**CRAZY OR COURAGEOUSLY COMPASSIONATE?**

**Acts 26:1-32**

* *“For this is what the Lord has commanded us:* ***I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.****”* (Acts 13:47)
* *“giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light. 13 He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. 14 In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* (Colossians 1:12-14)
* **A life that has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus behaves differently!**
* *“For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.”* (Ephesians 2:8-10)
* **Physical chains pale in comparison to the bondage of spiritual chains that keep people blinded to the truth of the gospel of Jesus.**

**CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE RESPECTFUL FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL**

* *“Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense: 2 ‘I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,’”* (Acts 26:1b-2)
* **Following the example of Jesus demands that approach our conversations with non-believers respectfully and with grace.**
* Jesus - *“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who[r] persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:43-44)
* **We will never demean, belittle, or badger anyone into an understanding of the amazing gospel of grace.**

**OUR CONVERSION TESTIMONY IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL TOOLS WE HAVE**

* *“All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem… 9 In fact, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 I actually did this in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I was in agreement against them. 11 In all the synagogues I often punished them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.*

*12 ‘I was traveling to Damascus under these circumstances with authority and a commission from the chief priests. 13 King Agrippa, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” 15 ‘I asked, “Who are you, Lord?”*

*‘And the Lord replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. 16 But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”* (Acts 26:4, 9-18)

* **While every Christian should study the Scriptures, God has already equipped you with all you need to share the gospel of grace with others through your own story.**
* *“Jesus did not let him but told him, ‘Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.’ 20 So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed.”* (Mark 5:19-20)
* **“Not everyone has a story as dramatic as Paul’s, but choosing personal transparence**

**REGARDLESS OF THE RESPONSE, COMPASSIONATELY PREACH THE CROSS, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS, AND REPENTANCE**

* *“’Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance. 21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and were trying to kill me. 22 To this very day, I have had help from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place— 23 that the Messiah would suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles.’* 24 *As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, ‘You’re out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad.’”* (Acts 26:20-24)
* **It is only our responsibility to compassionately share the Truth of the gospel, but we are not responsible for the results or the responses.**
* *“’I wish before God,’ replied Paul, ‘that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains.’”* (Acts 26:29)
* *“When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.”* (Matthew 9:36)
* **Only when we learn to see people the way Jesus sees people will we be able to effectively love and share truth with people who are far from God.**

**\*\*CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION ON BACK\*\***

**CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION**

**ICE-BREAKER**: Share about a time when someone showed you unexpected compassion.

**START THINKING (Observation):**

* What does Acts 26 teach us about God/The Holy Spirit?
* Why did Paul stretch out his hand before he spoke?
* Even after 2 years of false imprisonment, how did Paul treat the Governor (Festus) and King Agrippa?
* What were the main elements of Paul’s speech to Agrippa?
* How did Festus respond to Paul’s testimony and speech?
* What did Jesus mean when he told Paul “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”? (See verse 14)

**DIGGING DEEPER (Understanding and Application):**

* In what ways can we emulate Paul’s example of respectful dialogue about the gospel? What are some things to avoid?
* Share a brief version of your conversion testimony. (If you have not yet trusted Jesus as your Savior, what are your main questions/hindrances?)
* What might it look like today if someone is “kicking against the goads”?
* How does Paul’s handling of being called crazy by Festus help you as you think about sharing the gospel with others?
* Even though we are saved by grace, what role does “the works of repentance” play in the life of a Christian?
* What will you do differently based on this study?

**LOVING OUTWARD**

* Who do I/you need to share Jesus with this week?
* Who do you need to have a follow-up conversation about Jesus with?
* Who are you inviting/bringing to church next week?