

Paul, You Are Out of Your Mind

For any professional working in the mental health field, and by that I am thinking of counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, there is a source of information that's very important for what they do. Periodically, the American Psychiatric Association publishes what's known as the DSM, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. It's not easy reading by any means. It's quite technical and detailed, and contains language the average lay person would not understand. The manual describes and categorizes all known mental health disorders that are recognized by the American Psychiatric Association.

The DSM is used in the United States and around the world by therapists, researchers, doctors, insurance companies and drug makers as a valuable tool in diagnosing, describing and treating known mental health conditions. It was first published in 1952. Since its original publication, it's undergone several revisions. The next edition of the manual is due out in May of 2013.

In its original form, it covered 134 pages describing 60 mental health disorders. The 1974 edition was 500 pages long and it described 256 disorders. The 2000 edition was 1000 pages long and described 365 disorders. And the upcoming edition will contain approximately 1200 pages describing 500 mental health diagnostic conditions.

It's interesting to think about the expanding length of the DSM since 1952. I found myself wondering why it keeps growing as it does. I'm not sure what that means other than we are better able to identify, categorize, diagnose and describe the mental health disorders present in our generation.

Now you may be legitimately wondering what a discussion of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* has to do with our ongoing study of the book of Acts. Perhaps you've even thought about what condition best describes me based on how I began this message. That's a fair question to ask.

Well, I have to tell you that there was one individual in the Apostle Paul's day that did not need the DSM or any such help when he spontaneously blurted out what he thought was wrong with Paul. He was a DSM in and of himself. Open your Bibles to Acts 26:24 to see what I mean. After listening to Paul's speech before the most influential and powerful people in Palestine, frankly right in the middle of Paul's address, Festus the governor of Judea shouted out in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."

I find that almost amusing. You see, what the DSM takes 1200 pages to describe - which by the way are legitimate disorders not to be taken lightly - Festus blurted out with a blunt diagnosis of what he thought ailed Paul. In Festus' estimation, Paul was crazy, out of his mind.

In that light, isn't it interesting to note that what Festus asserted in his day is to a large degree how the world views those who profess faith in Jesus Christ? Christians are crazy, out of

touch with reality, losing their minds. I wonder; have you ever been called crazy because of your faith? Perhaps not to your face, but I guarantee you that people have thought of you in that way.

Now with that observation in mind, here's what I intend to do today as we continue in our study of the book of Acts. We are going to bite off a larger portion of scripture than is typical for us. Today we are going to make our way through chapters 25 and 26. My intention is to walk us through the events described in the chapters, but in particular to focus on what Paul said in his own defense before Festus and King Herod Agrippa. Following that, we will make several point of application for us in our day as we serve as representatives of the gospel.

Since it's been three weeks since our last message from Acts, let me provide you with a little bit of background before we review the events of chapters 25 and 26. When we studied chapter 22, we noted that upon Paul's return to Jerusalem, he had an opportunity to preach to the people. As a result of his preaching, a major riot took place. The crowd was inflamed by Jews from Asia, who violently disagreed with what Paul was preaching. In addition, they alleged that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple, a major breach of Jewish law.

As a result of the riot, Paul was put under protective arrest by the Roman authorities. Although he had violated no Roman laws, he was about to be flogged by the centurion overseeing his arrest. It was at that point that Paul identified himself as a Roman citizen. This stunned the centurion. He realized that to flog Paul, who as yet had not been found guilty of any crime, constituted a violation of Paul's rights as a citizen of Rome. You see, the Jews accusing him could not prove he had done anything worthy of punishment under Roman law.

Once the centurion determined that Paul had not broken Roman law, he convened the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem for the purpose of hearing their charges against Paul. It was shortly after that the centurion learned of a plot to murder Paul. As a result, he had Paul transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where Felix the governor of Judea resided. Paul had a formidable escort to protect him along the way; 200 soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen. In addition, the centurion provided a letter specifying why he was transferring Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

Now once Paul arrived in Caesarea and Felix read the letter, he determined to bring the Jewish leaders there to hear their charges against Paul. As the text tells us, there was nothing brought against him deserving of death, let alone imprisonment. But Felix, wanting to appease the Jews and keep the peace, decided to keep Paul under protective custody for a period of two years.

This now leads us into the events of chapter 25; for here we have Paul, having been under house arrest for two years, meeting the new governor, Festus, who followed Felix. Shortly after assuming his role as governor, the text tells us that Festus travelled to Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders wasted no time in approaching him regarding Paul. They were intent on permanently silencing him.

