for a minute or two. ... Escher shows an unrealistic world. By drawing stairs that never go the same way and floors that are up... down... right... and left he demonstrates this strange reality. Each person seems to be living their life according to their own perception of reality... without regard to each other’s different perspective.

In an art class... or a philosophy class... or even in a communication class... like this one... the professor might ask: “So who controls the world, and reality, in this painting?” ... It seems that the human-like figures do. By going about their everyday business they show no desire to change it. ... I think Escher is trying to say something about human nature. ... It seems as though as long as these beings can eat, walk, read, and go about their normal lives they are content to go along with

the distorted world they live in... however ridiculous it is. This painting also shows what humans consider to be their everyday reality. People are indoors, cleaning, in love, eating, watching everyone else – this is what life has come to. People mindlessly are going about their lives, not paying any attention to the fact that their lives make no concrete sense.

In Escher's mind WE control reality. If we care enough to wake up and see what's going on, we will have the power to change it.

On this last point Escher and I part company. Our awareness through... or our inspiration from... even such a drawing like this... does not awaken a power for changing our lives to make sense. ...

Now let me draw you away from the college classroom... and back into our church auditorium. (Where many of you might rather want to be...) ... Welcome back!

I believe rather strongly that we must wake up and see what's going on... and that we simply must not mindlessly go about our lives. ... But you see... Satan (the current Prince of this world) has a strong hold on this world's thinking and perceptions. He is the Father of Lies... and he bamboozles the most perceptive among us into thinking his reality is where we all ought to live. The result is that we have a pluralistic world... where people are busy (side-by-side) trying to live out all kinds of realities that contradict each other.

But even as believers need to be careful. We must engage in frequent perception-checking... against the misperceptions that we may be

carrying... as we journey through life in this world. ... That is what we have the Bible for... This is why we are to meet together regularly. It is for worship... and for perception-checking. We must be willing to submit our hearts and minds to the truth of God's Word... and reject the common misperceptions that so easily entangle us. Our passage this morning in Acts calls out to us (in a very unique way) showing us our need to do this.

We are about to see how backward... upside-down... and reversed the common perceptions of our world are... to Biblical truth. (LISTEN) – If we are going to stand for Biblical truth... and live it out... then we must be prepared to appear VERY counter-culture to this topsy-turvy world. May God give each of us the courage (far beyond... what the inspiration of some Dutch philosopher's drawing could ever do)... so that we would have the boldness to cut across the grain of mainstream perceptions that run contrary to Biblical truth.

In our passage today... it becomes quite clear that Paul's contemporaries considered him to have completely lost touch with reality. But the fact of the matter is . . . **Paul** was the sane one!

In recent weeks we have seen how incredible his mind was, as he argued in his own defense against the incessant attacks upon him by the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem. Clearly the Jews have failed to prove a single point in the allegations against him. But he still remained a prisoner of Rome. The politicians who kept him there had a strong desire to please the Jews. . . and Felix had hoped to get a bribe from Paul.

Just when we may begin to feel that the story of Paul could not possibly get any more dramatic . . . that certainly a climax has been reached and now it's downhill – we come to a passage like this morning's. And let me tell you... we're still climbing. There's even more excitement in today's passage of Scripture.

ACTS 25:13-18

You can see that the Roman governor is troubled here. He thought that certain political charges would be leveled against Paul, since he was a political prisoner. But the accusations were of an entirely different nature. As he says,

ACTS 25:19-22

Thus the foundation is laid for the appearance of Paul before King Agrippa. We must remember, as we read this account, that this is not really another trial of the apostle. It is more like entertainment - planned for Agrippa and Bernice. The custom in those days whenever a king arrived, was to have a great deal of pomp, ceremony, and entertainment.

Part of it was this arrangement to bring Paul before the king. The Roman governor, knowing Agrippa's religious background, suspected that he would be intrigued by charges laid against the apostle.

Let me go back and answer what some of you may be asking right now. Who were King Agrippa and Bernice. . . ? Bernice, we might suppose, was some sort of queen. But our text never calls her a queen ... neither did the Jews... and neither **could** the Romans. Formally, Bernice could not be recognized as a queen. I'll tell you why in a moment.

