

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

Psalm 103

Of David.

- 1 Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
2 Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits -

Message - Darkness in the Light

As ants get into bread, darkness gets into light, but God is not overcome (v11). Therefore we will either follow darkness, exterminating Jesus, or follow Jesus, and the light.

We began our journey through Acts with Jesus ascension. Jesus has risen, he has appeared to the disciples, and many others. And Jesus last words are a reminder of what is expected of us. Perhaps we might see it as a command;

Acts 1:8 (NIV - UK)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

This command isn't something that we're to do begrudgingly, like when we're being told what to do. For we don't usually like being told what to do eh? This verse is about our response to Jesus, how we are to live. As witnesses to Jesus, in response to what Jesus has done for us. Dying for us, putting evil in its place. Giving us hope and life.

How do we do this witnessing? By loving the unlovely, restoring what is broken, making Jesus known.

You might find this a bit hard to believe? We were moving house, and a few days before we were to go, our neighbours invited us over for a cuppa. They'd been great neighbours so no problem. Besides they made really good scones! When we got there, and sat down, I was a little too hasty in taking a scone, and was stopped, while they took their hats off, and gave thanks to God. They even said grace for morning tea. I was quite impressed. So I then waited for them to take a scone, before I tried again.

Now, a week or so later, after the removal truck had left, and we'd finished packing the last of the things in the car, locked up the house for the last time, I was just hopping in the car, when out of the corner of my eye, I noticed something on the lawn. Now it hadn't been there earlier. As I got closer I realised exactly what it was. A couple of years earlier the neighbours who we'd had scones with had borrowed my old mower. While they were using it, it broke down. I had a new one so it didn't really matter. I thought I'd given to them. But they never returned it. And I'd forgotten about it.

But here it was, upside down on the lawn. They had just chucked it over the fence! Couldn't even wheel it around! What do you think of that? Was that okay? What does this tell you about our neighbours?

Now, as I said, you might find this a bit hard to believe. Who believes it? And that's fine, because it's not true, well, not quite true. Unfortunately, it is based on fact, from a very recent series of events not far from here.

What's my point? We can passionately follow Jesus, and keep a whole series of rules, but if our attitude to others is not like Jesus, then what is the point? For we are to follow Jesus, and be like Jesus, and that's it. And sometimes it's costly.

We've worked our way through Acts, where we've seen the Holy Spirit working through Peter and Paul, establishing and growing churches and knowledge of Jesus around what was then known as Asia. Incredible growth! But the establishment in Jerusalem was none too happy about this, this preaching of Jesus. So as they killed Jesus, as they killed Stephen, now they try to kill Paul. And it looks like darkness is overcoming light. Let's read.

Acts 23:12-35 (NIV - UK)

The plot to kill Paul

12 The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. 13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, 'We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.'

16 But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, 'Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.' 18 So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, 'Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.'

19 The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, 'What is it you want to tell me?'

20 He said: 'Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. 21 Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.'

22 The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: 'Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me.'

Paul transferred to Caesarea

23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, 'Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen[a] to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.'

25 He wrote a letter as follows:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings,

27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. 28 I wanted to know why they were accusing

him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. 29 I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. 30 When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. 32 The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. 33 When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. 34 The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, 'I will hear your case when your accusers get here.' Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

Footnotes

Acts 23:23 The meaning of the Greek for this word is uncertain.

May God bless these words to our hearts and minds.

Well, what do we have here? We have at least 40 people with ants in their bread! Well, you have to admire the passion of these people, passion in what they believe. It certainly brings a determination. They are determined to be in opposition to Paul. But, v11, the last verse from last week, shows that indeed, they are in opposition to God. They are bringing darkness into light. That's the interesting thing for me here, usually we have these dark plots being formed in the middle of the night, but here, the scheme is being hatched in the middle of the day. Darkness is trying to work its way into the light.

