

Acts 24:1-27
Feilding Baptist
20.9.26

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

David reminds us about God in Psalm 103, so that we don't forget. It's a great Psalm, it's a comforting Psalm, it assures us about the character and actions of God. Here are the first six verses;

Psalm 103 (NLT)
A psalm of David.

- 1 Let all that I am praise the Lord;
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.
- 2 Let all that I am praise the Lord;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.
- 3 He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
- 4 He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
- 5 He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!
- 6 The Lord gives righteousness
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

As it begins, it ends with praise.

Father, thank you for these things that David reminds us of, your forgiveness, your redemption, your love, your mercy, your renewal, your restoration. Thank you for your loving mercy. Thank you for your grace. As we worship this morning, please help us to remember and give thanks for Jesus. Holy Spirit we ask for your blessing on this time, and on this space, and us as we worship. We pray in Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

Message - What are the facts?

As we delight in the restoring that the resurrection of Jesus offers, we strive to keep our conscience clear before God, resting in worship, belief, and hope.

There are so many seams of gold in this chapter! It would be perfect for a church camp. But hang on, talking of gold, I was at Coombrae Resthome this week and I asked them about the tv series Hunter's Gold. This was such a powerful series for me in 1976. But the surprising thing is, none of those at Coombrae had heard of it, nor could remember it! So the illustration fell flat.

My point had been that the one off tv programmes like The Chase, they'd heard of that, don't rely on what has come before. But really good drama series leave you hanging out for the next episode. And back then, they were weekly, and seven days was a very long time.

Now I realise, that once again, the illustration falls flat, my age has got in the way, because we can binge watch on Netflix or on demand, so the anticipation of the next episode is for only a moment.

Anyway, the book of Acts is very much like this, what is going to happen next? And it begins from when Jesus left and ascended to heaven, with those last words to the disciples;

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.'

So what is going to happen next? And as we read through Acts, we keep reading, because we wonder, what is going to happen next?

Last week Paul has been squirreled away down to Caesarea on the coast, in the middle of the night, to prevent a lynch mob getting him. The Romans have some obligation to look after him, because they now know that he is a Roman citizen. So while he's under arrest, he has some freedom. His friends and family have access to him, to care for him.

So the story continues in Caesarea. Acts 24, all 27 verses, let's read;

Acts 24 (NIV - UK)

Paul's trial before Felix

1 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: 'We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

5 'We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. [a] 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.'

9 The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

10 When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: 'I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence. 11 You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. 13 And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. 14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

17 'After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 18 I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. 19 But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin - 21 unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: "It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today."

22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. 'When Lysias the commander comes,' he said, 'I will decide your case.' 23 He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

24 Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the

judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.' 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Footnotes

Acts 24:7 Some manuscripts include here him, and we would have judged him in accordance with our law. 7 But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence, 8 ordering his accusers to come before you.

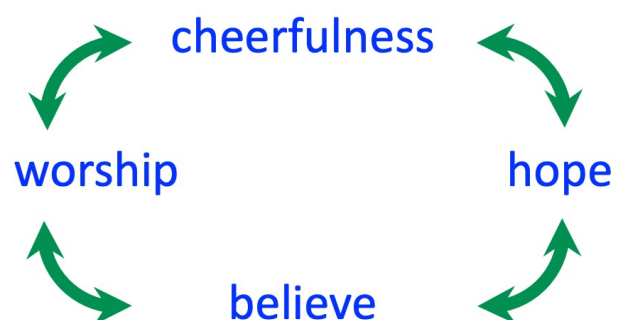
What are the facts? Spot the difference was a page filler on page 15 in the Baptist magazine. I'd love to have had each picture on different tv's. What are the differences you can spot? I hope you noticed in last week's verses, there was also a 'spot the difference'? The commander Claudius Lysias writes to Governor Felix giving an introduction to Paul the prisoner. The previous three chapters have outlined how Paul came to be in the possession of the Romans. We know the facts.

So it is just a little interesting what Lysias writes in his letter, his memory of events differs to what the Bible has just said. Like, this man was seized by the Jews who were about to kill him. Okay, true. I came with my soldiers to rescue him because I had learned he was a Roman citizen. Um... didn't you learn about the Roman citizen thing when you were about to flog him, something which you a) don't do before a trial, and b) don't do to a Roman citizen? Oh, I forgot! Hmmm, convenient lapse of memory.

Following the same theme, we have in today's verses, the trial of Paul before governor Felix. Now, the background was, Felix was a nasty piece of work. Felix was not only corrupt, he had brutally oppressed the local people. He had initiated no reforms, the state of the nation was much worse than before his rule. As such, the number of revolutionaries had grown, and there was far more unrest than peace. Felix would not have won the Nobel peace prize. Although, maybe he would have?