Agrippa was a King - Roman educated and Roman appointed - to rule over the Jews. His responsibilities included the appointing of the High Priest each year... and overseeing the Temple administration. Thus, he knew Jewish law and Jewish practices. He even fully participated in Judaism... and Paul is about to affirm in his address to him... Agrippa believed the Prophets of Israel. He was an expert (in Festus' opinion) of Jewish matters.

Although he practiced Judaism, Agrippa was not truly Jewish. He was an Edomite. Edomite's descended from Esau ... the brother of Jacob. Agrippa was an Edomite as were all his relatives who you've heard of before - the Herod's.

The first, you've heard about was Herod the Great, who killed all the babies in Bethlehem when our Lord was born, in an attempt to wipe out the Messiah, whom he regarded as a rival to his throne - His son, Herod Antipas, had John the Baptist beheaded in prison. His grandson, Herod Agrippa I, put the Apostle James to death with the sword. Now his great-grandson, Agrippa II, (who we have here) has been appointed by the Romans to be tetrarch of Galilee. All Jewish and Roman historians agree that Agrippa II (who we have in today's

passage) **was** an expert in the affairs of the Jews.

Now a word about Bernice. Bernice was King Herod Agrippa II's sister! Married twice before, Bernice came to live with her brother in a scandalous relationship of incest. They were brother and sister living together as husband and wife! Not a few writings exist today from that time period which affirm – they were the talk of society. Eventually, Bernice left her brother and married another king . . . King Poleman. But even decant Rome would not confer the title of queen upon her. They thought she was too immoral.

The Herod family tree was infested by murder. . . power struggles... incest . . . and tremendous general moral decay. This was the couple for which all the pomp and circumstance was given! It is before this morally profligate couple, enslaved by their own lust and passion, that the Apostle Paul is to appear -- the enthroned prisoner appearing before the enslaved king. You can see that it is a tense situation, full of highest drama.

On the one hand you have those who are so beautifully decorated and honored on the outside... with royal splendor and fine purple robes. Festus, you can be sure was wearing his formal scarlet colored governor's robe. But not only those, filling the room were highly decorated captains, commanders, legionaires, centurians, and city officials.

What a scene! What splendor... opulence... wealth... and luxury! Decorations adorned the room that befit a King. And into the midst

of this would come one more. Only this one had a totally different exterior. His would be an unimposing body ... probably stooped ... possibly even still locked in his prison chains. There could hardly be a stronger contrast.

As Luke goes on to paint this scene for us, we will see that there is a dawning hunger in Paul's heart to reach this king for Christ, despite this King's dark past. This is Paul's last chance to reach Israel, and he hopes against hope that perhaps the king will turn, in order that the nation might follow.

The Apostle Paul, mighty in the Lord, towered above all these finely dressed petty dignitaries. Speaking with great fervor, in the fullest control of the entire affair, Paul will not defend himself, so much as he will give a positive presentation of the Gospel with an evangelistic appeal.

(You know) - there are certain "defining moments" that forever change the identity and destiny of an individual, a movement, a nation. The moment may be as commonplace as the birth of a child or as unique as the extraordinary British defeat of the Spanish Armada. The defining moment for all of human history and for every individual is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Prisoner Paul will boldly proclaim this before Festus, Agrippa and Bernice in the final missionary preaching in Acts. Once Paul was finished with his witness, all his hearers would know how to be saved and would be without excuse.

ACTS 25:23-27

The phrase "with great pomp" comes from the Greek word *phantasia*, from which we derive our English word *fantasy*. The world we live in is phantasia. Tonight is the Oscars. Boy... talk about phantasia! But this Red Carpet phantasia had Agrippa and Bernice arrayed in purple, Festus in red, chiliarchs (commanders of thousands), rigid legionnaires, manipulative politicians, and Paul.

The contrast between the dazzling garb of the high and mighty and the humble clothes of the chained prisoner suddenly becomes meaningless, because we will see Paul display the quiet dignity of a man with a message.

