Series: Acts

Message: “Who’s Crazy Now?”

Text: Acts 21:27-26:32

Theme:

Date: June 15, 2014

Location: Christ Community EFC

**Please open your Bibles to Acts chapter 21 and we will be picking up at verse 27; Acts 21:27.**

Last week we covered Paul’s third missionary journey as we continue to make our way through the book of Acts.

In Acts 21:17 we find Paul and his missionary team arriving back in Jerusalem.

The first thing they do is seek out the apostles, elders and go before the church to report and give testimony to all that God had done through them during their journey.

Those in the church receive the news and praise God!

Why did God chose to include the book of Acts in the Bible? Is it just the history of the early church?

This is our history as Christians but it is more. The book of Acts give us the opening chapters of God’s story of the church and the spreading of the gospel.

This story is still being written in our lives, our church, as we obediently seek to make disciples all people for the glory of God.

Paul had hurried back to Jerusalem in order to arrive in time to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. (The second of the three great annual festivals, the others being the Passover and Tabernacles.)

Then in verse 27 we read that: “**When the seven days were almost completed** [that is the seven days of purification]**, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him**…”

Some of the Jews from Asia Miner, where Paul and his team spent much of their time come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast too.

When they recognized Paul they begin making all kinds of accusations against him trying to stir up the crowd against Paul.

And they are pretty successful at it and before long the commander of the Roman troops heard the commotion and steps in to restore order.

They arrest Paul and start to take him away but Paul ask that he might speak to the crowd first.

In the first part of chapter 22 Paul shares his testimony and in the process presents the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is and what He did on the cross.

With that the Roman commander had Paul taken to the barracks before a riot breaks out and they lose all control over the situation.

The commander orders that Paul be flogged and questioned. In essence they weren’t sure what he did but they were going to beat a confession out of him.

Paul just happened to mention that, oh by the way it’s not legal to flog a Roman citizen, and by the way, I am a Roman citizen.

We are told here that Paul, though a Jew, was born a citizen of Rome. With that came certain rights and privileges. And he didn’t mind making use of those privileges here.

The next morning a plot to kill Paul had been discovered.

At this point, knowing that Paul was a Roman citizen but that he was also charged with maintaining peace and order in Jerusalem, the commander thought it best to get Paul out of town.

So the Roman commander sends Paul the Caesarea. To be turned over to the Roman governor over all of Palestine “**his Excellency the governor Felix**…” (Acts 23:26)

History shows that Felix was somewhat of an inept leader. He was governor over Judea from A.D. 52-59.

Felix kept Paul locked up for two full years with the hopes that as some point Paul would offer him a bribe to be released.

At the end of chapter 24, Luke records that Felix is succeeded as governor by Porcius Festus, leaving Paul in prison.

Trying to win points with the Jews, the new governor Festus asks Paul if he would go back to Jerusalem and stand trial.

Knowing that that would mean his death sentence, Paul appeals to Caesar. One of his rights as a Roman citizen was that he could have his case heard by Caesar himself.

Before Festus could send Paul on to Rome, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrive in Caesarea to pay their respects to the new governor. (25:13-ff)

King Agrippa was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and ruled over several minor territories in the northeast of Palestine.

Bernice is Agrippa’s half-sister and constant companion and the two of them had an incestuous relationship.

When Agrippa shows up, Festus tells him about this guy, Paul, left in prison by Felix. He says; “You might get a kick out of hearing his story.”

Look over now at Acts 25:23: “**So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in**.

Paul then proceed to once again tell the story of his conversion, his encounter with the living Jesus Christ and his call to take this message of salvation first to the Jews and then to the gentiles.

And then Paul wraps up his testimony starting in chapter 26 verse 19. Let me just read this; Acts 26:19-29.

**“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.**

**21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.**

**22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:**

**23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”**

**24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”**

**25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.**

**26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.**

**27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”**

**28 And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”**

**29 And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.**”

Luke describes how Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice entered the auditorium amid great pomp, accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city (25:23).

If you’ve ever watched the Oscar Awards night on TV, you have some idea of the glitter and glamour of the rich and famous, who are all trying to impress one another and the world.

Into this superficial scene the guards bring a little Jewish man in chains, the apostle Paul, to speak about eternal truths.

It was not a trial per se, but more like entertainment.

Festus needed to know what charges he could write to the emperor when he sent Paul off to Rome.

Agrippa, who was somewhat an expert in Jewish matters, wanted to hear this man who had stirred up such intense opposition among the Jewish leaders.

It would be fun to hear the man’s quaint story and discuss it afterwards over drinks and hors d’oeuvres.

In the middle of the proceedings, after Paul had proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, Festus reached his limit.

He blurted out loudly, **“Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.”**

Paul calmly replied, “**I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.**” (26:24-25).

Paul proceeded to target King Agrippa, seeking to bring him to personal faith and repentance.

This exchange, which puts Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice on one side, with all of their worldly pomp and show, and Paul the prisoner for Jesus Christ on the other side, makes us ponder the question; “Who’s crazy now?”

Is Paul crazy to give up all that this world offers to follow Jesus Christ?

Or, are those who live for all that this world offers—riches, fame, and pleasure—crazy, who die without repenting of their sins?

The biblical answer is…“**The crazy person lives for this present world, whereas the sane person obeys Jesus Christ and lives in light of eternity**.

**1. The crazy person lives for this present fleeting world.**

Martin Luther said, “I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But the things I have placed in God’s hands, I still possess”.

The missionary Jim Eliot, who was martyred at 28, wrote in his journal at age 22, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”.

Those comments make perfect sense to the believer, and yet each of us would have to admit that this present world holds a strong attraction for most of us.

