

## CRAZY CHRISTIANS

### Introduction:

1. In this lesson, we dive into a thought-provoking and perhaps even provocative topic: “Crazy Christians.” At first glance, this title might seem jarring or uncomfortable, but it serves to highlight an essential aspect of our faith journey. We will explore what it means to be perceived as “crazy” by the world for our steadfast belief in Christ and adherence to His teachings.
2. Our focus will be on a fascinating narrative from Acts, where the Apostle Paul, one of the most influential figures in early Christianity, is accused of madness. This accusation does not stem from any erratic behavior but from his unwavering commitment to the gospel, his radical personal transformation, and his profound theological assertions.
3. We will examine: 1. Paul’s “Madness”, 2. Remaining Faithful Amidst Criticism, and, 3. Almost Persuaded.

### 1. Paul’s “Madness” (Acts 26:24):

In Acts 26:24, the Apostle Paul stands before King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus, who accuse him of madness. This charge, stemming from Paul’s deep engagement with Scripture, radical personal transformation, and profound theological claims, reveals a broader tension between the gospel’s truth and worldly perceptions. As we delve into this passage, we will explore the context of Paul’s “madness,” how his passionate defense of the faith was perceived as irrational, and the parallels this presents to our own experiences of criticism today. Our aim is to understand how Paul’s encounter with Festus and Agrippa challenges us to remain steadfast in our faith despite similar accusations in our modern world.

#### a. Setting: Festus inherits the case:

- 1) Contextual background: Festus, who succeeded Felix as governor of Judea, is introduced in Acts 25. His administration begins with significant challenges, one of which is the unresolved case of the apostle Paul. This case involves a complex mix of legal and religious issues that Festus, unfamiliar with Jewish customs and laws, finds difficult to navigate.
- 2) Political complications: Festus’ inability to adjudicate Paul’s case impartially reveals his susceptibility to political pressure. In Acts 25:9, Festus is noted for trying to please the Jewish leaders, who were vehemently opposed to Paul. His decision to hold Paul in custody without presenting a substantial charge demonstrates his political motivations, as he attempts to curry favor with the Jewish leadership rather than uphold justice.

#### b. As Paul makes his defense to Agrippa: Festus’ accusation of madness (Acts 26:24):

##### 1) Paul’s scriptural arguments:

- ▶ **Biblical Foundation:** As Paul presents his defense before King Agrippa, he draws extensively from the Old Testament. He refers to the promises made to the patriarchs and the prophecies of Moses and the prophets, emphasizing that the events he describes are the fulfillment of these ancient promises (Acts 26:6, 22). Paul connects his own experiences to these scriptural foretellings, arguing that the gospel message is not a new or contradictory doctrine but the culmination of a long-standing divine plan.
- ▶ **Festus’ Reaction:** Festus’ outburst, “Much learning is driving you mad!” (Acts 26:24), reflects his perception of Paul’s argument as overly complex and irrational. In Festus’ view, Paul’s deep engagement with and interpretation of Jewish scriptures seems to indicate a departure from sanity. This reaction highlights a broader contemporary challenge: individuals who commit deeply to scriptural study and allow it to shape their worldview are often labeled as fanatical or out of touch with reality. Festus’ response underscores the tension between those who see biblical faith as a source of truth and those who view it as an eccentric obsession.

##### 2) Paul’s personal transformation:

- ▶ **Radical Change:** Paul’s testimony includes a detailed account of his dramatic personal transformation from a fervent persecutor of Christians to a devoted preacher of the gospel (Acts 26:4-5, 10-11, 22-23). This profound shift in identity and mission is central to his defense and serves as a testament to the power of his faith. Paul’s transformation is a living example of the impact of encountering Christ and accepting the gospel message.

- ▶ Perception of Change: Such radical personal changes are often met with scepticism and suspicion. Individuals who undergo significant religious transformations are frequently accused of being brainwashed or unduly influenced by charismatic leaders or doctrines. In Paul's case, his dramatic change from a persecutor to an evangelist is perceived by some as evidence of a loss of rationality, rather than as a genuine response to a divine call.

### 3) Paul's theological assertions:

- ▶ Core Beliefs: Paul speaks about profound theological concepts such as the contrast between light and darkness, the power of Satan, and the transformative power of forgiveness (Acts 26:18, 20, 23). He also discusses the resurrection of the dead (Acts 26:8, 23) and describes a visionary experience of a resurrected Jesus commanding him to preach (Acts 26:16-18). These elements are integral to Paul's defense and convey the depth of his conviction and the foundation of his message.
- ▶ Reaction to the supernatural: The mention of supernatural experiences, such as visions and resurrections, contributes to the perception of Paul as irrational or delusional. Festus' reaction reflects a common scepticism towards claims of divine encounters and miraculous events. In the modern context, similar reactions can occur when individuals speak about spiritual experiences or teachings that challenge conventional secular views.