Worldly pomp adds nothing to the truth, righteousness, or justice of the case, nor to the excellency of the leader's character. Pomp only seeks to satisfy man's cravings for recognition and show, conceit and self-exaltation, honor and glory.

The pomp and show of history disappears, but not the men of character. Note how Festus and Agrippa are remembered in comparison with the prisoner Paul who stood before them. But even in the midst of all this pompous show... we will see that Paul became the judge, and Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice became the defendants!

In the verses that we just read... we can already see that Paul continually puzzled these Roman officials. They did not know what to do with him. And Festus is particularly on the spot here because, by Roman law, he has the responsibility of sending Paul to the emperor to answer for charges. But he does not know what to write, for all the

political charges have long since been disproved, and he knows it. Paul has recently reminded him of that fact: "You know very well that I have done nothing against the Jews." And yet he has to say something, because, if he sends a prisoner without a charge, he himself will be criticized for governing ineptly. So he has elicited the aid of King Agrippa to find something that will hold water before the emperor.

ACTS 26:1-11

The substance of the Apostle's argument before King Agrippa is that he stands condemned because he was a good Jew. He is trying to appeal to the Jewish background and the Jewish sympathies of this king, in order to help him to understand that there are no grounds of accusation against him. Notice how neatly he does it:

First he points out that even the Jews present could testify to his Pharisaic background, to the fact that he was raised according to the strictest sect of the Jews. And second, he states that he believes nothing now, basically, that he did not believe then. He has not changed his faith at all -- he is still a good Jew. He points out that the Jews were looking for the Messiah -- that is the "promise made by God to our fathers" that he mentions -- and so was he.

And furthermore, the Jews believe in a resurrection. "And for this hope," he says, "I am accused by Jews, O king!" And then... addressing himself to the whole court he says: "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" That is a good question, isn't it? Certainly a Jew should not think it incredible, because God had said

he would do this. And even Gentiles should hardly question the power of a Creator who brought forth life in the beginning to restore it if he wants to. It is perfectly unreasonable for man to think of raising the dead. Nobody has ever been able to achieve that. But it surely ought not to be unreasonable to expect God to be able to do so. You see how earnestly he is trying to appeal to the intelligence, the rationality, and the Jewish understanding of this king. I mean... common... He who is in Himself eternally the Living One can grant, and express, death-vanquishing resurrection life, whenever, and in whomever, He pleases.

His third argument is that he demonstrated how sincere he was in his commitment to his beliefs by the way he persecuted the church. All this is to show Agrippa that he is a true Jewish believer in every sense of the word, that basically he has changed none of his fundamental beliefs, except with regard to the character of the Christians that he persecuted. The only thing that he concedes was wrong is that he was persecuting people whom he ought not to have persecuted.

Now he marshals his forces and moves on to assault the citadel of Agrippa's will by telling him about his own conversion:

ACTS 26:12-14

Goads were the sharp spikes often mounted on the front of chariots. If a horse kicked back he would hurt himself against them. The Lord said, "That is what is happening to you, Paul. You're kicking against

the spikes, resisting the moving of the Holy Spirit."

What were the goads that Paul had been kicking against? It probably included the stoning of Stephen that Saul participated in. He would have watched as Stephen's face was like that of an angel... and as he spoke loving words of forgiveness toward his murderers... even as he was being put to death. And then there would have been the many others... who Saul tortured and also put to death. As they held firm to their testimony for Christ... God was speaking to Saul... but he kicked against the goads.

God tries to break through our misperceptions of reality... that the world has us believing... and we kick against the goads as God tries to lead us to truth. ... Some of the realities Paul lived by... we are kicking against. We are about to see some.

Paul continues...

ACTS 26:15-18

Here is the heart of his message -- his own transforming experience with Jesus Christ. Part of that included a definite call. Here is one of the goads that we sometimes kick against... The Lord means business when He calls a person. The call is from heaven; therefore, it supersedes all other calls and interests. It is not up for discussion nor is it to be subjected to any other desire. God knows the need of the world for the gospel, and He knows whom He wants to fill that need.

