

Week 5: Out of your mind!

Sunday, June 5, 2022

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- **Movie reference! Some of the best movies can be summed up by a single quote from the movie...**
  - **Star wars... May the force be with you.**
  - **ORIGINAL Top Gun... I feel the need for speed!**
  - **Princess Bride- As you wish!**
- **Prime example... from Jerry Maguire...**

✠ **Show me the money!**

- **We know what this mean, right? Talk is cheap, give me some evidence! Jerry, if you're the greatest sports agent, then show me the money!**
- **TODAY we complete the story of Paul's trial before Festus, King Agrippa, and the assembled glitterati of Caesarea. Now, Paul's not going to ask Agrippa to show him the money- but he's going to continue his testimony with an equivalent thought.**
- **Paul has just told the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus, and how Jesus had said to him...**

<sup>16</sup> 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

– **And so Paul continues- we are in Acts 26, v19**

**Acts 26:19-20** "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. <sup>20</sup> First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

- **In other words, show me the money!**
- **Multiple times in Acts we've heard Paul sum up his teaching... it's fascinating that here, in front of the court of Festus and Agrippa- a court that has unjustly held him captive for over two years- Paul emphasizes that core to repentance and turning to God is that our lives will be changed- we will demonstrate this repentance by our ethics, our actions and choices- by how we live.**
- **How Paul says this is very important. These three ideas- repentance, turning to God, and how we live are inseparably bound to each other.**
- **To repent is to turn to God. We often diminish repentance by thinking of it primarily in moral terms- I repent when I stop doing bad things and start doing good things. This is the RESULT of repentance, but the heart of repentance is turning from my SELF as my source of life, identity, wisdom, and authority, and turning to GOD as my source of life, identity, wisdom, and authority.**
- **Likewise, to turn to God is the choice- enabled by the Holy Spirit- to lay down the prideful ways of my old self-centered life, and pick up- act upon- the new nature and character of a Christ centered life. In both Ephesians and Colossians Paul describes this as 'putting off the old self and putting on the new self.' This is a choice made possible by the turning of our heart and minds to God.**

- **Throughout Christian history there has been philosophy Luther called ‘antinomianism’- which literally means ‘against law’. This is the idea that takes God’s grace to an extreme, stating since we are saved only and totally by grace, we are no longer bound to the moral teaching of scripture, nor, by extension, the moral nature of God.**
- **This is a distortion of scripture, and Paul soundly refutes the notion multiple times, including here..**
- **To use a common NT metaphor, In response to God’s grace we are to BEAR FRUIT expressing the nature of God’s grace. To turn to God is to live in a way- to bear fruit- consistent with the character of God. To NOT bear the fruit of God’s nature- as an ongoing and characterizing manner- is the same as NOT turning to God.**
- **It’s been said that ‘we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that IS alone.’ By faith we are brought into union with the righteousness of God, and this faith will lead to our lives expressing the righteousness of God.**
- **It should be noted that Paul’s words ‘by their deeds’ is not passive. This does not refer to just a moral conviction that we may use to look down upon- or pass judgement upon- the sinful world around us. Rather, ‘deeds’ or ‘works’ describes actions that engage life- principally through our relationships with people- in how we express the goodness, love, and character of God.**
- **In his ‘Introduction to Romans’, Martin Luther put it this way...**

It is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing.... it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!"

- **If that sounds familiar, it’s because Luther is almost quoting the famous statement from James chapter 2- which is ironic because Luther was known to not like the book of James.**

**James 2:14-18, 26** What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

- **AND SO, Paul proclaims we must “repent and turn to God and demonstrate repentance by our deeds.”**
- **PAUL CONTINUES by saying.. “and.. my opponents really, really didn’t like this!”**

**Acts 26:21** That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.

- **Once again this brings the question- why did Paul’s message make the Jewish leaders so upset?**

† Why so upset?

