

# A Reasonable Faith

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well today we're going to think about how Christianity is a reasonable faith.! That is why it should be believed. And you may be here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, but the message in Acts chapter 26 that Paul gives to this king, King Agrippa, is that Christianity is a reasonable faith.

Now everybody has got a faith. I wonder if you have ever thought about it in that way. Everyone has a faith. Of course it might not be a religious faith or even a Christian faith, but everyone has a faith. Just take atheism for example. What is atheism? Atheism is the belief that there is no God. So it is a belief. The belief that there is no God is still a belief.

It's a faith position. Now the sociologist of religion, Professor Stephen Boulivant, studies British nuns. Not nuns, N-U-S, but nuns, N-O-N-E-S, meaning those with no religious affiliation.

So nuns is a term given to people with no religion. And he says, as he studied those who call themselves nuns, all kinds of nuns believe all kinds of stuff.

[ 1 : 17 ] In other words, just because you aren't religious doesn't mean that you don't have faith. G.K. Chesterton, the writer, put it this way. He said, when men stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing.

They believe in anything. And so we all have faith of one sort or another. We all have a belief that inevitably determines how we think, how we live, the kinds of things that we do.

And so our faith, our position, our worldview impacts everything. And so when it comes to faith, the fundamental issue really is, well, what is true?

What should you believe? If everybody believes something, if everybody has some faith, what is the thing that you should believe? Where should we put our faith?

What is the most reasonable belief? What is it that makes best sense of the world that we live in and our lives? Well, as I said, Acts 26, we have Paul presenting Christianity as a true and reasonable faith.

[ 2 : 24 ] He shows how it is coherent, how it is credible, and therefore why it is compelling. Coherent, credible, and compelling. And his speech comes, in fact, this is one of his longest speeches in Acts.

It comes to this king, King Agrippa, as Paul defends himself. And as he defends himself, what he does is he proclaims the risen Lord Jesus Christ to the king and to his audience.

And it becomes clear that Paul is seeking to persuade King Agrippa and his audience, all the listeners, to become Christians. Now, maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you're perhaps skeptical.

Well, the message of Acts 26 shows why Christianity is a reasonable faith that should be believed. And so I'd like us to look at two points, two main points this afternoon.

We see, first of all, that Christianity reports public events. We see that in verse 1 to 23. And then secondly, Christianity requires personal engagement.

[ 3 : 31 ] Christianity reports public events and requires personal engagement. So first of all, Christianity reports public events. Now, Paul is on trial again and he seeks to persuade his hearers.

Christianity is a reasonable faith. And so essentially here he presents four things. A rational defense, a resurrection hope, a revolutionized life and a reasoned appeal.

So we're going to look at these in turn. First of all, a rational defense. That comes 26 verse 1 to 3.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself.

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense. King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews.

And especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. Okay, so Agrippa was king.

[ 4 : 35 ] He was Jewish. But as a ruler, he was part of the ruling Roman elite. And so he'd have understood Paul and the religious aspects of his case.

But because he was a ruler, he would also understand the legal aspects of why Paul stood before him on that day. Now, Paul assumed that Agrippa was familiar with Judaism as well as being open-minded enough to hear and to listen to Paul's defense.

And so what Paul did was he tailored his defense, his speech, according to Agrippa, who was his listener. Now, this is the third account of Paul's conversion in the Book of Acts.

And each time, as Paul tells his conversion story, he tells it in a different kind of way, according to the person who's listening. And so Paul was good at understanding where his listeners were coming from so he could present the gospel to them in the best way.

And so I think there's a passing application for those of us who are Christians, which is that we actually need to know the kind of people we're talking to so that we can present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them in the best way.

[ 5 : 51 ] So the people will be different and we'll approach how we share the message of Jesus with them, therefore, in different ways. We'll need to tailor our approach depending on who it is we're speaking to.

And of course, we will always be sharing the same good news, but we'll need to contextualize it according to the person. And that's what Paul does here. And he does it because he's making a rational defense, not just of himself, but of the Christian faith.

And so his rational defense secondly includes the resurrection. And so he gives the resurrection hope. Verse 4 to 8. So after he shares his upbringing as a Jew, he shares his past life as a Pharisee, he shares his impeccable credentials.

Then he says he's got the same hope as the rest of his people. What is his hope? It is the hope of the resurrection. That's what's going on in verse 6 to 8, Paul says.

Paul's saying the resurrection is the fundamental issue here.

[ 7 : 19 ] That's why he's on trial. And so he emphasizes that his people have always had a hope in the resurrection. Israel's hope was that God would save his people and raise the dead.