Take a look at Acts 25:3; “They asked a favor that he summon him to Jerusalem because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.” They wanted Paul brought to Jerusalem to face them again. However, that was simply a pretense for their second plot to kill him. Festus refused likely because he knew of their previous plot to have him murdered. However, what Festus did was to instruct the Jews that they should come to Caesarea where he would hear their case against Paul. Verse seven tells us that when they arrived, they made their case before Festus. Note the final phrase in verse seven; “...bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove.”

Now shortly after that, the new King of Judea, Herod Agrippa, along with his wife arrived in Caesarea. Verse 14 tells us that Festus told the king about Paul. He told him that the charges the Jews brought against Paul were based on points of Jewish law, nothing in violation of Roman law. After hearing what Festus had to say about Paul, the king said in verse 22, “I would like to hear the man myself.” To which Festus replied, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

Now in order to fully understand the scene, follow along with me as I read Acts 25:23-27: “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. And Festus said, ‘King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we have examined him I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.’”

Now that describes the scene as Paul is brought in to the assembly. I want to pause at this point and ask you to put yourself in his position if only for a moment. Think with me now. Paul had been in captivity for two years. He may have had no warning whatsoever that he would appear before these people. Perhaps he was taken directly from his place of confinement into the hall, where he found a large assembly of people. He was thrust before the most important people of Judea with all their power and pageantry on full display. He saw Agrippa and Bernice, the king and his queen. He saw Festus, along with all the leading military and political leaders of the city. That’s quite a scene, would you agree?

I’m not certain if you have ever been plunged, without warning, into a situation where you had to speak to powerful and influential people. That must have been quite an experience. A number of years ago when I taught at the University in Missouri, I was appointed by the governor to serve on a committee charged with the oversight of state funds for children with special needs. I met with the governor on several occasions. On one occasion, as I entered his office, the United States Senator from Missouri was present. On another occasion, after I taught a class in Mississippi, I was scheduled to have lunch with the governor to discuss how his state provides for the education of children with special needs.

In each of those instances, I knew the meetings were scheduled, thus I had time to prepare my thoughts. I knew what they wanted and what I would say. But that was clearly not the case for Paul. He went from prison cell to assembly hall; from solitude to a large crowd of prominent people; from the austerity of his surroundings to a place, look at verse 23; of “great pomp.”

Pay attention to the word “pomp” in verse 23. This is the only place in the New Testament where we see the word. It signifies a grand, showy pageant. That suggests that Festus, who arranged it all, desired to turn Paul’s hearing into an occasion to impress the king. As we enter chapter 26, we can see clearly who’s in control. Take a look at verse one; “So Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You have permission to speak for yourself.’”

Now before we take a look at Paul’s response, let me tell you just a little about Herod Agrippa. As you know, the name Herod is not strange to the New Testament. His father, Herod I, was the Herod who killed James, arrested Peter and met a gruesome death when he was eaten by worms after failing to give God the glory following a speech he made. That’s all described in Acts 12. His uncle, Herod Antipas is the Herod mentioned in the gospel of Luke. He was the Herod who executed John the Baptist. His great-grandfather, Herod the Great, ruled Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth. He gave the order to have all the children of Bethlehem killed in an effort to kill the newborn king. So this particular king comes from a long line of royalty. He was used to power and he knew how to use it if need be.

Now what I really want us to see is that Paul’s response to Herod’s order to speak contained three component parts. Its primary focus was on two main themes; the resurrection of Christ, and how his life had changed since he placed his faith in Christ. But in stressing these two themes, he divided his address into three parts. Let me show you the divisions by way of reading select portions of the text. After we do so, we will direct particular attention to how we might follow his example.

First, take a look at verse four and the initial part of verse five, where Paul made reference to his manner of life from his youth and how he spent it from the beginning among his people in Jerusalem. What Paul introduced in that opening statement was a discussion of his former life, where he was from, as well as how he was raised. He also made the point of saying that his former life was not hidden in any way. Take a look at the last part of verse 4; “...known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time if they are willing to testify.”

What that points to is something everyone here this morning shares in common with Paul. Each of us who has come to faith in Christ had a life before we came to faith in Christ, and the variety of our stories is limitless. Some of us were raised in spiritually sensitive homes. Perhaps we went to church regularly. Others were vehement haters of God and anything having to do with the church. Some may have lived relatively trouble free lives free from destructive choices. Still others may have spent years locked in patterns of behavior that were dangerous and risky.