- **We've seen how Paul's great offense was the message of Christ's resurrection. But second only to the resurrection- and likely Paul's primary meaning here- was the incredibly offensive idea that God's salvation was not just for the Jews, but also for the gentiles.**
- **When Paul was arrested on the temple mount, the accusation sparking the massive riot that nearly killed him was that he had defiled the temple by bringing a gentile into that sacred space.**
- **For many first century Jews- especially the religious leadership in Jerusalem, CORE to their identity wasn't just that they were God's chosen people, but that everyone else was excluded.**
- **Even for the apostles and first believers themselves, their understanding was the Gospel was only to the Jews- it wasn't until Peter's vision that this understanding began to change.**
- **In fact, idea of Jews/Gentiles being equal before God seemed insane to Festus, himself a gentile. Festus is about to interrupt, saying...**

**† Out of your mind! Paul continues**

**Acts 26:22-24** *But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—<sup>23</sup> that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”  
<sup>24</sup> At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”*

- **Paul here reaffirms the three great points he has made multiple times throughout his trials in Caesarea.**
- **First- The message of the Gospel is not new- it is the promised and prophesied hope of Israel, going all the way back to Moses. By saying this Paul proclaims faith in Christ to be the truest form of Judaism, a notion criminally offensive to the religious leaders of Jerusalem and laughable to Festus.**
- **Second- the death and resurrection of Jesus as the messiah. Very intentionally, Paul says that as the Messiah Jesus is the FIRST to rise from the dead... meaning what? Meaning that the promise and hope of resurrection is for us as well. In fact, this hope of resurrection is for ALL.**
- **In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul's explains why the resurrection is absolutely essential to our faith- and in vs 20-22...**

**1 Corinthians 15:20-22** *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (Jesus is the first to raise from the dead, never to die again, but he is not the last!)  
<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

- **To his accusers and all the court of Agrippa and Festus, Paul is saying- this hope of resurrection- it is for YOU.**

- **Paul’s third and final point is that the hope of resurrection- the message of light- is for Jews and Gentiles alike. THIS IS TOO MUCH for Festus...**

*Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”*

- **Festus declares that Paul’s learning has led him to embrace insane things- and to a Roman resurrection would have sounded insane. There’s an interesting nuance in Festus’s claim- by recognizing Paul’s intelligence and education, he is hinting that the resurrection SOUNDS like wisdom- it would be really great if this were true- but it’s simply unbelievable- it’s foolish.**
- **We should not be surprised at this response. In his opening paragraphs of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul says...**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25** *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

- **This is a profound passage- and it’s crucial to remember this is written to believers- point out two key things.**
- **FIRST, the message of the cross is ‘foolish’ to ‘those who are perishing’. Friends, WE also were those who were perishing, until by God’s Grace our hearts were opened to believe. “Those who are perishing” are not to be looked down upon, judged, pushed away, or marginalized, but rather engaged with compassion, mercy, relationship, so that they may see in us the genuineness and humility of God’s character- and so we may be given an opportunity to share with them the same Grace and mercy we have received.**
- **SECOND... we can’t forget WHY the Gospel- and by extension those of us who proclaim to be disciples of Jesus- why we may be considered foolishness. In this passage there’s only ONE REASON- and it is in our hope of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**
- **This is a call for the church to examine itself- in its words, actions, inactions- how we present ourselves to the world around us- and ask... WHY WOULD PEOPLE CONSIDER US FOOLISH? If it is for reasons other than the hope of the Gospel- the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we should give that great consideration.**
- **Festus was impressed by Paul. It was Paul’s message and character that Festus could not comprehend.**
- **Paul is masterful in his response- I’M NOT INSANE... and if I’m not, then what will you do with my message?**

✠ Not insane!

**Acts 26:25-28** *“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable.*

- **Quick observation there- the gospel is reasonable. Meaning, while it is only received by FAITH, the gospel does NOT ask us to check our brains at the door. It does not require us to set aside the inherent sense of justice and reason given by God to humanity.**

<sup>26</sup>The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.

- **Another quick observation- Paul says everything he had taught, everything the church had done, was said and done out in the open. Christianity is NOT a secretive faith.**

<sup>27</sup>King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.” <sup>28</sup>Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

- **Do you see Paul’s strategy here? His words to Agrippa are respectful, but also confronting. Paul essentially says... Agrippa, I’m not insane, and you know it! You know the evidence I speak of, you know the prophets, and this evidence demands a verdict!**
- **With incredible courage and intelligence, Paul has put Agrippa on the spot, and he looks for a way out.**
- **You see, if Agrippa answers NO, I don’t believe the prophets, he hurts himself in the eyes of the Jews. If he answers YES, then he is taking a step towards Paul’s reasoning, and could hurt himself in the eyes of all the Romans in the room. So, as we all at times do with God, Agrippa dodges the question.**

- **PAUL! Do you think I’m going to be a Christian this quick?? You could also translate this “do you think with such few arguments you...”**

