



SAN ITV OR MADNESS

Presented by

DR. JOEL NEDERHOOD

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SANITY OR MADNESS

I am not mad . . . but I am speaking the sober truth.
Acts 26:25

Many people who hear The Back to God Hour occasionally, or perhaps even frequently, would have to say that this program broadcasts madness ... insanity.

I know that this seems to be a very harsh statement - to say that to many who have heard this program it has been madness and insanity. Most likely, many who do not particularly agree with the Christian position would hasten to assure me that they do not feel this way about this program at all. If we were talking together, they would be very kind to me, and they would probably say something like this: "Oh, of course, I don't agree with everything that is said on your program, but I certainly wouldn't call it madness and insanity. Why, I think there were a lot of nice things said on your program. We need programs like yours. Oh, I don't feel the same way you do about the Bible, and I don't feel the same way you do about Jesus Christ, but we all have different opinions about religion, isn't that right? Don't think that just because I don't believe in Jesus, I think your program was foolish and that there wasn't any good in it. Come on now ... be sensible."

Well, that's very kind! appreciate it when people talk to me this way and assure me that they feel a program like The Back to God Hour does some good, even though they don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is a supremely important book because it reveals God and His Son to us. What would our world be like if we couldn't be kind to each other, even when we disagree? But I feel I must press my point, nevertheless I believe that this program either rep-

resents insanity and absurdity or it represents the truth.

Unfortunately, this is the way it is with religion. A religious position is not either true or half true, or even true or false, but it is either true or insane. To be perfectly frank with you, if what I have said is not true, I am not just mistaken, but I am simply mad.

I think we would both be doing ourselves a favor if we recognized this fundamental issue. If there are problems with my mind that make my relationship to reality very shaky, you should try to help me. And if there are problems with yours that make it impossible for you to perceive reality properly, I should try to help you.

This is the ultimate religious issue. I have come to this conclusion not because many people write in and tell me that the Christian position is madness, though many people do just that. I believe that the Christian position is either sanity or madness for a very special reason. The Bible puts the issue this way.

Before talking about that reason, we should first of all agree on a definition of madness. I am not a psychiatrist nor a psychologist so we will have to develop a working definition that hopefully will be acceptable. May I suggest this one: madness, or insanity, is any condition of the mind that makes it impossible for a person to perceive reality accurately and respond to it usefully. To take a very common example, if a man thinks he is Napoleon, he has made a basic mistake in perceiving reality. He doesn't understand who he himself is, and that is extremely serious. Because of this fundamental error in perception he will respond to his environment improperly. He has a view of reality that renders him pretty useless to himself and to everybody else. He is insane.

With this in mind, it is useful to notice that the

Bible talks about the Christian position in ways that indicate that, if we are honest with each other, we must admit that the Christian faith must also be discussed in terms of either sanity or madness. Near the end of the book of Acts in the New Testament, there is an account of the appearance of the apostle Paul before representatives of the Roman government. Paul was the greatest single representative of Christianity.

In his speech to the Roman King Agrippa, Paul described his early life of hatred of Jesus Christ and his record of fierce persecution of those who followed Jesus this way: "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I gave my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."

So that is the kind of man the apostle Paul had been. But as his speech before King Agrippa continued, he described how Jesus Christ met him on the road to Damascus where he was going to harass Christians. "At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ... And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus who you are persecuting.'

And then the apostle told how he saw Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who had been crucified, but who had risen from the dead. He saw that this Jesus was the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament prophets. He declared: "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: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."

And then do you know what the Bible says? It says that the Roman governor, named Festus, interrupted Paul's defense, and said, "Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad." Paul answered, "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth." Did you notice that? The charge of madness was leveled against Paul. And Paul rejected it. He said, "I am not mad. I am telling you the sober truth (26:4-29).

