

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

As we prepare to worship, here are some verses from Matthew 17, as Jesus and the disciples arrive in Capernaum.

Matthew 17:24-27 (NLT)

24 On their arrival in Capernaum, the collectors of the Temple tax came to Peter and asked him, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the Temple tax?”

25 “Yes, he does,” Peter replied. Then he went into the house.

But before he had a chance to speak, Jesus asked him, “What do you think, Peter? Do kings tax their own people or the people they have conquered?”

26 “They tax the people they have conquered,” Peter replied.

“Well, then,” Jesus said, “the citizens are free! 27 However, we don’t want to offend them, so go down to the lake and throw in a line. Open the mouth of the first fish you catch, and you will find a large silver coin. Take it and pay the tax for both of us.”

What caught my eye here is the New Living’s translation of Jesus’ words in v26. It caught my eye because we’ve been reading about Paul in Acts, about the favour shown to Paul because he was a Roman citizen. Here the citizens of the Kingdom of God, are shown favour, they’re free! Which left me pondering about my citizenship in the Kingdom of God, and the privileges that this brings. It’s not about being free of taxes!

Let’s take a moment to ponder, what are the privileges you can think of, for being a citizen in the Kingdom of God?

Father God, thank you for the freedom we have to come to worship. Thank you for the freedom you have brought us through Jesus, through His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension. Thank you for the immense privilege of having the Holy Spirit with us, and in us. Thank you for inviting us to be part of Your Kingdom.

Father, as we worship this morning, please lift our hearts, bring us joy and peace, give us confidence in who Jesus is. Please encourage us. Amen.

Message - The Time is Right

Are we showing to others, by the way we live, that we believe in a dead Jesus, or an alive Jesus?

When I arrived in Feilding I was advised to get around as many places as possible and introduce myself. It’s your one opportunity when you’re new. There were many people who took the opportunity to come and introduce themselves to me. Several of these had grandmothers who had just died in Northland, and they had run out of petrol in Feilding, and needed some vouchers...

One of these people must have done a sales course while in prison. Or watched too many tele evangelists. He provided a wonderful story of his life, and then, after quite a few minutes, leaned forward in his chair,

looked me in the eye, and said, “Well pastor, will you give me some money?” He received the same response as all the others. Which I should add, lead one fella to inform me, that I was not very Christian!

Interesting that I had more of these people in my first three months than I’ve had since. You see, I was the new kid on the block. These people needed to know if I would be like the last fella? Or would I be like the others in town? They needed to know how much was I good for? And that’s exactly what’s happening here at the start of Acts 25.

Let me remind you of the last verse of Acts 24, v27 from last week, before we read ch25.

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.

This change in leadership provided the Jewish leaders the opportunity to reintroduce some old agendas. How would the new boy respond? Let’s read;

Acts 25:1-12 (NIV - UK)
Paul’s trial before Festus

1 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They requested Festus, as a favour to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, ‘Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there.’

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood round him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

8 Then Paul made his defence: ‘I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.’

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, said to Paul, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?’

10 Paul answered: ‘I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!’

12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: ‘You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!’

Festus consults King Agrippa

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14 Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. He said: ‘There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15 When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

16 ‘I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. 17 When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18

When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19 Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive. 20 I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21 But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.'

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I would like to hear this man myself.'

He replied, 'Tomorrow you will hear him.'

May God bless these words to our hearts and minds.

So we start with a question... We're working our way through the book of Acts. And at the moment we have Paul the evangelist in prison. So the question, think about, who are the groups of people Paul has had the opportunity to talk to about Jesus?

Does that strike you as strange for someone who is a prisoner?

Would it not have been surprising if Paul had waited till he got out? No, the time was right. Opportunities were given to him, and he took them. We should notice the opportunities we have. Note though, none of these opportunities were Paul's creation. He simply was who he was, where he was.

And notice the last verse, even the king asks to see Paul! What is it about Paul and his message that draws the Romans to want to know more? The gospel, the news of Jesus, was attractive. How can this be?! When you look at Jesus' teaching, like Matthew 16:24

Matthew 16:24 (NIV - UK)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

Matthew 16:24 (NLT)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me."

Wouldn't this turn people off, turn people away? No it doesn't. So what about now? What is so abhorrent that people today will not turn to Jesus? Jesus lived out this verse, giving up His way, and now Paul is living out this verse too, and because of that, people want to know! And I wonder if that's part of the problem now, when do we give up our way to follow Jesus?