And now Paul stands before King Agrippa. He's on trial and he is proclaiming this hope that my people, your people, have always had is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Because he rose from dead, from the death, from death. And so that's why the resurrection is central here to Paul's witness. Just as the resurrection is central as we as Christians defend our faith to anyone.

Because it shows how the Christian faith is coherent. Paul is saying here the resurrection is the fulfillment of what God had already promised.

What God said would happen. And so the Christian faith is credible because God raised Jesus from death in history.

[ 8 : 25 ] In human history. When there were people around who could verify that he rose from the dead. And that's why the whole of Christianity pivots on whether Jesus Christ rose from the dead or not.

The resurrection is the issue on which everything hangs when it comes to Christianity. Because if Jesus didn't rise from the dead then the Christian faith is futile.

And Paul says elsewhere that Christians should be pitied. But if Jesus did rise from the dead then it changes everything for everybody. The resurrection helps everything else make sense and fit into place.

And so if anybody is considering Christianity here today or anybody you know is thinking about what it all means. Then they need to start.

You need to start with the resurrection. Because if Jesus is the son of God who died and rose again then you can't ignore him.

[ 9 : 27 ] You have to accept everything he said and respond to him. Because he said he would rise from the dead and he did. Michael Green a former vicar in England said this in a book *The Day Death Died*.

He said the resurrection therefore is the place to begin if you're looking for a satisfying faith on which to base your life. Do not waste a lot of time investigating every religion under the sun from

animism to Hinduism.

Examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus instead. If he is risen you need look no further. That's what Paul is saying there to King Agrippa essentially.

That Jesus has been raised from death. Therefore he makes sense of your life and this world. So Paul's speech gives a rational defense.

It gives a resurrection hope. And then Paul goes on and describes a revolutionized life. In verse 9 to 18. And that's his own life. Because he was fanatically opposed to Jesus.

[10:32] Nobody hated Christians more than Paul did. But verse 9 to 11 something happened to change this. And Paul explains it.

Verse 12. On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon King Agrippa as I was on the road I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun blazing around me.

And my companions we all fell to the ground. And I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

So the risen Lord Jesus confronted Paul on the road to Damascus asking him, Why are you persecuting me? And then saying to him, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.

Goads, basically sharp sticks that people would use to prod animals to get them to go in the right direction. As Jesus was saying to Paul that he couldn't keep kicking against him, against Jesus.

[11:36] It was futile to stubbornly resist God's purpose. And Paul could resist it no longer. And so his story essentially shows how anyone's life can be revolutionized by Jesus Christ.

And remember who he's talking to. So he wants King Agrippa and his audience to know that the most unlikely people like him who are against Jesus can have their life revolutionized so that they are for Jesus.

And so Jesus appointed Paul to go and witness to him. That's what Paul's saying there in verse 15 to 18. Jesus sent Paul to others so they could be converted from darkness to light, he says, From the power of Satan to God and to receive forgiveness of sins.

Which is essentially what happens when somebody becomes a Christian. That's why it's revolutionary. Becoming a Christian is not just a lifestyle choice that you decide one day, I'm going to turn over a new leaf, try a different way of living, and hopefully I'll be happier as a person and life will be better for me.

No, it's about having your life revolutionized by Jesus. About having your eyes opened and being brought from darkness to light. About being rescued from the kingdom and the power of Satan to God.

[13:08] About having all your sins forgiven, no matter what you may have done. And so the question is, has that revolution happened to you?

It happened to Paul. Has it happened to you? Now, of course, it won't happen in the same way that it happened to Saul, who then was Paul.

But it will just be as revolutionary. Coming from under the power of Satan and darkness into light and to God and having all your sins forgiven, turns you into a new creation.

Completely different person. And so that's what Paul is saying. He's saying the Christian faith, when you get it, it transforms you.

It goes into your head and you understand you need to respond to it in your life and then you're different forevermore. And so as Christians, just as Paul does, we have a great opportunity to share our story with people and tell them how we came to discover this for ourselves, discover about Jesus Christ and our need for him.

[14:26] It's interesting that today in our culture, everybody's story is valid. Your personal experience or your lived experience should be listened to by other people.

Your story is a credible thing because you're telling what happened to you. And so in our culture, people do listen. And so what a great opportunity we have as Christians to share our story of how we used to think, of how we used to live, of how we used to be and what we used to do, and how our life has been revolutionized by Jesus Christ.

So there's a rational defense, a resurrection hope, a revolutionized life, and then a reasoned appeal. Verse 19 to 23. Given Paul's encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, he appeals to Agrippa and he says that he could do no other than do what Jesus told him to do.

So verse 19. So then King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven, first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles.

I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. This is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.

[15:50] So he's saying, Jesus gave me a mission, his mission, calling people to repent. Repent basically means to turn from sin, away from sin, and turn to God.

