

If any of you have ever owned an electric lawn mower, you know that electric lawn mowers tend to not be very powerful. Electric lawn mowers, as a whole, are underpowered garden tools. I have an electric lawn mower now and it isn't very powerful, all I can say is that the price seemed right at the time. However years ago I had an incredible electric lawn mower manufactured by a company called MTD. This electric lawn mower was the king of electric lawn mowers.

This MTD electric lawn mower was unbelievably powerful. It could easily power through even wet grass that was over five inches high. It was so powerful that anything that got in its way, it just took it out. I'm embarrassed to say how many times I ran over the power cord - but I got pretty good at splicing the power cord.

This mower drew so much current that nothing else could be running on the same circuit or the fuse in the fuse box would just blow. This mower drew so much current that even a higher gauge electrical cord became too hot to touch after the lawn was mowed. This was one mean mower.

Well, one day this MTD mower just stopped. The power was still on, the fuse had not blown and I had not run over the cord - something blew in the mower itself. So I opened the mower casing up to have a look. An electric mower is quite a simple piece of machinery, it is just an electric motor with a blade attached. So when I looked inside the housing there were only about 12 different parts, and one little part was charred black and somewhat melted. It was obvious to me that this was the part I needed. I had no idea what the melted part was, and I don't know much about electric motors, but the part was clearly damaged, and it conveniently had the part number printed right on it.

So I called up the manufacturer in Arkansas, who referred me to a parts warehouse in Dallas Texas and I ordered the part.

A few days later the lawn mower part arrived in the mail...but it was the wrong part. So I called up the parts warehouse in Dallas to rectify the situation. The call, which should have taken about three minutes, dragged out into this huge ordeal.

Now before I tell you the rest of the story, let me just say this: I was living in Oklahoma at the time that my mower died. When someone in Dallas Texas receives a phone call from someone in Oklahoma, the person on the line from Dallas Texas doesn't necessarily have a favorable opinion about the person on the line from Oklahoma. I'm not saying that this

is right, I just saying that people in Dallas generally have a certain image of people from Oklahoma.

So, with that in mind, I call up the parts warehouse in Dallas Texas and tell the guy that I received the wrong part for my mower in the mail. I'm transferred over to Steve in shipping. Here is our conversation:

Steve: "I understand that you received the wrong part for your mower. What is name of the part did you receive from us?"

OK, first off, this is not a fair question. This little envelope arrives at my house with a little black part inside. There's no description, there's no name, its just a little black part - which was clearly not the same as the other part I needed....and the name of the part - I needed had no name, I could see that the part they sent me was completely different than the part that had charred in the mower.

Steve repeated his question: "What is name of the part did you receive from us?"

Peter: "I don't know what the part is called, but it is not the part I ordered"

Steve: "OK....Well then what is the name of the part you need?"

Peter: "I don't know what the name of the part is that I need."

There was an extended period of silence.

Steve: So let me get this straight. You don't know the name of the part you need, and you don't know the name of the part you have, but the part you received is not the part you need, even though you don't know what the part is"

Peter: "Exactly."

Steve: "Jim, I have some guy on the phone from Oklahoma who wants to talk to you about parts for an electric mower"

Steve clearly thought I was crazy and probably not the most intelligent person he had ever spoken to - I could feel over the phone lines that Steve did not think I was the sharpest tool in the shed, so Steve handed me off to one of his coworkers because Steve did not know how to deal with me.

This is what we see in our passage today, Paul who is not crazy, is seen as crazy because of what he believes and Paul is handed off from one person to the next because people

do not know how to deal with Paul's beliefs. Have you ever been placed in a position like that? Have you ever been placed in a position like that? Have you ever felt like the conversation around you carries the tone of well...anyone who believes this Christian stuff is a complete idiot? Sure you have, I've been there too, and sometimes these people who think Christianity is for fools are so articulate, they are so convincing, that you end up wondering...Am I fool to believe?

Paul had arrived in Jerusalem after being away from Jerusalem for an extended period of time and is set upon by a mob when he appears at the Temple. The Romans pull Paul out of the mob and send Paul before the Sanhedrin to find out what is going on. The meeting with the Sanhedrin goes nowhere so Paul is brought before the governor Felix.

Felix was well acquainted with Christianity, but kept Paul in prison for two years and frequently sent for Paul to hear more about Christianity. Felix was fascinated with Christianity, yet apparently his fascination never became belief. Felix never released Paul. Felix doesn't know what to do about Paul and Christianity, so he does nothing.

Two years later Felix was succeeded by Festus and upon Festus' arrival the Jewish leaders bring charges against Paul before Festus. So Paul stands before Festus. Festus does not know what to do about Paul either, so Festus brings Paul before King Agrippa because King Agrippa, who is half Jewish is an expert in all things Jewish. Felix, Festus nothing, perhaps Agrippa will know what to do with Paul.

