

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Madness or Reason?

Some people think we're crazy for believing and teaching the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul experienced the same criticism—but unlike many of us, he knew how to respond.

“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’ But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner’” (Ac. 26:24-26).



This exchange occurred near the end of an informal hearing before Herod Agrippa, just prior to Paul's voyage to Rome. Agrippa was a figurehead king over the Jews who had no real power to decide Paul's fate; that would be settled by Caesar when Paul arrived in Rome. But the king was curious about Paul's faith, and the apostle was more than happy to oblige with a defense of his life and his message, centered around the death and resurrection of Christ (v. 23).

As a Roman governor, Festus had heard all sorts of wild tales from defendants who came before him. But this one from Paul took the cake, and he couldn't

help but exclaim in derision, “Much learning is driving you mad!” The Greek word he used is *mania*. Paul's claim of resurrection, to his view, was the raving of a maniac. Paul was just crazy to believe and teach such foolishness.

Paul had heard this criticism before, so he was ready with a response. He assured Festus, “I am not mad . . . but speak words of truth and reason.” The Greek word translated “reason” here literally means “sober.” Other translations render the word as “rational” (ESV), “sane” (GWT), or “sensible” (NCV). His testimony about Jesus' resurrection was not madness, but a perfectly reasonable account of the facts of history.

But notice that Paul did not merely assert his claim; he backed it up with evidence, evidence that Agrippa himself was already aware of: “The king . . . knows these things.” The circumstances surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus and the events that followed were “not done in a corner.” There were multiple witnesses, both friendly and hostile, who could corroborate the facts, and Herod was already familiar with this

body of information. Paul's appeal to this evidence apparently hit close to home, because Agrippa was almost persuaded to become a Christian (v. 28).

Christians today stand where Paul stood then. We are mocked as “crazies” by a skeptical culture that views the Jesus story as a baseless myth. But the Jesus story is *not* a myth; it rests on a solid body of historical documentation that withstands the harshest scrutiny. When we cite this evidence, we are, like Paul, speaking “words of truth and reason.” We can defend what we believe.

But before we nod approvingly, let's ask ourselves one question: *Can we articulate this evidence to those who do not believe?* If we cannot, then upon what does our own faith rest? Habit? Peer pressure? Tradition? Upbringing? That's not faith; that's laziness.

When someone called Paul's hand on his truth claims, he did not dismiss his critic as an idiot unworthy of further discussion. He appealed to the available evidence to defend his faith. In an increasingly hostile culture, we must be prepared to do the same.

— David King