And so Paul assures Agrippa that this isn't some kind of new, innovative teaching that he's bringing. Verse 22. But God has helped me to this very day so that I stand here and testify to small and great alike.

I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Messiah would suffer and as the first to rise from the dead would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

He's saying, this is what God said would happen. And can you see how it's happened in Jesus? His life, his death, and his resurrection. That's what the prophets said.

Paul is saying that the Jesus of history fulfills this prophecy that's all the way through the scriptures saying that he would be the Messiah who would live, die, and rise again.

[17:03] And that's why Paul is saying to King Agrippa, you can't just ignore Christianity. He can't just push it away because Jesus has fulfilled in his death and resurrection the Jewish scriptures all that God said would do and it's happened in history so we can all see it and hear it and know about it.

And so, therefore, King Agrippa, you've got to respond. You can't just ignore it. Christianity doesn't just revolutionize lives like mine, he's saying.

It revolutionizes our world. Tom Holland, who is a great historian, I don't think he's a Christian believer that I'm aware of anyway, but he wrote a great piece in The Spectator magazine a couple of years back and it was entitled The Way of the Cross.

And he explains in his article how the public events of Christianity, the death and resurrection of Jesus, have transformed our world. And this is what he says.

It is the audacity of it, the audacity of finding in a twisted and defeated corpse the glory of the creator of the universe. That serves to explain more surely than anything else the sheer strangeness of Christianity and of the civilization to which it gave birth.

[18:24] Today, the power of this strangeness remains alive as it has ever been. It is manifest in the great surge of conversions that has swept Africa and Asia over the past century and the conviction of millions upon millions that the breath of the spirit like a living fire still blows upon the world and in Europe and North America and the assumptions of many more millions who would never think to describe themselves as Christians.

All are heirs to the same revolution, a revolution that has at its molten heart the image of a God dead upon an implement of torture.

You see, Christianity reports public events, the death of Jesus in history, the resurrection of Jesus in history, and they have transformed our world.

They've happened. And so that's why we must respond to them. That's where Paul is taking Agrippa. And so our second point is Christianity requires personal engagement.

Verse 24 to 32. So Paul began his speech with his defense, but how does he finish? He finishes with a personal challenge for King Agrippa and for everybody else.

[19:43] Because the public truth of Christianity requires a personal response of belief. Because you just can't be neutral when it comes to Christianity.

You either believe it or you resist it. And that's why Luke records the first responses that Festus and Agrippa give.

Festus thinks Paul was insane. Verse 24. At this point, Festus interrupted Paul's defense. You're out of your mind, Paul. He shouted. Your great learning is driving you insane.

So he recognizes that Paul is intelligent, but he's out of his mind for believing this crazy stuff about Jesus being raised from the dead.

And now you often get that response today if you're a Christian and you speak to people about what you believe. Because when someone is a Christian, people will say, well, he has completely lost the plot.

[ 20 : 45 ] She has gone all weird since she started believing that Christian stuff. He must be off his head if he thinks that's true. And even if it's not said out loud, it is what people will be thinking.

And so Festus thinks the Christian faith makes no sense. For people today, they think the Christian faith makes no sense. And believing it is like committing intellectual suicide.

Because they think it isn't credible. But see how Paul responds. Verse 25 and 26. I am not insane, most excellent Festus, Paul replied.

What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice because it was not done in a corner.

He's saying it's true and it's reasonable. And so people are not out of their mind for believing Christianity. People are using their mind when they believe Christianity.

[ 21 : 54 ] And that's why Paul brings Agrippa into the conversation because Paul's been talking about public events. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were public knowledge.

That's what he's saying. They were actual events. Paul's showing that Christianity wasn't some kind of sect made up by a tiny, weird group of people in the middle of nowhere.

He's saying, no, Christianity is public. It is the story of what actually happened with the most significant figure in human history. It's about these publicly verifiable events concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And that's why, for Festus, he can't just dismiss it all as nonsense and accuse Paul of being insane. And why Christianity can't be dismissed as an insult to someone's intelligence today.

It's a reasonable faith that is coherent, it is credible, and therefore, it is compelling when you actually examine it. It warrants the personal engagement of every thinking individual because when you discover, when you explore it, you discover that it makes sense.

[ 23 : 14 ] And so it does require a response of belief. And that's where Paul wanted to lead King Agrippa. But we see that he wasn't persuaded by the message.

Verse 27, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do. Then Agrippa said to Paul, do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?

What's Paul saying? He's saying, Agrippa, you're a good Jew. You believe the prophets. Sure you do, Agrippa. So you should be able to see that it is reasonable to become a Christian because the prophets are pointing to this man, Jesus, who has come, who did die, who was raised again.