Finally, Paul is standing in front of a man who should understand where Paul is coming from. Paul addresses this issue before king Agrippa: My belief is not wrong nor is it crazy because Christianity is the logical conclusion to Judaism. In essence what Paul tells Agrippa is that if a person believes in the OT and the prophets, then the logical conclusion is to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and then become a Christian.

Paul says that the OT and the prophets, specifically speaking of the resurrection, lead a person with a sound mind that Jesus is one we should follow. Paul tells Agrippa - I used to believe just like my accusers, in fact I used to be exactly like them, but like them I believe in the hope of the resurrection.

Paul says I used to believe like my accusers from Jerusalem. Paul used to believe that acting righteous, living as a good man was what God required of him. (Verse 5) Paul shows this by saying that he was at one time part of the strictest sect of Judaism, Paul was

a Pharisee. This means that Paul lived a very guarded life where every aspect of life was examined so as to live as close to perfect as possible. A Pharisees did this to such minutia that they even calculated the volume their herb gardens so that they could clip off exactly ten percent of their herbs. Now that is being detailed about your religion.

Understand that King Agrippa would be very familiar with what Paul is speaking of, and King Agrippa would know that within Judaism the Pharisees were considered very righteous because they went over and beyond what any normal person would do in Judaism. King Agrippa would see what Paul is saying about the Pharisee lifestyle as a very normal kind of religious experience - perhaps not something he would want to attain to, but still, a normal religious experience.

Paul used to believe like his accusers that acting as righteous as possible and acting as good as possible is what God wants.

Further Paul explains that he even acted just like his accusers and hunted down Christians. Paul was so convinced in his ways, he was so convinced in what he believed to be true. Paul could see no other possibility.

This is a fairly common among people we know isn't it? People are so convinced that what they believe is true, they never look into any other possibility.

I had Speech professor in college whose specialty was studying group interaction. She studied how groups of people interact differently in formal meetings as opposed to informal meetings. (Pretty interesting stuff huh?)

Be that as it may, she got herself involved in a group of people who were world peace advocates. These people had a passion to oppose anything that prevented world peace, their passion was so strong she could only term as religious in nature. It seemed that all they could ever talk about was the world peace and how it could be attained. My professor was there with them in their group to study their interactions, not to be a peace activist, the problem was, she never told them that she was only there to study their interactions and had no interest in anything to do with world peace. They thought she was one of them.

These were good people who were willing to do anything they could to bring about world peace. They were honest, honorable, intelligent people who wanted to be good

people and were willing to do what it takes to be a good person. My professor was with the group for several months and after a few months she saw a change in the group's dynamics. What she saw with some members, though not all the members, with some of the group's members there was an increasing willingness to attain world peace by any means necessary. Ironically the talk about how to obtain world peace, turned to obtaining world peace by means of violence. Somehow, some of the peace activist were willing to perpetrate violent acts to bring about peace.

Then, there was an alarming change, some members started making actual plans to use violence against certain individuals - ironically, with the hope of a greater world peace. My professor could not believe it and since she felt that lives were in danger, she revealed who she really was, a professor of Speech. The group was silent upon her revelation.

The peace activists were quite upset. They felt that she had lied to them, that she had betrayed them, and well, they were right. My professor was banned from the group that night and she went directly to the FBI with information about the potentially violent members of the peace group.

These were good people, with good hearts, for a good cause, wanting to do ultimate good in the world. The ultimate good, will not ultimately redeem us.

Paul tells King Agrippa that he too used violence in the name of peace. Paul had felt, like his current accusers did, that Christianity would disrupt Judaism and so he tried to stop it to keep the peace. Paul was a good man, with good a heart, working for a good cause, wanting to do ultimate good in the world. The ultimate good, did not ultimately redeem Paul.

Problem was, God wasn't looking for one good man; the problem is God still isn't looking for one good man. Being good isn't what it is all about. Doing the right thing isn't what it is all about.

What is it all about? Let's look at verse 17b -18, "I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Do you see that there? Take a look at that verse. What does the verse say about doing the ultimate good?

Paul was not asked to go and tell people about the ultimate good, was he? Paul was not asked to go and attempt to achieve the ultimate good either. Why is that? Why is Paul not asked by Jesus Christ to go and do good things? Because ultimately, only God is good, because ultimately, in the big picture everything we do, falls short, therefore Paul is asked to do something else.

Paul is asked to do three things: One, open people's eyes to the reality of Jesus Christ. Two, Paul is asked to turn people from darkness to light - that is to turn people from no understanding of the spiritual world to an understanding of the spiritual world. Three, turn people from the power of Satan to the power of God. The bible assumes that if you are not under the power of God, then you are under the power of Satan.

