

Almost a Christian

by John Rhys Watkins

The sermon explores the dangers of being 'almost a Christian' and the transformative power of true faith in Jesus Christ.

Duration: 25:55

Scripture: Luke 16:23-24, Acts 9:5, Acts 26:27-29, Romans 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:17

Topics: "False Conversion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher describes a man who is trapped in darkness and torment, symbolizing the state of humanity without Christ. The preacher emphasizes that salvation is available through Jesus, who came to set people free from sin and death. He urges the audience to fully embrace the gospel and not hold back, as they are being judged by God. The sermon is based on the biblical account of Paul's defense before King Agrippa, where Paul passionately shares the message of salvation and urges the king to turn from darkness to light.

Transcript

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For more information, visit us at www.bethelpulpitministries.com or email us at info@bethelpulpitministries.com I'm going to read from verse 27 of Acts 26. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuade me to be a Christian.

And Paul said, I would to God that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am. Amen. The Lord will bless his word.

We're going to share with you the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this message. Now, Zoe's read most of that story, most of the text. And in this passage of scripture, Paul is standing on trial.

He's on trial for his life. He's standing there before three people. There's Festus, the governor of Judea.

There's King Herod Agrippa and his wife, Bernice. And Festus has inherited the problem of Paul from his predecessor, Felix. Paul is a Christian.

He's a Christian in a world that doesn't understand Christians. He's a big problem to most people. He's a problem to the political world, to the religious world, and to the social world.

They cannot understand the mystery of Paul, Paul the Christian. We're not talking about a church member or someone who believes in God. Paul had done that.

He'd been religious all of his life. He believed in God. He'd been raised in church.

But there's something different about him, something different about Paul. They'd known of Paul for many years, but he stands before them. He's a different man.

He's a changed man. No longer is he religious. There's something about him.

He's joined the Christians. He himself, on his own testimony, said that he once was a hater of those so-called born-again Christians, those that followed Jesus of Nazareth. But now something's happened to him, and he's going to plead his case, the case of Christ, before the jury.

The religious people of the day, they'd seized Paul in the temple. They'd accused him of all sorts of things. This was a trumped-up charge.

Paul had done no wrong, but the rumors, the innuendos, the lies, they would follow him wherever he would go. The religious were persistent in their desire to see Paul put to death. Even to the point that 40 men, 40 of their men, had vowed that they would starve themselves to death until Paul, until the Christian, had been destroyed.

Persecution always comes to them that fear nothing but God and hate nothing but sin. Real enemies, Paul adds, those are heavy fists that land upon that head. Hair pulled out, teeth broken, feet crashing into ribs, real enemies of the day.

The soldiers had protected him. They'd saved his life. They dragged him up those stairs as the hate-filled mob pleaded for his blood, kill him, kill him, all along.

Things haven't changed much. Things don't change. These same scenes are witnessed throughout the world.

There's a madness in the world. People, the world, they want blood. The jury, the jury that Paul stands before, they don't know what to do with him.

What can you do with a man like Paul? What can you do with a man today that fears nothing but God and hates nothing but sin? Paul begins his defense like this. I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things that I'm accused of by the Jews, especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently.

I beg you to hear me patiently. You know, I'm always amazed by the fact that most people can give the impression that they're experts in the field of religion. Your average person, your average person in the world always seem to have the answer to all of life's problems.

If only the world would listen. Don't be surprised by these words. You may be sitting next to an expert yourself.

Don't look to the side. I know that you're tempted, but you could be sitting next to someone who thinks himself an expert in religion, in the affairs of the world. I once sat next to an expert.

Told me that he believed in God and the Bible. Said he believed in Jesus, the devil, and angels. Said he believed in heaven and in hell.

He said that only certain types of people would get to heaven. And certain types of people would burn in hell. Told him that I agreed.

And then I gave him a list taken from the Bible showing the types of people that would go to either heaven or hell. You know, that expert became very angry with me for showing him that list. He not killed anyone.

He not committed adultery. He not been immoral. He didn't hate anyone at all.

But he saw from that list with his own eyes that no liars would enter the kingdom of heaven. You see, the man was a liar from beginning to end. But only took one lie.

He saw that for himself. If he told one lie, then he was a liar. He was exposed.