However in today's verses, the lawyer Tertullus says that Mr Felix is a wonderful leader, someone they respect! Tertullus says it as it isn't! Felix has been a dreadful leader. In embellishing Felix' rule, Tertullus makes a mockery of the charges against Paul. How can he be so dishonest in his summary of Felix, and be honest about Paul? He can't. There is something more going on here. Evil and darkness is fighting a losing battle.

So to the gold, firstly, Paul begins his defence cheerfully (NASB) or gladly. Here is no cowering or fear. Here is courage, confidence, and boldness. And where does this come from, yes, God, yes, the Holy Spirit, but look at the next couple of verses; Paul has gone up to worship (v11) because of what he believes v14, which gives him much hope v15. I've been pondering this, and wondering if these four things are linked; cheerfulness, hope, belief, and worship.



What do you think?

John Stott takes out cheerfulness but adds the striving from v16, striving to keep a clear conscience between God and man. We can try and pull the wool over the eyes of the judge, or the governor, telling them how wonderful they are, and how terrible Paul is, but it simply doesn't work with God. God is all knowing. We can't hide from God. We can't hide things from God.

Backing up a bit, verse 14 struck me as a bit strange. The NASB said that Paul serves the God of his ancestors. Whereas the NIV says he worships. The Greek word for worship in v11 is about falling down

before God in worship. As in Matthew, the magi come to worship Jesus. It's a different to the word worship in v14, this is about serving God with our heart. Both the NIV and NASB are right, but Paul is talking about following God, about his commitment to God, about his willingness to go to the ends of the earth. He's talking about his passionate and determined commitment to serve God with all his heart. It's a whole of life thing. And that's where his statements and testimony complement this, as we continue to read.

Paul believes everything in the Law and Prophets. Head and heart combine in his following, in his serving, in his worshipping of Jesus. And where does all this lead? It leads to v15 a hope in God, that there will be a resurrection of the righteous, and the wicked. Why does it matter that there is a resurrection of the wicked? This is profoundly helpful when we have been wronged. God is a righteous Judge. Those who have brought injustice on others will be brought to account. The wicked will not get away with that they have done. Unless, like us, they turn to God with head and heart, and accept through grace, God's forgiveness. The righteous, are those who have been restored, rectified.

Where some more gold? Verse 24, the imprisoned Paul is sent for to speak to Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla. What does Paul speak about? His faith in who, not just Jesus, but Christ Jesus. Christ being - the Messiah. Paul is making sure that this Jewish wife understands clearly that Jesus was a fully significant person. If she gets this, what influence could she have on the household?

Then Paul goes on to talk about, v25, three things; righteousness, self control, judgement. That's a very interesting mix! Here is evangelism. We might have expected to see grace in there. We might have expected to see something about the resurrection of Jesus, or Jesus' return. No, three things, righteousness, self control, and judgement. Indeed they are linked. If this is a model for us, how would you unpack each of these?

Righteousness - this word that we've covered a lot in the last year or two, this idea of restoration, or rectification, God putting things back to how they were meant to be. I love this image. This intent of God gives me so much hope, that life, our world, and environment, will be restored to how it should be. And we know that God changes us now, the restoration begins when we turn to Jesus.

Self control - yes, we have freedom, but not freedom to do evil. And it isn't easy to say no in some circumstances. Which is why one of the fruits of the Spirit is self control. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self control. We don't have to battle evil on our own. The Holy Spirit will help us, if we're prepared to desire to follow Jesus.

And Judgement - yes, evil and Satan are judged. But as Paul has said in v15, there will be a resurrection of wicked and righteous. We live either facing the light or facing the darkness. And the wicked should fear, oh, and Felix did! The righteous should have no concern. Those who choose to face the light, and acknowledge Jesus will have the pleasure of living on the renewed earth where there will be no more sin, no more crying, no more dying, no more pain.

That's enough for now Felix said, for he was afraid. But instead of releasing Paul, he kept him in prison, asking to see him often, in the hope that he might receive a bribe to release him. Which confirms the corruption that he was content with.

How do we finish?

Paul cheerfully makes his defence. He reminds the court about his worship, what he believes, and his hope. He reminds them that of the resurrection to life beyond life here and now. That links to righteousness, the restoration we will receive, and do receive, self control, and judgement, three aspects of evangelism.

So may we strive to keep our conscience clear before God, as we rest in worship, belief, and hope.