- **This is the second and final time we see the word ‘Christian’ in Acts. If you remember, the first was when the people of Antioch in Syria derisively coined the term to describe this strange new community of ‘Little Christ’s’ growing in their city.**

- **Here, Agrippa’s use of the phrase suggests he is blustering... ppsstt.... ME? KING AGRIPPA? A little Christ? I don’t think so.**

- **AND YET... Agrippa understands what Paul is saying, and the defensiveness of his response indicates Paul- or perhaps the Holy Spirit- struck a nerve. But Agrippa seems to care more about the audience of his peers than the audience and evidence of God, and so he punts.**

- **But Paul doesn’t back down. In his final words before the court, Paul shows the loving heart of God one more time. With complete sincerity, he looks at Agrippa, Festus, and the entire room- including his accusers- and he says... “I’m going to be praying for you.”**

#### † Paul’s prayer

**Acts 26:29** Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

- **In Luke chapter 9, there’s a fascinating scene where Jesus sends his disciples out into the surrounding communities to proclaim the kingdom of God. At the end of his charge, Jesus said “If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”**
- **Jesus’s words here are stern, and they were given in a very unique time and context. There may be times when the Spirit leads us to do the same, but it can be tempting to use that statement as a way of turning our backs on people we just really don’t like. To think- these people, they reject the gospel, and they reject God’s ways. I’m turning my back on them- may they go to judgment like they deserve- come Lord Jesus.**

- *Friends, PAUL DOESN'T DO THIS. To the very people who have tried to kill him (multiple times), lied about him, falsely imprisoned him, chained him, mocked him, rejected him and the gospel... Paul responds with compassion and love. Regardless of what these people ever did with the gospel, they all had to be impressed by Paul's incredible courage and peace.*
- *And with the message of the resurrection still ringing in their ears, Paul says- my desire is that you would come to know the same hope, freedom, and new life that is mine, and that you would know this without experience the suffering I have experience.*
- *Paul KNEW he was going to Rome. After this public event there was no way Festus would go back on that. He could have left the room with a voice and heart of condemnation. He left the room by leaving the door open.*
- *I just wonder if, when we get to heaven and first meet Paul in heaven, if he may be sharing a cup of coffee with one of the people who were in the room that day.*
- *OKAY- lets finish the story.*

**Acts 26:30-32** *The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them.*<sup>31</sup> *After they left the room, they began saying to one another, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."*<sup>32</sup> *Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.*

#### ✠ Injustice and providence

- *As Paul prepares for his journey to Rome, he is experiencing two great realities- realities we often think should be mutually exclusive to each other.*
- *The first is that Paul continues to be a victim of injustice. He is innocent, yet will journey to Rome as a roman prisoner and will be living under house arrest when we close the book of Acts. Church tradition holds that Paul ultimately will die a martyr. Paul's circumstances were difficult, unjust, and unfair. This was his reality.*
- *But there was a second reality, and this was the providence of God. Even as a prisoner Paul knew that all these events were part of God's plan, and this was to Paul an unflinching source of courage, hope and peace.*
- *It's tempting for us- especially in the extreme individualism of western culture- to assume that our personal rights are the greatest good and the ultimate goal.*
- *It's not hard to find Christian teachers who will say that if you are in God's will, living in obedience, that you will be rewarded with beneficial circumstances. We tend to thank God for what we call blessings, and then wonder where he is when life is hard.*
- *In contrast, we are extended the same invitation that Paul embraced again and again. It is the invitation to experience the blessing of God's PRESENCE- of his courage, his nature, his leadership, his purposes, his comfort- both when things are good and when things are hard.*

- **God cares about Justice- intensely so. He calls us to be people of justice as we seek to make the world a better place. And yet, our greatest goal is not for our circumstances to always be right and fair. The nature of our circumstances will come and go.**
- **As disciples of Jesus- people who have been brought from death to life- our greatest goal is the Glory and purpose of God.**
- **MOVE INTO TIME OF COMMUNION. As we take this time to purposefully reflect upon Jesus' sacrifice... consider the words of Isaiah...**

**Isaiah 53:4-6** Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- **Friends, we are ABLE to remember Christ's sacrifice because Jesus is the ultimate example of laying down his own rights – of willingly suffering injustice- because of His great love for us. Because of his great love of humanity. Love so great that Jesus' choice to endure the cross was nothing less than act of Joy.**

**Hebrews 12:1-3** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.