Paul, like Jesus. There's something about these verses, that we're meant to notice. The parallels with Jesus' life and trial:

v1 Festus goes up to Jerusalem, just like Jesus

v1 it was three days later, like Jesus in the tomb

v2 the chief priest brought charges, like they did against Jesus

v3 they sought to kill Paul, as they had done to Jesus

v6 Festus took his seat, it is the judgement seat, like Pilate

v7 the chief priests stood around Paul accusing, like they did to Jesus

v13 Agrippa and Bernice come in, is this to be like John the Baptist's beheading?

v22 Agrippa curious about Paul as Antipas was curious about Jesus (Luke 9:9 and 23:8)

We're being shown, and we're being challenged, that as Paul was a follower of Jesus, and was like Jesus, so can we be! Like Paul, like Jesus. And we as followers are to be.

Not that this makes life easy. Paul is a pawn between governor and Jewish authorities. The Jewish leaders ask for, v3, a favour, of the new governor. This seems fair and reasonable, except that they haven't accepted the ruling of the last governor. But it is interesting that the word favour is *charis*, the word we usually translate to grace, an undeserved favour. They are asking for grace.

With that in mind we get to v9, and here, Festus in wondering what to do, is wanting to gain some credit with the Jewish leaders, suggests that he give the Jews a favour. Again, the word is *charis*, undeserved of course. It is likely at this point that Paul realises that his fate is on a knife edge. If he is given to the Jews, he returns to Jerusalem, he goes backwards. Jesus has said to Paul (23:11) that as he has spoken for Jesus in Jerusalem, past tense, he will soon speak in Rome;

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.'](#)

Paul has no interest in going backwards, or being given to the Jews as a favour. And we can guess that the Jews knew that they would never win their case in court against Paul. How do we know that? Because they plan to murder him on the way, v3.

So Paul speaks up. And what are his words? No one has the right to 'hand me over'. What is the Greek for hand me over? The verb form of the noun *charis*, meaning grace. No one has the right to use me as grace, is what Paul is saying. And he is right. It should not be. He has value. He's not prepared to be a diplomatic gift to the Jewish leaders (Peterson, 649).

Using his Roman citizenship, and his knowledge of the Roman legal system, Paul appeals, as is his right, to Caesar, and Caesar's court. This keeps him moving forward, towards Rome. But more importantly, it keeps him in Roman care, keeping him out of Jewish hands, keeping him alive.

But before Festus could organise Paul's travel documents, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice come to visit. To pay their respects. We'd never say that today, sounds like a funeral! They discuss Paul's case, and the accusations by the chief priests. Festus is bemused, we see in v19, it's just some points of disagreement about their religion, oh, and, about a dead man, Jesus, who Paul asserts is alive. And this is the problem. The chief priests and elders are wanting the world to know, that Jesus is dead.

So let's pause and evaluate the lives of those who say that Jesus is dead. What are they living for? And how are they living? Are they contributing positively to anything? They are destructive, negative, and self seeking.

Paul, who not only believes that Jesus is alive, he knows that Jesus is alive, is living very differently. Let me be clear, Paul believes that Jesus died. But he knows that Jesus is risen, Jesus is alive again. And as a result, Paul lives in a positive way, he's living for Jesus, he's into restoration, revival, renewal, and repentance. You could even say he's radical! This must be where our Baptist Call to Prayer has come from?!

This is the question or the point for us. How we are living? Are we living as if Jesus is dead, or alive?

Oh, it's more than that, in all that we do, are we being a window into who Jesus is? Are we living like we believe Jesus is alive, or dead?

Paul is able to live boldly, without fear, because of Jesus, who is alive. Will we follow in the same footsteps?

[Benediction](#) - Nathan Nettleton

(based on Matthew 16:21-28; Romans 12:9-21)

Go now and follow Jesus in the way of the cross.
Rejoice in hope,
hold fast to what is good,
persevere in prayer.
Do not be overcome by evil,
but overcome evil with good.
As far as is possible, live peaceably with all.

And may God hear your cries and deliver you;
May Christ Jesus repay you with fullness of life;
And may the Holy Spirit be with you always
.....nourishing you in love and hope.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....In the name of Jesus. Amen.