We all need to remember Jesus’ words, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13); and John’s warning, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Why would a person live for something as superficial and short-lived as this fallen world?

A brief glance at the lives of Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice will uncover at least three factors that should serve as a warning to help us keep sane and focused on God.

You see:

**1) A wrong view of success can cause us to live for this present world.**

Let’s face it. It must have felt great to Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice to be surrounded by armed guards, to step out of the royal chariots in their expensive robes and wave to the common people as they went up the steps into the auditorium.

In the eyes of the world, they had it made! Ah, the sweet smell of success!

But those whom the world considers successful are soon dead and forgotten. Festus would be dead within two years.

If he, Agrippa, and Bernice had not had their names recorded in the Bible, no one today would know anything about them.

Paul, whom most people in Caesarea wouldn’t have walked across the street to see, was the truly successful man in the room that day, because he lived his life in the light of eternity and the promises of God for the future.

So we have a warning against having a wrong view of success.

We also see a warning that:

**2) Trying to impress others while ignoring God can cause us to live for this present world.**

Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice were like some of the rich and famous, trying to impress others with their own greatness.

But their fatal mistake was that they did not give any thought about how to live so as to please God. They were totally self-focused.

And, while few of us here would ever be as superficial as these worldly people were, it’s easy to fall into the trap of trying to impress others and forget that our focus should be on pleasing God, who examines our hearts and has a plan for our future.

We should always keep in mind the God’s words (Isa. 66:3, NIV), “**This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word**.”

The warning is that:

**3) An over-emphasis on reason without factoring in God’s power can cause us to live for this present world**.

Festus was a rationalist. For him, the notion that Jesus or anyone else could rise from the dead was just plain crazy.

He was narrow minded and could not see beyond himself.

He thought that in spite of Paul’s great learning, saying such things proved that the man had lost his mind. He believed in philosophy and logic, not in religious superstition.

Festus’ mistake was that he had not factored in God, who spoke the universe into existence by the word of His power.

Reason is fine to a point; God gave us minds capable of thinking, and we should use them. His Word gives us many truths that require careful thinking to grasp.

But if we exalt human reason to the point that we exclude God and His power or set aside His revelation in His Word, we fall into error.

To leave God out only leaves this present world as all that there is. If this world is all there is, then we should eat, drink, and be merry because tomorrow we die.

The lives of Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice show us that the crazy person is the one who lives for this superficial, fleeting world that has no purpose or future for tomorrow.

On the other hand, Paul helps us see that:

**2. The sane person obeys Jesus Christ and lives in light of eternity.**

Contrary to the charge of Festus’ outburst, Paul was the sanest man in that room!

He calmly counters Festus’ charge by saying, “I am not out of my mind, most noble Festus, but I utter words of truth and rationality” (26:25, lit.).

Paul’s faith (along with the faith of all of the apostles) rested completely on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was not an irrational leap in the dark, but was based on their eyewitness testimony.

It was Paul’s encounter with the risen Savior that converted him and changed him from insanity to sanity

Note three things that Paul shows us about the sanity of obeying Jesus Christ in light of eternity:

The first thing Paul shows us is that:

**1) Sanity begins with your conversion.**

Paul was insanely driven when he persecuted the church, but it was on the Damascus Road that Paul began to live in light of God’s eternal kingdom, which is the only sane way to live.

If Paul had viewed Agrippa through worldly eyes, he would have thought, “The man has everything he needs. He’s wealthy, he’s powerful, he’s successful—what do I have to offer him?”

But Paul viewed his audience that day through God’s eyes: They were lost, enslaved to sin, and under God’s condemnation.

While Agrippa had a superficial belief in the Old Testament prophets (26:27), he needed to repent of his sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

So Paul sought to bring him to saving faith, which necessarily includes repentance.

Paul apparently went through a time of resisting and kicking against the truth of the gospel, perhaps after he witnessed the death of Stephen.

The point is, to fight God on the matter of conversion is insane. It is only to wound yourself.

The path to blessing both now and for eternity is to quit fighting God, to repent of your sins, and to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, and through the power of the Holy Spirit begin to live a life that shows the reality of your faith.

That leads to the next thing Paul shows us:

**2) Conversion manifests itself in radical, lifelong obedience to Jesus Christ.**

As I said, repentance is an essential part of conversion.

Paul preached that people “**should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance**” (26:20).

Repentance means more than just turning from our sins but in carries the idea of turning toward God.

Before conversion, we all were living for self and for the things of this world. After conversion, we live to please and glorify Jesus Christ and to seek first His kingdom.

Paul describes his own repentance in Philippians 3:7-8,

“**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ**.”

Can you say this? Is this true of you? Have you counted all things to be loss?

Or do you just want enough Jesus to bless the things you have or give you the things you want?

Here Paul describes his life after conversion: “I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision” (26:19).

You don’t accidentally fall into that kind of radical obedience to the Great Commission. It must be your deliberate focus.

You’ve got to keep shrugging off the enticements of this world in order to be obedient to the heavenly vision.

The third thing Paul shows us is that:

**3) Radical obedience to Jesus Christ only makes sense in light of eternity.**

The world lives as if this life is all that really matters.

The obedient Christian says, “No, if this life is all there is, I am crazy!”

We put all of our eggs in the eternity basket. We say, “If Christ is not risen, and if there is no hope beyond the grave, please pity me, because I’m nuts!”

Would the way that you obey Jesus as Lord, the way you spend your time, and the way you manage your finances cause a worldly person to say, “You’re a bit off”?

If not, perhaps you need to rearrange your priorities in the light of eternity. Because Jesus is risen, it’s the only sane way to live.

**Conclusion**

Who are the crazy ones? Those who live for this present world and all it offers.

Who are the sane people? Those who obey Jesus Christ and live in light of eternity!