My point is simple. Every personal story will differ. But note especially the powerful parts of Paul’s. In the space of verses four through 11, he made reference to his upbringing as a

Pharisee, which clearly includes his devotion to the law, his opposition to Christianity, and his persecution and murder of Christians. Note verse 11 in particular; “I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blasphemous, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Friends, the simple truth here is that you have a story to tell of what your life was like before coming to faith in Christ. It’s your story. No one knows it better than you; and further, no one can take it away from you. You and only you lived it; therefore, it has validity and power in the telling. That’s where Paul started his defense before the king, and it should be the first place we start when telling others about Christ.

But note what Paul discussed next. The second part of his speech included the specifics of how he came to faith in Christ. Starting in verse 12, he elaborated on his experience of meeting Christ as he was travelling to Damascus. It is a familiar story to us. Out of nowhere, Jesus appeared to him and asked why Paul was persecuting him. Verse 15 says Jesus told Paul to rise and proceeded to inform him of what he wanted Paul to do.

So, as part of his conversion experience, Christ told Paul the reason why he appeared to him. In Jesus’ words, Paul was to be Christ’s servant and witness; to go to the Gentiles so that their eyes might be opened to the gospel, thereby delivering them from the power of Satan and enabling them to receive forgiveness of sins, setting them apart because of their faith in Christ.

Now clearly, Paul’s conversion experience was unique to Paul. Nonetheless, your conversion experience is unique to you. It is yours alone, shared by no one else. How did you come to faith in Jesus Christ? Was it as a child or later in life? Was it at church, through a campus ministry as was the case for me, your family, through the witness of a friend telling his or her story, a book, reading the Bible on your own, hearing something on the radio, and on and on?

No one can take from you your unique experience; that moment when you understood that you were a sinner in need of a savior. At some point, although the circumstances vary greatly from person to person, you came to the place of understanding that there was nothing you could do to save yourself. Going to church would not save you. Being baptized would not save you. Being a nice person would not save you, nor would following a set of manmade rules. There came a time under your unique circumstances when you came to realize that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; that there is no other way. And note; Paul was direct in explaining his salvation experience to King Herod, which means that we should be just as direct as the opportunity presents itself to do the same.

The third and final part of Paul’s speech begins in verse 19. Paul said, “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” He then went on to describe what his life was like after he came to faith in Christ. In other words, he described how the gospel changed him.

Now this is a very important thing for us to understand and for this reason. One of the first marks of a true conversion experience is a changed life. Once again, this will be unique to

you. The specifics of how your life changed are yours alone. For some people, the change is fast and remarkable, forsaking things that were painful and clearly sinful. For others, the changes are reflected in a more private and quiet manner. But the Bible is quite clear in telling us that a genuine conversion experience is accompanied by a change in how a person lives, thinks and feels about God.

In Paul’s case, he went from being a violent aggressor against Christians to being their most vocal proponent. How did your life change as a result of placing your faith in Christ? Only you can answer that question. It’s your story to tell.

Now it is at this point in Paul’s speech that Festus interrupted him and shouted out, “Paul, you are out of your mind.” You see, for the person who does not know Jesus Christ, a personal story such as Paul related brands them as crazy or worse. And although the King did not call Paul crazy, note what he said in verse 28; “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”

Finally, take a look at verse 32. After the entire spectacle of what had taken place was over, the king said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.” The remaining part of the book of Acts, which we will cover in the next three weeks, describes Paul’s journey to Rome.

Now how does all of this apply to you and to me? Well, I trust you see clearly that what Paul did before the king, you and I can do as well. Paul’s speech encompassed his personal testimony composed of three parts; his life before Christ, how he came to faith in Christ, and how his life was changed as a result. How ready are you to follow Paul’s example this week?

Friends, I hear all types of excuses for not doing so. Sometimes I hear, “I don’t know what to say.” To which I respond, “It’s your story. No one knows it better than you do.” Others say, “I just live the gospel with my life.” To which I say; “God bless you for that, but now go out and open your mouth and speak about why you live as you do.” I’ve heard others say, “I’m waiting for the perfect timing.” Friends, there is no such thing. Still others suggest, “Yes, but I might be rejected.” Well friend, you’re in very good company. Jesus was rejected, wasn’t he? The one that truly confounds me is when people say, “Well, that’s the pastor’s job, not mine.” Can I tell you that it’s the pastor’s job to equip *you* to do so?

My prayer is that in the coming days, you will find yourself in a situation where you can speak of Christ in the telling of your salvation story. It is as easy as describing your life before Christ, how you came to salvation in Christ, and how your life has been changed since. As I prayed about this message all week, I asked God to move in each of your hearts preparing you to do what Paul did. I’m anxious to year your stories of how God did so.