Paul is asked to do this for the following two reasons: One, so that we may receive forgiveness of our sins and two, so that we may be sanctified in Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul is speaking to King Agrippa in a way that King Agrippa can understand. Paul knows Agrippa's background and Paul knows that Agrippa would clearly understand the concepts of opening ones eye spiritually; Of spiritual darkness and spiritual light; Of the power of Satan and the power of God. The King would also know about repentance and forgiveness.

Then Paul goes one step further - Paul speaks of the resurrection.

You know, people don't mind if you go to church. People don't mind if you volunteer for charities through your church and people don't mind if you study the bible, but have you noticed, if you tell them that you really believe that Jesus was resurrected and is alive today - they are not so sure about you anymore.

I was at a Christmas party years ago at a friend's house in San Antonio Texas. This friend of mine was highly educated as was her husband also. This couple had a lot of friends who were highly educated and so, there were an unusually large number of over educated people at this particular Christmas party.

At one point during the party, I was introduced to a couple, they were about in their fifties and the husband, first thing, asks me what I did for a living. I told him I was a pastor and this man immediately turned his back on me and refused to have anything more to do with me.

I thought. Huh.

Some time later I was being introduced to another person, and the person introducing me mentioned that I was a Princeton graduate same as the woman who was throwing the Christmas party. Suddenly, this man who would have nothing to do with me a few minutes before, overheard the comment about my school and became very interested in talking to me.

He was very animated and threw all kinds of questions at me. This man had questions about life, questions about death and he was particularly mystified by the idea of the resurrection of the dead. All I can say is that under normal circumstances, this man would not have carried on a conversation about the resurrection, because for him, resurrection of the dead would be intellectually ridiculous - but somehow he felt intellectual permission to talk about it with me.

We talked for quite some time. I walked away with the feeling that this man desired to believe, that this man wanted to believe, but he just couldn't take the step and believe.

King Agrippa interrupts Paul as he is speaking about the resurrection calling him out of his mind, calling him insane with Paul retorting that he is not insane but that what he is proposing is logical and reasonable.

It appears that King Agrippa had a desire to believe, but couldn't take the step to believe. We can tell this by his final words in the chapter, Acts 26:32 "Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'" Agrippa is admitting that Paul was in fact not insane and that what Paul was advocating is reasonable and logical.

We are not crazy or intellectually bankrupt for believing in the resurrection of the dead, it is a logical and reasonable belief to believe in the resurrection. We saw last week that the resurrection proves there is life after death and if there is life after death than logically there is resurrection of the dead. We saw that if we believe in life after death, then believing in the resurrection is the next logical and obvious step.

Here today we see that if we believe that the Old Testament and the Prophets are true, then logically we would believe in the resurrection of the dead. It is not intellectually dishonest to believe in the resurrection nor is it illogical or crazy to believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Some time ago avowed atheist Hermant Mehta, who gained notoriety by trying to sell his soul on EBay, began to receive invitations from churches to come and share why his was an atheist.

After one visit to a particular church, Hermant said this, "At one church I visited, some people were asked to write down how they felt before and after becoming a Christian.

They said things like 'dark and light' 'lonely and befriended' which got me wondering: Is being lonely or desperate a prerequisite to finding God? Do these people think that others who have not yet found God are lost, scared or miserable? Do I have to go through some sort of crisis before finding some ultimate meaning?"

No Hermant, one does not have to go through some sort of crisis to find ultimate meaning, one simply has to give their life over to Jesus Christ to find ultimate meaning.

Now if you have been coming to this church and thinking about Jesus Christ, thinking about Christianity, thinking about what does all this ultimately mean - then I would like to talk to you for a moment.

Life isn't about how ultimately good we are, Christianity isn't about being ultimately good, it is about having a relationship with the one God of the universe. Christianity isn't some intellectual puzzle to solve, it is not some philosophy of life, or a good feelings that come upon us when we talk about Jesus Christ.

Look, Jesus Christ is very real. He lived. He died. He rose again. He is alive here and now.

See it is not about how good I am, or about how much good I can accomplish, ultimately good will not redeem us. We carry with us all that we have done, the good, the bad and the ugly. It weighs us down, it burdens us day in and day out, and no matter of good works will make it go away.

What we experience is the weight of sin on our lives - this is what Jesus will deal with in your life. He will release you from your sin and Jesus Christ himself says, sanctify you.

Stepping out in faith is not intellectually dishonest, looking at who you really are is probably the most honest thing you can ever do.

If you are a person who has been waiting, trying to figure this whole thing out, why not have the direct help of God in all this, let's pray together.

Lead prayer of salvation.