### c. Defending our faith against modern criticism:

- 1) Paul's provocative message and the accusation of insanity: Context of persecution: Paul's bold proclamation of the gospel, rooted in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, led to intense opposition from Jewish leaders. "For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me" (Acts 26:21). Festus, unfamiliar with the religious significance and the transformative power of Paul's message, accused him of madness. Paul, however, stood firm, asserting that his teachings were "words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25).
- 2) Similar reaction today:
  - a) Preaching sexual morality: The Bible clearly teaches that sexual activity is reserved for marriage. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4). Advocating for abstinence as a means to prevent issues like AIDS, teen pregnancy, and divorce is often met with derision. Yet, like Paul, we must uphold these truths despite societal pushback.
  - b) Views on divorce and remarriage: Biblical stance: Jesus' teaching on divorce is explicit: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Upholding this teaching can lead to accusations of being unreasonable or lacking compassion. However, maintaining the sanctity of marriage as intended by God is essential, regardless of societal norms.
  - c) Gender roles in the church: The Bible outlines specific roles for men and women in the church and family. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (1 Timothy 2:12). Additionally, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23). Teaching these roles often leads to accusations of sexism and being out of touch with modern values. Nevertheless, these roles reflect God's design and purpose, and we must convey them with clarity and love.

Paul's defense before Festus and Agrippa serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring clash between divine truth and human perception. Despite being labeled as mad for his unwavering commitment to the gospel and his profound transformation, Paul stood firm, proclaiming that his message was indeed "words of truth and reason." As we face modern criticisms of our beliefs - whether about sexual morality, divorce, or gender roles - we are called to uphold these biblical truths with the same conviction. Paul's example encourages us to respond with courage and clarity, ensuring that our defense of the faith remains rooted in the truth, regardless of how it might be perceived by those around us.

## 2. Remaining Faithful Amidst Criticism (Acts 26:28):

As we navigate the complexities of living out our faith in a world increasingly at odds with biblical principles, we face significant challenges and criticisms. This section, "Remaining Faithful Amidst Criticism," addresses the common tendencies we encounter when upholding beliefs that are considered out of the mainstream. From perceiving God's laws as harsh to doubting ourselves and the temptation to alter the truth, we will explore how these reactions can undermine our commitment. By examining scriptural insights and Paul's steadfast example, we aim to reinforce our resolve to remain faithful and unyielding in our convictions.

### a. Tendencies when sustaining an "Out of the Mainstream" position:

#### 1) Perceiving God's laws as harsh or outdated:

- ▶ Temptation to conform: We might feel that God's commands are too strict or out of touch with modern societal norms. This can lead to embarrassment and a tendency to equivocate or apologize for the truth.
- ▶ Scriptural insight: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19). We must remember that God's wisdom often runs counter to worldly wisdom.

#### 2) Doubting ourselves:

- ▶ Self-doubt: We may begin to question our convictions, wondering if we are missing something that everyone else seems to understand.
- ▶ Scriptural example: When Elijah felt alone and doubted his mission, God reassured him that he was not alone and that His plans were still in place (1 Kings 19:18).

#### 3) Altering the truth:

- ▶ Compromise: There is a temptation to soften or modify the truth to make it more acceptable to others, which can lead to a reduction in our zeal and enthusiasm for God's word.
- ▶ Scriptural warning: "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

### b. The problem is not with us or the truth:

- 1) Inherent truth of God's word: The word of God is timeless and applicable across all cultures and epochs. It is not overly complex, illogical, outdated, or culturally biased. The misunderstanding often lies with those whose value systems are at odds with divine truth.
- 2) Scriptural affirmation: "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalms 19:7). God's word is flawless and brings wisdom.

### c. Paul's example of obedience and boldness:

- 1) Unwavering obedience: Paul proclaimed, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). He did not apologize, hedge his message, or feel sorry for himself. Instead, he boldly expressed his wish that all could share in his faith, minus his chains (Acts 26:29).
- 2) Call to action: Just as Paul remained steadfast, we too must hold fast to our faith and proclaim the truth without compromise. "Brethren, if not you, who?" Our responsibility is to remain obedient to God's vision and boldly share the truth, regardless of societal pressures.

Remaining faithful in the face of criticism requires courage and clarity. The challenges we face - whether it is the perceived harshness of God's laws, self-doubt, or the temptation to compromise - are not new. Like Paul, who boldly adhered to his divine calling despite accusations and adversity, we too are called to stand firm in our convictions. By embracing the timeless truth of God's word and resisting the urge to alter our message to fit societal norms, we honor our commitment to Christ. Let us draw inspiration from Paul's unwavering example and remain resolute in our faith, confident that we are upholding the truth amidst a world that often misunderstands and resists it.

### 3. Almost Persuaded (Acts 26:28):

In the dramatic encounter between the Apostle Paul and King Agrippa, we witness a profound moment of tension and decision. As Paul addresses Agrippa, he leverages the king's knowledge of Jewish customs and his family's infamous history of opposition to Christianity. Despite Agrippa's awareness and the compelling nature of Paul's message, he remains "almost persuaded," a testimony to the powerful yet often unsettling impact of the gospel. This section, "Almost Persuaded," explores Agrippa's internal struggle, the political and personal barriers he faced, and Paul's unwavering commitment to his mission despite his imprisonment.