This is a royal scene. King Agrippa, who prided himself in his knowledge of Hebrew lore, was the person addressed, intelligent, suave, urbane, Agrippa the King. The governor Festus and his wife Bernice were there, too, polished Roman civil servants who had earned their position by their ability to live wisely and well. And Paul, the most cultured of all the Christian representatives, a man who could quote the classical poets, a Roman citizen. The governor's party was being entertained by Paul's passionate defense. And then suddenly something went wrong. What had begun as an amusing spectacle suddenly burst the limits of propriety, and the Romans felt that they were being confronted with the demand either to believe in Jesus or reject Him. King Agrippa became so disturbed, he said to the shackled apostle: "Why, with this brief speech of yours you are trying to make me a Christian!" The

whole situation had got entirely out of hand. This was madness.

Of course the Christianity Paul announced had to be madness from their point of view. Look at what Paul was saying and notice that if madness is that which makes it impossible for a person to perceive reality accurately, he was as insane as a man could be.

First of all, he said that everything about him was a response to a heavenly appearance. He said, "O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Paul had seen Jesus Christ, and Jesus had spoken to Paul. This is what Christianity is. This is what this booklet is all about. Christianity is a response to a message that comes from God. Elsewhere the same apostle stated it this way: "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1: 11, 12). So everything that Paul did was conditioned by the revelation he received. And that's the way it still is with the Christian faith. The Christian faith is a response to God's revelation of Himself.

Someone wrote me a few months ago and asked something like this: "Don't you ever think for your self? Do you always have to follow what the Bible says?" I can understand his exasperation with Christians. A Christian is a person who thinks for himself, indeed, but what he thinks about is influenced by the fact that he has received a special revelation from God. I believe that the apostle Paul really did see Jesus Christ, and that he along with all the other writers of the Bible received their message from God. And if that is not really true, anyone who believes that it is, is not perceiving reality properly. He's mad. He's insane.

The apostle also said that Jesus Christ, who had died? (vv. 6-8). You see, the apostle saw a con-

been crucified; was really alive. With this claim there was closely connected the fact that this Jesus was God, for Paul described how Jesus of Nazareth had appeared in the flaming glory of divinity, and Paul had addressed Him as Lord. During his discourse the prisoner apostle had declared that Jesus had fulfilled all the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. Thus, if anyone wanted to know anything about God, he would have to look at Jesus. Thus, if anyone was looking for someone to worship, he would have to worship Jesus. Thus, if anyone was looking for someone who was worthy of full obedience he would have to obey Jesus Christ.

Now, this, too, you see, if it is not true, is madness when it is a person's sincere conviction. If a person really believes these things about Jesus Christ, obviously all of his life is going to be shaped and formed by this belief. If a person had these convictions about Snow White or Santa Claus, you would say there was something wrong with that person's mind, wouldn't you? Yet Paul believed that Jesus was God, worthy of total obedience. And I believe that. And those who bring you this program believe that. No wonder, when Paul spoke, Festus said to him, "You are mad."

There was one thing more that Paul believed that surfaced during his talk with the governor and the king. He believed that because Jesus lived, he would live forever with Him. Paul believed that he would survive death!

He spoke of this as his hope. He began his speech by saying: "And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the

nection between the resurrection of Jesus and the fact that we can realistically expect that we, if we believe in Christ, will be raised with Him. He says this in Romans 8, for example: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (v. 11).

Now, if a person believes as Paul did, that this life is preparation for a fuller life to come, this is bound to affect everything he does. This point of view has been represented time and time again on The Back to God Hour. I believe this some way. If this is not true, if men perish like the animals, Christians are foolish to expect that they will be raised from the dead. The apostle himself admitted that this faith is foolishness if it is not true when he wrote: "If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15: 19).

So you see, when the Christian message was brought to those cultured Romans many years ago, they reacted with their devastating appraisal: "Paul, you are mad." And if I may say so, I believe that you would do yourself a favor, too, if you would take a sharp look at Christianity and decide once and for all whether it is madness or sanity. It is one or the other. If it is madness, you had better separate yourself from it; if it is sanity, you should not rest until you have filled your head and your heart, your life, with this satisfying faith.