Therefore, we must hear His call when it comes and surrender to it

What a marvelous declaration of the gospel Paul delivers! There from the words of Jesus himself, as Paul recalls hearing them on the Damascus road, is an accurate analysis of the problem with humanity. Here is his description of humanity in its lost, broken, fragmented condition.

What is the matter with people? "They are blind," Jesus says, "blind and living in darkness."

And I submit to you that, two thousand years later, that is exactly what is wrong with our world. People do not know where to turn; they do not know where the answers lie. They do not even know how to analyze the problems accurately; they cannot see what is happening. They do not know where we are going. They are utterly blind, like men staggering around in a dark room, groping and feeling and trying to find their way through the course of history. This sense of lostness pervades our society. Two thousand years later we can see the truth of Jesus' words. How accurately he analyzes the problem!

And then the Lord Jesus analyzes why men are blind. "Because," he says, "they are under the power of Satan." Behind the darkness is the great enemy of mankind, who is twisting and distorting the thinking of men, clouding their eyes, and spreading abroad widespread delusions. He has loosed into this world a great flood of lying propaganda. And everywhere today men and women have believed these delusions and lies.

You hear them on every side. All the commonly accepted

philosophies of our day reflect the basic satanic lie that we are capable and adequate and independent, able to run our own affairs. You also hear that if you live for yourself, take care of "number one," you will find advancement and fulfillment in life. And you hear that material things can satisfy you, that, if you get enough money, you will be happy. All these lies permeate our society. That is the power of Satan. ... God often tries to give us a perception check and we must not kick against the goads.

But the power of the gospel is that it comes in to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the power of God. The gospel is that God has found a way to forgive men's sins, to wipe out all the guilt from the mistakes of the past, from all that they have done in their ignorance and enslavement to the lying propaganda of Satan, and to give them a resource from which they may live in fulfillment and strength. That is what Jesus means by "an inheritance among those who are sanctified." And how do you get this? Jesus says precisely: "By faith in me." This not "A answer to life's problems. Perception check: It is THE answer!

This is what marks the sands of our own age of religious pluralism. On the one side of the line is biblical Christology, its revelation of the person of our Lord: not just a special holy man, a great religious teacher and genius, a spiritual master or miracle-worker, or even all of these combined. He is nothing less than Immanuel, God Himself with us in person, fully human, fully divine. Hence to bracket Jesus with Muhammad, or the Buddha, or Krishna or any other religious luminary of the ages, is to fail to understand Him, indeed it is to detract from His

proper glory. He is the unique, the one and only: He is the Lord Jesus Christ! ... And we need to throw off Satan's pluralistic perception that the world believes.

ACTS 26:19-24

Since coming to Jerusalem, Paul has yet to finish a public speech. He keeps getting interrupted. Here he is accused of being mad and out of his mind.

The world has always thought that Christ's ambassadors were crazy. To those outside of the faith, utter devotion to Jesus Christ can only be explained as utter madness (or foolishness). Certainly, Paul must have looked crazy! For the sake of following Jesus, Paul tossed aside everything, which many in his culture prized.

Philippians 3:5-7 (ESV)

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

In 1913 William Borden, heir to the Borden Foods fortune, graduate from both Yale and Princeton, at age twenty-six, gave most of his inheritance away to go overseas and become a missionary. And the country he felt called to, was known as the missionary graveyard ... because missionaries often died there without a single convert. He went to be a missionary among Muslims. Within six months, William Borden had died in a Cairo hospital among the heat and flies, of

cerebral meningitis ... a disease he contracted upon his arrival. His contemporaries back home thought – *"What a waste of human resource!"* But God, I'm sure, thought otherwise, because of his sold-out commitment. After he died, William Borden's mother happened to read the Bible that was shipped back to her as part of his belongings. On the inside flap, in Borden's handwriting were six words: *"No regrets... no reserve ... No retreat!"*

In 1885 England's most famous athlete was a man by the name of C.T. Studd – and yes, I believe this is where the expression "studd" comes from. C.T. Studd traded in his superstar status and was ridiculed by British society when he set out for China, answering the call of God to be a missionary.