He became very angry, this expert. Now, those of us who gathered here in the name of Jesus. These young people today.

We're simple Bible-believing people. But we get blamed for all sorts of things. One of the things always thrown at us is that religion is the cause of every war.

We agree. The Christian would agree. Religion is the cause of most wars.

But let me tell you something. You won't find a disciple of Jesus Christ with dynamite strapped to his chest in the streets of Jerusalem today. You won't find a follower of Christ parking a car bomb on the roads of Belfast.

You won't find a born-again Christian with his finger on the nuclear button in Pakistan or India this day. Only the experts. Only the experts in religion and the things of the world.

But we get blamed for all sorts of things. Most of us here today. We've got more money in our pockets tonight than our parents had in their day.

But this world. This world that you live in. It's getting sicker by the moment.

And the pressures of modern life upon us all is crushing in itself. The threat of terrorism, global warfare, exerts an unsustainable pressure. Mankind is ready to blow the lid off this planet.

There's a madness in the world. Pressures are mounting all along. And very soon the forces that be, they will collide.

You can bet anything on it. It's going to be a collision. Something has to give in this world.

Some of you. Some of you will live to see those nuclear bombs dropped upon cities. And all in the name of peace.

You're going to see it happen. These things are sure. If it does.

If there is a war. If there is violence in the world. If mankind wants blood, it's for one reason.

And one reason only. They've rejected the love of God. They've rejected the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see Jesus. He came to heal the world. But we spat in His face.

He opened the eyes of the blind. And we plucked His beard. He drove terrible diseases from the bodies of lepers.

And we tore His frame to shreds. He called the dead back to life. And we crowned Him with thorns for His efforts.

He laid hands upon the sick. And we drove nails through His wrists. In the name of God.

He came to set you free from death and destruction. And all we can do is use that name for a curse. For a swear word.

This is what they've done to the Lord. Now on this text. On the stage of this text.

There are four players. They would represent the whole of humanity. Every one of us here tonight.

Is identified with either one of these people. Now Paul of course is the hero. He's the hockey type Christian.

Jesus had appeared to Paul in a vision. And He told him that He would be sent to all men. Just as we are.

Every Christian would be sent to all men. To open their eyes. In order to turn them from darkness to light.

From the power of Satan to God. That they may receive forgiveness of sins. And inheritance among those who are sanctified in faith by Christ.

This is the good news. Christ came. He came to set you free from sin and death.

You don't have to die. You can live forever in the kingdom of God. And in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Now I want to talk tonight. To every one of you.

Concerning the kingdom of darkness. And the kingdom of light. Don't get excited.

This message is for everyone. You all belong to either. The kingdom of light.

Or the kingdom of darkness. You all make your choice. You'll see yourself upon this stage.

You'll see yourself in one of these characters. Christ commanded man. Let your light shine.

This is exactly what Paul was doing in his life. He shone the light of God for all men to see. You see he disturbed the darkness.

He intimidated the glory of mankind. There was a presence with Paul. That exposed the spiritual blackness in a man's heart.

Paul can say. Just like these people can say. No longer I that live.

But Christ that lives in me. This is why the world would hate him. This is why the Christian is despised and rejected.

No longer Paul that lived. But Christ now lives in Paul. This is true of all Christians.

You've heard the phrase. He's seen the light. Well this is what happened to Paul.

He saw the light of God. He had a personal encounter with the living God. Paul was an ordinary person.

Someone. Someone that thought himself right with God. Before his conversion.

He would never have imagined. That he was hell bound and sliding fast. Why should he? He was a good man.

He wronged no one. He was good as anyone else in his street. Why would he think that he was hell bound? This was another problem in the life of Paul.

As in every other man. He could see no further than himself. He was no worse than his neighbors.

In most cases. He was better. But those commandments.

Paul knew that those commandments. They came from heaven. Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not covet. And thou shalt not lie.

Paul believed in God. But somehow. He believed that those commandments.

Were for everyone else. Didn't relate to him. It wasn't for Paul.

This was the problem with him. God has changed him now. God gave those commandments for every man.

Every one of us are to live by those laws. But none of you. None of you here.

Can live by them. Do you lie? Do you steal? Do you covet? If you do. If any of those commandments you break.

Then you are hopelessly lost. In the prize of darkness itself. There is only one way out.

