

Words Of Truth And Soberness

Acts 26 records Paul's sermon to Agrippa, an audience the King himself had asked for. Festus had revealed to Agrippa his quandary about Paul. Felix had left Paul in prison for Festus's disposition. Festus asked Paul if he would return to Jerusalem to be judged of him there, an effort to placate the Jews for Caesarea, not Jerusalem, was the judgment seat for the province. Paul knew the plot of the Jews to slay him had two years before necessitated the chief captain to hurriedly transport Paul to Caesarea. Paul knew the animosities and schemes of his enemies had not abated and so he appealed to Caesar. Festus had a problem on his hands. He did not know what to write of the charges against Paul for he knew the issue was religious concerning "one Jesus who was dead and whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

This was a critical matter with Paul. In his address to Agrippa, he early asked, "Why is it judged incredible with you if God doth raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Paul said he taught nothing "but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).

At this point Festus could contain himself no longer. With a loud voice he cried, "Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning is turning thee mad" (Acts 26:24). Paul's response to Festus was brief: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Festus perceived that Paul was highly educated. He attributed Paul's much study to having driven him insane. He regarded Paul as insane because he preached Christ who had been dead as now raised from the dead. The resurrection from the dead was incredible to Festus, the ranting of a deranged person. Paul denied the doctrine to be the product of insanity; rather they were words of truth and soberness. Paul was certain Jesus had been resurrected. From the time Jesus answered Saul's question, "Who art thou, Lord," in saying "I am Jesus...whom thou persecutest," he had "obtained the help that is from God" (Acts 26:22). That help involved deliverance from his enemies; working miracles through his hand and in revealing to him the mystery that had for ages been hidden in the mind of God. Paul KNEW he had obtained the help of God and he KNEW that help was proof of a risen Christ. When he preached a risen Christ, his words were not fabrications nor unfounded

rumors; they were words of truth.

And they were words of soberness. In addition to the fact they WERE NOT the ranting of a mad man, the truthfulness of these words ought to bring sober reflection to all who hear them. Christ is raised from the dead. He is the firstfruit of them that sleep. We shall be raised from the dead, but raised to what? "And many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:1).

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