When the Roman governor accused the apostle Paul of being mad, the apostle rejected his accusation coolly and categorically. He said: "I am not mad ... but I am speaking the sober truth. This is the truth, the sober truth, and it is the truth that enables a person to get his life together and to get his head together; it is the truth that enables a person to know who he is himself who God is, and

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what the world is. It is a truth that enables a person to perceive reality and to respond to it usefully. It is a truth that brings great personal satisfaction, individual fulfillment, and eternal peace. It is a truth that enables a person to transcend the limits of his own personality and become involved in the establishment of the kingdom of God already during this life. The Christian faith, revealed in the Bible proclaimed by the prophets and the apostles, confessed within the church and proclaimed by the church, also on a program like The Back to God Hour, is not madness but sober truth.

How can we know this? Is there any reason for a person outside the Christian faith to begin to suspect that Christianity might be the sober truth and not madness? Well, I would think that there is real evidence that the non-Christian position has some things about it that are beginning to make it look very much like madness. That's what our world's built on—isn't it—the non-Christian position. Most people do not believe what the apostle Paul believed: that a special revelation has come from God, that Jesus is God, and that those who believe in Him will live forever. Most people believe that you cannot take such beliefs into our day-by-day life—to the school, into business, into the government, into science and into labor.

"When you turn away from Christ, do you find sanity? You do not. Samuel Beckett, the anguished playwright, has expressed his reaction to our frantic foolish world with this disjointed and insane sentence: "None, no, nothing is nameable, tell, no, nothing can be told, what then, I don't know, I shouldn't have begun." Our world is a world in which the blind lead the blind. It is a world that has lost its way. It is in love with things. It is a world that knows nothing of lasting peace. It is infected with lust for war. It is addicted to oil, alcohol, and rubber. It is a world that plays with

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the false promise of detente and tries to insure the future with hollow conferences. It is a world that appears to be mad.

Within the nations the quality of institutional life decays and ancient loyalties and patriotic devotion are forgotten in the selfish pursuit of personal fulfillment that is never attained. Accountants fudge figures and cook books, lawyers connive and play at law, doctors fiddle with plugs of life support systems and participate in the destruction of the unborn, educators march on the picket line and neglect their charges, and cities go bankrupt. With in the nations the fabric of society is ripped and torn and ways of life once thought sacred have been scorched and burned. The nations seem mad.

And on the level of personal and family life, in millions of homes there are uneasy truces and little joy. Many marriages are sick with crippling eroticism, to say nothing of people who mock marriage with their animal liaisons. Children grow up tended by the state more than by their parents. Love is lost. Self-fulfillment grows increasingly rare. Human life seems built on madness.

Are the faiths and philosophies which men possess outside Christianity sobriety and sanity? There is no objective evidence that they are.

But how can we know that Christianity is the sober truth? We must stand where the apostle stood, in the bright light of the revelation that comes from heaven itself. The Jesus who appeared to him and turned his life from the absurdity of rebellion against God meets all those who open the glorious book that reveals the work of God to all men who truly seek to know. The Christ who met the apostle still meets us on our way as we listen with faith to the message of the gospel. The only way we can experience the sobering truth of the Christian religion is that we disentangle our selves from the overpowering influences of this age

and submit ourselves to the mighty witness that still comes from the Scriptures.

There we meet Jesus. We see Him crucified for the payment of all our human folly. We see Him offering us salvation if we believe in Him. There we encounter the promise of life everlasting. There the light of life eternal becomes reality us right now.

The sober truth of God-how glorious it is! How it makes all the half truths and falsehoods of man turn to ashes! And so now I want to say to you that what you have read in this booklet is not madness. It has been and it is today the sober truth. And those who believe the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ will be able truly to understand reality and they will be able to respond to it meaningfully. Those who reject it choose madness.

So I plead with you to believe that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, lives. I urge you to humble yourself before Him and ask for His forgiveness. As Jesus' representative, I ask you to believe and gradually get to know the beauty and the wholeness of the sanity that is the Christian faith.

"I am not mad ... but I am speaking the sober truth."

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P.O. Box H>S,

SUTHERLAND, N.S.W.2232.

P.O. Box 15392

New Lynn
AUCKLAND N.Z.