He's the fulfillment of all that God said would happen. So you should believe in him. So Paul turns his defense into this appeal to Agrippa and to everybody who's listening.

He's saying that everything that happened regarding Jesus is true and therefore it is reasonable to believe in him.

[ 24 : 25 ] Paul's presenting evidence here that demands a verdict. But Agrippa deflects the personal challenge. He was a king but he didn't want to bow to the rule of King Jesus and become a Christian.

Verse 29, Paul replied, short time or long, I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am except for these chains.

So Agrippa is now under the spotlight because this wasn't just about Paul and Agrippa. This was about Agrippa and God. So how did Agrippa respond?

Well, he got up and walked away. He refused to engage with the good news of Jesus because it was just too challenging for his life. And isn't that what so many people do today?

Rather than engage with the Christian message and see that it is a reasonable faith to believe, they dodge it, ignore it, don't want anything to do with it.

[ 25 : 35 ] Why is that? It is because of the personal challenge of Jesus Christ to every one of us, to each and every life. And that's what happened here to Governor Festus and King Agrippa.

They were challenged. They did not want to engage with the truth about Jesus. There's no indication that either of them were persuaded by their reasonable nature of faith that they then came to believe.

And they could not have had a better opportunity to hear and respond than when the Apostle Paul stood before them. And yet they refused to consider the public events of the death and resurrection of Jesus and what they mean, why they're significant, why they were changing the world then and have mushroomed to change the world ever since.

They refused to let the evidence lead them to the right conclusion. And that should be a warning, shouldn't it, to all who have yet to respond to the truth of Christianity.

A warning not to continue to dodge the personal challenge of Jesus. And yet no matter how true and reasonable and persuasive, some people will never do the right thing by repenting and turning to God.

[ 26 : 57 ] And so the irony here is that Festus, who accused Paul of being insane, was himself blind to the clear truth that Paul was stating.

And Agrippa, for him, the irony is that while he was king and Paul was prisoner, Paul was free and King Agrippa was enslaved to his sin.

And so Acts 26 shows why Christianity is a reasonable faith and why putting our faith in Jesus Christ is not merely a reasonable thing to do, but it is the wisest and the most sensible thing that any and every human being could do.

G.K. Chesterton wrote this. He said, if I find a key on the road and discovered it fit and opened a particular lock at my house, I would assume most likely that the key was made by the lockmaker. And if I find a set of teachings set out in pre-modern oriental society that has proven itself of such universal validity that it has fascinated and satisfied millions of people in every century, including the best minds in history and the simplest hearts that it has made itself at home in virtually every culture, inspired masterpieces of beauty in every field of art, continues to grow rapidly and spread and assert itself in lands where a century ago the name of Jesus Christ was not even heard, if such teaching so obviously fits the locks of so many human souls in so many times and in so many places, are they likely to be the work of a deceiver or a fool?

[ 28 : 47 ] In fact, it is more likely that they were designed by the heart maker. It's so true, isn't it? As if you are not a Christian or not sure what you believe, can you see how Christianity is a reasonable faith?

That there is a God, he created the universe, he made this world, he made you and me, he is our maker, he sent his son, Jesus Christ, into this world in space and time in human history, he is the most significant figure who has ever lived in world history, he lived a perfect life, he died a cruel death on a cross, he rose again to life, God is speaking to us, pointing all creatures, every human being to his son, Jesus Christ.

And so it is more reasonable to believe in Jesus than it is to turn away. It is foolish to ignore the clear sign of his son that God has given to us.

God has spoken to us, he has spoken to all people in all ages in Jesus and he calls us to repent and believe in him.

None of God's work has been done in a corner, has it? It has been done publicly in history in Jesus for all to see and know.

[ 30 : 28 ] And so because Christianity reports public events, it does require a personal engagement from you and from me. And so the question is, have you responded to Jesus Christ, the one that God has sent for us?

Jesus Christ has revolutionized this world. Jesus Christ revolutionizes human lives. He's revolutionized mine and many of yours as well.

He did it for Paul. He can do it for anyone. Has he done it for you? That's why Jesus is the key to this passage. Jesus entered into this world.

Why did he come? Well, he came in order to die for those who were against him. And that's all of us. Jesus stood trial even though he had done nothing wrong.

And Jesus was willing to die on a cross and face the condemnation from God that we deserve for our rebellion against God.

[ 31 : 34 ] And he did it to save us. And so he gives us hope through his resurrection from the dead. Why should anyone consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

Of course God raises the dead. And so only when we see Jesus' love for us, for you, for me, in dying in our place, will we love others enough as his church to go and tell them and seek to persuade them to believe in Jesus too.

Let's pray.