But, we must remember, God's promise, God's reminder to Paul, the last verse of last week;

Acts 23:11 (NIV - UK)

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'

It's like after God's affirmation of what Paul has been doing in Jerusalem, darkness, evil, had other ideas.

And we have these 40 guys, who are on the outside, they appear to be passionate supporters of temple and God. But inside, they are content with murder. It just doesn't fit. One thing in private, another in public. So passionate, that they are prepared to give their lives. For they would have known that Paul would be accompanied by a soldier or two, so their sheer number, more than 40, would overpower the couple of guards. Guards who they probably intended to sacrifice as well. And if the guards put up a good fight, and took one or two of them out, then so be it. It's brutal, and callous, and wrong.

And as the story unfolds we find that darkness didn't overpower the light, even at night!

Paul wasn't killed, but was rescued. And of course we wonder, what became of those who had pledged not to eat or drink, until Paul was dead? Surely they just died? But no, to end this sort of oath that they have made, they simply had to go to the temple with an atonement offering, and they were free of their oath (Keener, 392).

Now we get to v15, the lynch mob command the Sanhedrin. There's an interesting parallel here. Back in chapter 22, a fortnight ago, verse 30, the Roman commander called the Sanhedrin to order. I noted it then, seemed interesting the power this Roman guy had, to call the Jewish temple high council to order. But here we see it again. This time it is the 40+ guys, the lynch mob that are telling the Sanhedrin what to do. What is this telling us?

This is Luke showing us that the so called powerhouse was not powerful at all. They thought they were in control. But God was in control, and God's Kingdom was going onwards without them. And in spite of them.

Oh, and when it comes to who is calling the shots, and who has power, look at v17. When does a prisoner get to have any say?! Paul calls over the centurion and tells him what to do. It's like a comedy. But remember, when Paul let them know he was a Roman citizen, by birth, they all stepped back. Why, because he trumped them. Like the joker in a card game. The commander had had to buy his way in to the Roman empire. Paul didn't have a choice about being a Roman, he was born one! It's actually Paul who has the authority. No wonder the centurion obeyed!

So Paul's nephew, is taken to the commander, who takes him seriously, very seriously. He believes him. Ah, and belief is an important thing in these verses. For the lynch mob believe in what they are doing. The Sanhedrin believe in what they are doing. But we know that they are working against God. It's madness, it's foolishness.

But belief isn't the most important thing here. The most significant thing is, what do we do with what we believe? What do we do with God's grace?

We have here a lynch mob who were willing to give their lives for what they believed, to end the life of Paul. We have a young guy who overheard the plot, and could have kept his mouth shut, but courageously followed what was right. And we have Paul who was also prepared to give his life, because he knew Jesus, was fully confident in Jesus, and was determined to follow the light.

What does Jesus expect of us?

Acts 1:8 (NIV - UK)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

What does it mean for us to go to the ends of the earth? Yes, it might mean going to Timbuktu. More likely it will be something to do with our neighbours. May we be as Jesus in our interactions, with whoever they are.

Let's take a moment to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Father God, thank you for all that you have done for us. Thank you for your love, for your mercy, for your grace. Please help us not to bottle this, but to share it, share your love, your mercy, your grace. Holy Spirit, please give us the courage, please give us the opportunities, to be like Jesus, in our world. May Jesus be known because of who we are. Amen.

Twenty four years ago a song was released that challenged us then, and still now, about how much we're prepared to give to following Jesus. I don't find it a sitting down type of song, so you might want to stand with me, as we sing To the End of the Earth.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiL_DF6RJig

[Benediction - Rev Gord](#)

As people of faith we have gathered for worship.
As people of faith we now return to the world.
Go out to share the story of faith,
the story of life, with the world around you.
We share the faith in word and in deed,
in speech and in action.

As we go out to give a living witness,
as we go out to testify to God's love active in the world,
go knowing that God goes with us,
sharing the laughter and the hope, the fears and the tears.
Thanks be to God! Amen

