They Were Crazy about Jesus. Are We?

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19 “After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. 21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: 23 that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.” 24 While he was making this defense, Festus exclaimed, “You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!” 25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. 26 Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” 28 Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?” 29 Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains.” *(*Acts 26:19-29*)*

1. Crazy People

There are many people who are crazy about someone or something in the world. I see quite often fishermen who are dedicated to fishing at the canal. Once a week, my younger brother, who came last year to see me, drives a few hours to go to a lake for fishing. After he catches fish, he lets them go and does not bring any fish home. His wife and his children can’t understand what he does when he is fishing. It does not make sense for them that he drives six hours to catch fish and then let them go.

I am not sure whether I am that crazy about photography. When I was in England, I took a lot of photos. Can you guess how many I took? I ended up taking 5,329 photos. On average, I took about 500 photos a day. Why did I take that many photos? It was because my camera setting took photos this way. Each photo I took created four images, one in raw file, and three with different shutter speeds so that the brightness of each photo is different. I ended up taking so many pictures because my camera was set that way.

2. Paul Was Crazy

In the Bible, there are many people who were crazy about their mission from God. One of them was Saint Paul. When Paul defends himself to King

Agrippa Festus, a Roman procurator says, "***Paul, you are crazy! Too much learning has driven you out of your mind***" (Acts 26:24, CEV). Paul replies, "***Honorable Festus, I am not crazy. What I am saying is true, and it makes sense***" (Acts 26:25). Paul says the death and resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Festus thinks the resurrection of Jesus is not possible. Festus believes Paul's education makes him insane. But Paul clearly asserts his sanity. He asks King Agrippa, "Do you believe the prophets?" (v. 27) Paul says that if king Agrippa believes the prophets, he should believe the resurrection of Jesus because Jesus is risen according to what the Old Testament says.

Psalm 16:9-10 says, "***I am thankful and glad and I feel completely secure, because you protect me from the power of death. I have served you faithfully, and you will not abandon me to the world of the dead***." Paul prays that King Agrippa and all who are listening to him would become like him followers of Jesus Christ. It is no doubt that Paul is crazy for Jesus. For Paul, there was no one or nothing more important than Jesus and his resurrection. Wherever Paul goes, we see him talk about the resurrection of Jesus.

3. George Whitefield

In church history, there are many people who were crazy for Jesus. For the past two weeks, I talked about John and Charles Wesley. Certainly these men were dedicated to Jesus. This morning, I would like to share about another important person in the Methodist movement. His name is George Whitefield. Whitefield was born in December, 1714 in Gloucester, England. He studied at Pembroke College at the University of Oxford. He joined the Holy Club and met John and Charles Wesley there. Charles Wesley suggested to read a book called, "The Life of God in the Soul of Man" written by Henry Scougal. After Whitfield read the book, he wrote in his journal, "a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment… did I know that I must be a new creature." Whitefield experienced a "new birth" and decided to become a missionary to the new Georgia colony. He became the leader of the Holy Club when the Wesley brothers left for Georgia. After he graduated from Oxford, Whitefield was ordained in the Church of England. He immediately began preaching as an itinerant preacher and evangelist. Whitefield possessed a rare gift for preaching powerful evangelistic sermons. Within a few years, he was internationally known as he preached about justification by faith and the new birth throughout England and North America.

In 1738, Whitefield went to Savannah, Georgia as a parish priest. While there, he decided to open an orphan home. Whitfield returned to England to raise funds. While preparing for his return, Whitefield preached to the miners of Kingswood, outside Bristol, in the open field. Whitefield later invited John Wesley to take over his Bristol congregations. There John Wesley preached in

the open for the first time at Kingswood because Whitefield was returning to Georgia.

According to church historians, George Whitefield was the most famous preacher of the 18th century. He spoke about 1,000 times every year for 30 years. This included at least 18,000 sermons and 12,000 talks and exhortations to over 10 million people. Many weeks, Whitefield spoke for 60 hours in the week. He crossed the Atlantic 13 times. The trips across the Atlantic took 8 to 10 weeks each. On the ship, Whitefield preached every day. He preached to gatherings of thousands of people. In the fall of 1740, Whitefield preached almost every day in New England to crowds of up to 8,000 people. At the time, the population of Boston was not much larger than that. It was known that there were times when the crowds reached 20,000 or more. Whitefield preached in every major town on the Eastern Seaboard of America. Estimates are that eighty percent of the entire population of the American colonies heard George Whitefield at least once. All this was done without television or radio.

4. Being Born Again

How can we explain such an unbelievable phenomenon? What made George Whitefield a man of power? In February of 1740, Jonathan Edwards invited Whitefield to preach at his church in Georgia. Whitefield recorded in his journal, “Preached this morning, and good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of exercise. The people were equally affected.”

For Whitefield, the experience of “being born again” or “the New Birth” are important. In his sermon, “the Conversion of Zacchaeus,” Whitefield asked the people. “You said you have faith. But how do you prove it? Did you ever hear the Lord Jesus call you by name? Were you ever made to obey the call? Did you ever, like Zacchaeus, receive Jesus Christ joyfully into your hearts? Are you influenced by the faith you say you have, to stand up and confess the Lord Jesus before men? Were you ever made willing to own and humble yourselves for your past offenses? Does your faith work by love, so that you conscientiously lay up according as God has prospered you, for the support of the poor? Do you give alms of all thing that you possess?” His point is that if we are not like Zacchaeus, we are lost and need to be found by Jesus.

5. Proof of the New Birth

If someone asked us, “Are you born again?” or “Do you have a born-again experience?”, what would we say? We might be angry with the person because this statement can be seen as arrogant or judgmental. However, the people who had conversion experiences like St. Paul, John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield, were on fire for Jesus. The common phenomenon after the conversion experience was that their lifestyles changed. These men lived their lives according to God’s will.

For me, the way to make sure whether we “are born again” or not is two things. First, do we have the joy of being forgiven? Do we have the assurance of salvation? John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield had the assurance of salvation. They fully accepted the gift of forgiveness as Ephesian 2:8 says, “***For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.***” Second, after they had the assurance of salvation, they lived their lives to witness to Jesus. Do we have the assurance of salvation and witness to Jesus Christ?

6. Conclusion

The happiest person in the world is the person who is lit on fire for Jesus. These people can genuinely trust in the Lord in any circumstance. They believe that God will take care of them. In Acts 26:29, Paul says, “***I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains***.” Paul trusted God in all circumstances, even witnessing to who Jesus is while he was still in his prison cell.

7. Application

Paul, John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield were crazy about Jesus. Are we crazy about Jesus? Unless we have experienced Jesus’ forgiving love, we can’t be crazy about Jesus. Everyone of us can love with the crazy, unconditional love of God. But in order to do this, we all must first experience the life changing love of God for ourselves. This love is the love that allows us to brave any situation, allowing us to be willing to even lay down our lives for the Gospel. Did we experience that kind of radical love? Do we have passion for witnessing that the Wesleys and George Whitefield had?

John Wesley said, “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.” How can we become the Methodists with the power of the Holy Spirit? Someone writes, “fasting and prayer empowered John Wesley as an instrument of the Holy Spirit.”

As one of UMC pastors, I feel deeply ashamed of myself that my sermon and my ministry are not powerful like those of John Wesley and George Whitefield. I am so sorry that I do not help you to experience God’s power. I repent of my neglection of spiritual discipline and of lack of powerful messages. I ask for your forgiveness. I pray that God pour out the Holy Spirit to me and all of you so that we can be powerful witnesses for Jesus Christ. May God equip us so that we can pass on the burning heart for Jesus Christ to the next generation. Amen.