Just as there was for Paul. To call upon the name of the Lord. Who are you Lord? I am Jesus.

Whom thou persecuted. That was the only way out for Paul. It was the only way out for myself.

It was the only way out for my family. It's the only way out for you. To call upon the name of the Lord.

Upon the name of Jesus. Jesus the son of God. These young people.

Those who will be baptized this evening. They passed you see. They passed from the kingdom of darkness.

They've come into the light. All their life is exposed. They've seen the rottenness.

The corruption that was there. But now transformed. Perfect.

They stand perfect. New creatures. Before the Lord God of heaven.

They've come from death into life. From the torment of hell. To the sanctuary of heaven.

These young people. Just like Paul. They've seen the light.

They too have met with Christ. No more condemnation now for these. They walk according to the spirit of God.

And not according to the pleasures of this passing world. They will be despised for their faith. And rejected.

But there before them. Is a crown of glory. That they will cast at the feet of Christ.

At the end of this age. These are happy days. For the Christians.

This is Paul. He's a changed man. He's a man that once lived recklessly.

A man that courted the world. And tried to work his way to heaven. But now he's changed.

He's a born again man. He's a Christian. He's changed.

Next character is Festus. This is a hard man. A man that he will not hear the truth.

Why should he? Here he stands listening to Paul. A man mocked and rejected by his own family. A man that seems to have no nationality anymore.

Is he a Jew? Is he a Roman? One moment Paul claims to be educated. Brought up in church all his life. But in the next breath.

He claims to have met a man. Raised from the dead. Festus will have nothing of it.

This is a mad man. Surely this is a man. Made mad from reading the Bible.

Poor Festus. Such a hard man to reach. Paul you see.

He held his attention. Only until he spoke of that afterlife. Paul related to him.

Hear the words. Jesus of Nazareth. A man approved of God unto you.

By mighty works. Wonders and signs. Whom God raised up.

Having loosed the pangs of death. Because it was not possible. That he should be held by it.

Festus could not hear these words. Could not see. Poor Festus.

He never ever see. Because that eye. The eye of faith.

Refuses to be opened. Jesus once said to a man. Unless you are born again.

You cannot see. Now let me tell you something. You cannot educate yourself to heaven.

You cannot work your way to God. You cannot be saved because you were christened as a child. You cannot live because you go to church.

You must be born again. There is no other method. God has chosen no other method.

You are in the church tonight. There are men like Festus. That foster this ungodly belief.

Denying the power of the almighty himself. Some of you would think. That believing the bible would drive you mad.

You don't believe. So you will not trust. Madness.

Madness. This is what Festus said. Paul.

You are a mad man. You are beside yourself. My wife testifying to a man once.

Claimed that she was a crazy girl. Claimed that she was mad. He said.

He said that he believed that all of us came from monkeys. When I knew the bloke. He had a good case.

If he looked in the mirror. He said that there was evolution. It was a fact he said.

The scientists would prove it. We have come from monkeys. Well she is not as bold as her husband.

So she offered for me to speak to him. I don't want to speak to him. He said.

I know that man is a mad man. Don't bother with your church. They are all crazy over there.

You are mad people. Get away with it. He said.

We come from monkeys. A couple of months later. There is a phone call.

The man is on the phone. There is tears. There is crying in his voice.

He has a daughter. She is in her 30s with a young baby. They found a cancer in her stomach.

It is eating through her liver. It is taking over her life. She cannot live.

Would you pray for my girl? Was his words. He didn't go to no monkey. He didn't phone no scientist.

He came to mad people. He came to mad people. People that knew what the answer would be.

Such a hard man. Festus. Everything to him is mad.

Everything is crazy. The third player. Bernice.

Such a wicked girl. Shamelessly. She sits there with her lover.

Her older brother. She shares a bed with him. Just as she did with her first husband.

Her uncle. In between these incestuous relationships. She is married to Paul.

But deserted him to return to her brother's bed. Finally she will become the mistress of Titus. The man that would one day destroy the whole of Jerusalem.

Later he turns against her. And she is ruined. Such a wicked girl.

This is the person. She is the person that swings between politics and religion. It doesn't matter what the truth is.

Her only persuasion is the fragrance of the day. She has no real opinion on anything. She does not care what she believes.