#### a. Paul's appeal to Agrippa's knowledge:

- 1) Historical context: Paul directly addresses King Agrippa, saying, "The king... knows these things" (Acts 26:26). Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish customs and prophecies added weight to Paul's message.
- 2) Family legacy of opposition: Agrippa's lineage was marked by opposition to the Christian faith:
  - ▶ Great grandfather: Herod the Great, who ordered the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).
  - ▶ Uncle: Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and mocked Jesus during His trial (Mark 6:27; Luke 23:11).
  - ▶ Father: Herod Agrippa I, who executed the apostle James and intended to kill Peter (Acts 12:1-3).
- 3) Agrippa's awareness: Given this background, Agrippa was well-acquainted with the events surrounding Jesus and the early Christians. Paul knew Agrippa could not feign ignorance of these matters.

#### b. Agrippa's dilemma:

- 1) Conflict of interest: Agrippa, surrounded by the Roman governor Festus, dignitaries, and his sister Bernice, who was also his consort, faced immense pressure. Accepting Paul's message would have significant personal and political repercussions.
- 2) "Almost persuaded": Despite being deeply moved by Paul's words, Agrippa's entanglements and the fear of losing his standing prevented him from fully committing. He famously responded, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

#### c. Paul's priorities:

- 1) Mission over freedom: Paul's primary concern was not his own freedom but the salvation of his listeners. He passionately declared, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:29).
- 2) Unwavering commitment: Paul's dedication to his mission exemplifies the true heart of a disciple. His willingness to endure imprisonment and suffering underscored the importance of his message and his desire for all, including Agrippa, to embrace the gospel.

Agrippa's near-conversion underscores a common struggle faced by many when confronted with the truth of the gospel: the tension between personal convictions and societal pressures. Despite being moved by Paul's testimony, Agrippa's reluctance to fully embrace Christianity reflects the challenges of making a radical commitment. Paul's focus on the spiritual well-being of his audience, even over his own freedom, serves as a powerful example of dedication to the gospel. As we reflect on this encounter, we are reminded of the importance of remaining steadfast in our mission, valuing the eternal over the temporal, and remaining committed to sharing the message of Christ, regardless of the obstacles we may face.

### Summary:

1. **Paul's Appeal To Agrippa's Knowledge (Acts 26:26):** Paul addresses King Agrippa by emphasizing his familiarity with Jewish customs and prophecies, given Agrippa's lineage marked by notable opposition to Christianity. Agrippa's great grandfather, Herod the Great, and other family members had been involved in significant events against the early Christian movement. Paul's approach underscores that Agrippa was well-informed about the gospel's claims and the context surrounding them.

- 2. Agrippa's Dilemma And Partial Persuasion (Acts 26:28):** Faced with considerable personal and political pressures from his position and surroundings, Agrippa is profoundly impacted by Paul's message but remains "almost persuaded." His response reflects the internal conflict of accepting a truth that could jeopardize his status and relationships, illustrating the challenge of reconciling personal beliefs with societal and political consequences.
- 3. Paul's Commitment To His Mission (Acts 26:29):** Despite his imprisonment, Paul's primary focus is on the spiritual well-being of his audience rather than his own freedom. His wish that all his listeners, including Agrippa, could fully embrace the faith he professes demonstrates his dedication and the centrality of his mission. Paul's example highlights the priority of spreading the gospel message over personal comfort or safety.

#### Applications:

- 1. Standing Firm In The Face Of Opposition (Acts 26:24-25):** Just as Paul remained resolute despite being accused of madness by Festus, we too are called to uphold our convictions even when they are met with scepticism or hostility. In our contemporary context, standing firm in our beliefs about morality, doctrine, and scriptural truth can lead to criticism. We must remember that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19) and find strength in the assurance that God's wisdom surpasses worldly judgments.
- 2. Embracing The Challenges Of Personal Transformation (Acts 26:4-5):** Paul's dramatic transformation from a persecutor to a proponent of the faith serves as a powerful example of the impact of a genuine encounter with the gospel. Similarly, when we undergo significant changes in our lives due to our faith, we may face misunderstandings or accusations of being radical. We are encouraged to embrace the transformative power of the gospel, as Paul did, and trust that "the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul" (Psalms 19:7), guiding us through our personal and spiritual growth.
- 3. Prioritizing The Gospel Mission Over Personal Comfort (Acts 26:29):** Paul's unwavering commitment to spreading the gospel, even while in chains, highlights the importance of prioritizing our mission over personal ease or security. Just as Paul wished for all to share in his faith despite his imprisonment, we are called to boldly and selflessly pursue our mission of sharing the gospel. This commitment is reflected in Jesus' instruction: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). We must be prepared to face trials and sacrifices in our dedication to this divine call.

#### Questions:

1. Why did Festus accuse Paul of madness (Acts 26:24)?
2. What was Paul's main defense when he was accused of being mad (Acts 26:25)?
3. How did Paul's personal transformation contribute to the perception of his madness (Acts 26:4-5)?
4. Why was King Agrippa almost persuaded by Paul's message (Acts 26:28)?
5. What can we learn from Paul's example in prioritizing his mission over personal freedom (Acts 26:29)?

Based on an outline by Jim Jonas  
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