The world system has always understood those who follow the Lord with conviction to be insane. But let me ask what is insanity...?

To be passionate about college or professional sports is not crazy from the world's viewpoint. Spending millions and millions of dollars a year to see people chase a ball around – is not crazy! You can be as fanatical about sports as you want. ...But to be fervent about spiritual things is madness!

To be meticulous enough to have the right make-up and to pay hundreds of dollars for designer labels – even on a pair of jeans - is normal. ...But to be meticulous enough to be in church every Sunday is lunacy!

Or consider the insanity when society applauds a federal judge for indicting the people who filmed Planned Parenthood committing felony crimes... and lets Planned Parenthood off scott free. ... Consider the society that mourns the terrible epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases – and then mocks those who suggest that the solution is chastity. "Repressive Christianity is the problem!" Then there are those who decry the terrible violence which terrorizes our schools and make the teacher who displays the 10 Commandments the criminal.

Would somebody tell me please, who the insane are?

True sanity lies with those who build their lives upon the Gospel of Christ. It is mad to live, as the majority of Americans do, chasing after the American dream. . . supposing that real fulfillment is found in our possession. I've got news for you – "HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST TOYS - DOES **NOT** WIN!" There is always something more. What possession have you ever owned has brought you even close to a lasting fulfillment ...?

Billionaire John Paul Getty was once asked "How much is enough?" –to which he replied, "Just little bit more!" No one can ever have enough material riches.

Festus called the wrong person out of his mind and mad. Right beside him were a brother and sister living in incest! Paul was the sanest person in the room!

Before I move on from Paul's being called "mad". . . let me say that I've often wondered if Paul were alive today... how many people in the **Church** would think of him as mad . . .? Would modern day Christians believe him to be too fanatical...? Too excitable...? Too one sided...? Imbalanced...?

Most of us believe what Paul believed. But we have not carried our faith to its logical end like Paul did. Paul did not practice what we would call "normal" or "balanced" Christianity.

ACTS 26:25-32

You can see that Paul is longing to reach this man, for this is his last chance, and he knows it, to reach the Jewish people. He says, "I am persuaded that none of these things have escaped King Agrippa's notice, for this was not done in a corner." That is, "Everything is open, nothing is hidden. The Lord preached and taught, lived and died, right out in the open before everyone, and I know that the king knows the story."

And then, speaking directly to Agrippa he says, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." Do you see what he's saying? He is saying, "You know the historical facts of Jesus' life. And you believe the prophets. So put the two together. What did the prophets say the Messiah would do? Where does that drive you? Jesus fulfilled what the prophets wrote."

At this point this enslaved king, mastered by his own lusts, living with his own sister, is faced right into the issue. You can just see him squirming up there on his throne. Unfortunately, his answer is to turn his back on what Paul says.

With almost sneering sarcasm he says, *"Do you really think that in such a short time you can persuade me to become a Christian?"*

But Paul's reply is magnificent. With a heavy heart he says, *"King Agrippa, whether I had to spend a short time or a long time with you, 'I wish you could be like I am. I wish you had the peace, the liberty, the power, the joy, the gladness of my heart and life'."*

This was hardly the answer of a prisoner, was it?

Not only as Paul the sane one... he was the freest! His were only temporary chains of iron. Agrippa's were the chains of lust and the never-ending pursuit of an elusive pleasure that could completely satisfy.

This morning, there may be some who are held by some of the same chains that held Agrippa . . . trying to find satisfaction with things and instant pleasure. And then there may be others whose Christian walk is being held back by the world's twisted sense of fanaticism . . . they don't want to appear too radical, or too kooky.

Would you reconsider what is sane and what is insane...? What is

bondage and what is freedom...? Come and enjoy the "blessed madness" of Paul. ... And find true your sanity.

Maybe it is time for you to say, like William Borden: *No regrets ... No reserve ... No retreat.*