Or even what she does. Her philosophy is live and let live. That every man live for himself.

Her creed is not to love her neighbor. Rather to tolerate him. And then to join with him.

Bernice. She represents the hypocrite. She stands in judgment of Paul.

She stands in judgment of the man of God. She looks down upon him through ravenous eyes. Hungry for power.

And lusting for flesh. She is always the life of the party. But only as long as that bottle is full.

She is always good for a laugh. But she cries when she is alone. She looks good for her age.

But underneath all that paint. The years of not being kind. Left alone.

She is empty. Sad. And pathetic.

She craves the attention. The attention that will ultimately destroy her soul. She says nothing on the stage.

Just her presence says it all. She is denied the cross of Christ. She denies that he is the son of God.

She denies that he is the only way. She denies the truth that you must be born again. She says nothing.

But denies everything. The last player. Is the king himself.

Agrippa the second. Agrippa is a man that knows the truth. He believes it all.

He has personal testimony of Christ. Deep within his heart. He knows that God has called him.

But his joy is in the things of this world. God has called some of you here tonight. That he can speak to you personally.

This is why he has brought you here. He has called you. That on this day you will testify before angels or devils.

That on May the 25th 2002. God called you to share an eternal life. Now Agrippa.

He had the same calling 2000 years ago. But he is remembered as the man. That refused.

He is a man that refused the Lord. Paul speaking to him said. King Agrippa.

Believest thou the prophets. I know that you believe. But Agrippa said to Paul.

Almost you persuade me to be a Christian. And Paul said. I would to God.

That not only you. But all those that hear me this day. Were both almost and all together.
Such as I am. Almost he was persuaded. To become a Christian that very day.
Almost Agrippa. Came to believe. Almost he inherited.
The kingdom of God. And eternal life. Agrippa is the person.
That knows well and believes the Bible. He knows what the prophets have said. He knows that it is the truth.
He is a man that knew the truth. Even according to Paul. Paul was convinced of the things of Christ.
And not escape his attention. Some of you have heard this gospel. Many times.
You know it is the truth. But you are holding back. You are holding back right now.
The trial is through him. It is no longer Paul on trial. But it is those three.
The rule of humanity stands on trial. The king himself is in the dark. The Lord God Almighty.
Is both judge and jury. The sweat is running off his nose. As the flames of hell.
Lick around him. The torment though momentary. Will shortly become eternal.
His life is in limbo. He hangs there every one of them. Between heaven and hell.
Weighed in the scales of the gospel. This great king will be found. Wanting.
Almost he believed this gospel. Almost he believed the preacher. Almost.
He became a Christian. Gripper. Could have met with Christ.
That very afternoon. You can feel the pain in Paul's heart. As he longs to see the king.
Turn from darkness unto light. From the power of the devil to God. King of Gripper knew and understood.
That Paul was telling the truth. But he knew. This was the problem.
He knew that to follow Christ. Meant the end of all selfishness. If he were to follow Jesus.
There would be a persecution. Of that pampered life. So almost he believed.
Almost he believed. The tears of this world. Would keep him from believing God.
Even though one day. The king would die. Even though he would die.
And face that final judgment. He could not raise. Or muster the courage to call.
Upon the name of the Lord. King of Gripper. He did call no one.
He even said that he almost believed. But almost is not enough. You cannot almost believe.
It's all or nothing. You take Christ. And every part of him.

Or you leave him to die. Somewhere. Let me leave you with this thought.
Somewhere right now. In a place called hell. There's a man.
Chained to a wall. He hungers and he thirsts. But there is never any relief.
He cries aloud. But no man can hear him. He knows that those chains.
But they cannot be loosed. Everything that he once owned. Is now lost.
He has eyes. But he cannot see. The darkness is now tangible to his soul.
His heart is gripped with fear. He knows that this torment. Will last forever.
One word. Just one word can be heard from those blistering lips. Almost.
Almost. Almost. If a gripper could be set free from those chains.
Tonight. He would preach you the greatest message. He'd ever hear.
Almost he believed. Almost he made it wherever. Almost he lived.
If I persuaded you. To become a Christian. This evening.
If I persuaded you to follow Christ. Or do you just. Almost believe.
Let us bow our heads.

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