

Acts 24:25

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Preacher: Robert Macleod

[0 : 00] Turn with me to the passage of Scripture which we read in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles in Acts 24.

And I want us this evening to look at the whole chapter in the context in which we find it. But particularly for those of you who like to have a text around which to recall our thoughts, it is appropriate to suggest verses 25.

Verse 25, I should say. Felix calls for Paul, listens to him as he speaks about faith in Christ.

And we're told that as Paul discourses on righteousness, self-control and judgment to come, Felix was afraid.

Whenever we think of the Roman Empire, we probably think of a variety of things. But it's suggested that one of the most characteristic and lasting expressions of that empire and of that epoch of history was its law.

[1 : 31] When we come towards these closing chapters as Luke records them for us in Acts, it is inescapable that we join together with Paul and with others in the Church a privy to their experience of the Roman legal system at work.

In chapter 24, Paul is at the bar. And as he stands there, he is, in a sense, accused on three counts.

He's accused at the personal level of being a pestilent individual. At a political level, the charge of sedition is laid before him.

He is, it's suggested or alleged, that he's the leader of an illegal rebellious group, referred to here as the ringleader of the Nazarene sect in verse 5.

And then there's a doctrinal charge also laid against him, insofar as they try to allege and to prove that he had profaned the temple.

[3 : 00] He even tried, in verse 6 we're told, to desecrate the temple. So against him personally, there's a charge.

Against him at a political level, there's a charge. And against him at a theological or doctrinal level, there's a charge. And then Luke allows us to hear and to appreciate how Paul defended himself in the context of these allegations.

And I think it's in the context of these allegations that we pick up some wonderful lessons, I think, that are timeless.

As well as picking up some instruction for ourselves and what we need to remember as individuals this evening at a spiritual level.

We're reminded by Luke that when Paul is granted the opportunity to speak, that he gives a thorough and detailed rebuttal of every charge.

[4 : 19] The charges that were brought against him, on paper at least, and in reality we could say as well, were charges that were going to struggle from the beginning to be substantiated.

There was no or little evidence provided to bring about a conviction. And if the evidence that was presented would have been looked at, again there would have been a move, surely, to fall from the case altogether.

And on top of that, the Asian Jews who started the story and who perhaps gave an acceleration to the process that brings them before Felix, were missing from the trial altogether.

And in the light of these weaknesses, at a legal level, yes, you would say, surely there's a travesty of justice going to take place here.

But Paul defends himself. And he defends himself in a thorough and detailed way. But you also know that, or recognize in Luke's record, how bold a Paul is in the process as well.

[5 : 39] And again, that is something to bear in mind in our own lives and in our own time, standing for the faith of Christ.

The need to be bold and the need to be courageous. The need to be direct. We live in a time where very often we are tempted, if not seduced into the position where we stand back from confrontation.

We don't face up to the opportunities that are before us. We don't speak the truth as we should speak the truth because we seem to have imbibed the mindset of our time that it is wrong to be direct.

It is wrong to be bold. It is wrong to create confrontation. But the third thing you notice, according to Luke's account of these events, is the way in which Paul, when he speaks, and particularly when he speaks on issues concerning the faith, speaks as a man who wants a decision.

He doesn't speak in generalities. And as I've thought about this, I've wondered if that is one of the reasons in our congregations that we are struggling in the present time.

[7 : 12] Those of us who preach week in and week out the glorious message of God's redeeming love. Preach it, I believe, with conviction.

We preach it as men, yes, and sometimes as women, who have been well taught in the scriptures. But there's education there, there's learning there, there's the ability to expound the truth per se.

But I wonder if one of the reasons we have so many empty seats in our churches, one of the reasons we hear so seldom of men, women, boys and girls placing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is because we are good at preaching in general terms.

We are good, perhaps, at educating the mind in the things of God, but we're not good at challenging our people to decide on which side of the way they wish to walk.

Challenging our people which road they wish to journey through life on. The narrow road that leads to life or the broad road that leads to destruction.

[8 : 35] Paul, I think, shares with us in his approach with Felix. A timeless lesson that we need to take on board and never become embarrassed about.

That we must ever confront ourselves with the claims of the gospel in order not so much that we're educated, but in order that we come to a place where we humbly bow ourselves before our holy God in repentance.

And it's in that context that I wanted to look at this chapter this evening. Because Luke takes us through Paul's rebuttal of the alleged crimes that he's been charged with.

he takes us through to the moment where he is standing before Felix. A moment that he may never have again.

A moment that gives him an opportunity as we're told to speak in verse 25 about the faith in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 54] About faith in Christ Jesus. and as he talks to Felix he talks directly to him. It's one of the lasting I think legacies of Paul.

That he was a man who many would suggest was not large in stature. But despite his seeming deficiencies physical deficiencies of stature was a man who was mighty in conviction in courage when it was demanded of him.

And here is one of these moments where he is the accused. Where he is before this Roman official who holds power.

Who has the prerogative to find him guilty. Who has the prerogative to keep him in jail as was the end result. And Paul is in a vulnerable position.

What's he going to do? Is he going to talk nice things to Felix? Is he going to make Felix feel particularly comfortable in order that he'll be favourable towards him?

[11 : 16] with the apostle the boldness and the courage of the man comes through. And it comes through as he approaches Felix.

Doubtless he looks him in the eye and he confronts him on three fronts. John Scott describes Paul's approach with Felix as displaying what he says are the four eight tenses of salvation.

He confronts him first of all on the reality of yesterday's sin. As Paul we're told he discoursed on righteousness that's the first thing Paul took up with Felix.

He discoursed on righteousness. When we think of righteousness in this context Paul is speaking on what he refers to or what he seeks to make Felix understand as right conduct before God.

As that kind of conduct that should follow the will of God and that kind of conduct that should always be seen in the eyes of God that's pleasing to him. And Paul takes up the reality of yesterday's sin in this Roman official.

[12 : 52] And how opposite in the context of Felix's life and Felix's lifestyle that was. Some time ago there was a book entitled Whatever Happened It's a Sin.

And that book explores the changes in attitude that have arisen towards it. How even the language of sin or the term sin has dropped from the vocabulary of today.

Whenever we think of sin, as I said to the children this morning, we think of it not as sin. We don't like the word sin. We talk about it as badness. But at the more academic level, sociological level, we speak of it as alternative lifestyles.

We speak of it as psychosocial problems. We speak of it as malpunctions or addictions or even disease. But in that particular book, Thelith McGinley said this.

She said people are no longer sinful. They're only immature or underprivileged, frightened or more particularly sick. For the Apostle Paul, as he confronts this man, who doubtless he knows something about, but as he confronts this man with this perhaps one-off opportunity to talk about the faith, here he talks to him in direct, involved in courageous language, about righteousness, about his lifestyle, about his walk with God, about his thinking in respect to God, about whether or not what he does, thinks, say and do, is pleasing to God.

[14 : 51] And the reason Paul is so direct with Felix about yesterday's sin, is because Paul himself has come to recognize that whatever we think about ourselves, that thought about our goodness, about our acceptability to a holy God is far from the mark.

And Paul himself is someone who learned and learned well is a lesson that at best our righteousness is a filthy ruse. And that is something that Paul is not taking up here before Felix says something new, as a new fad in his theological or pastoral or preaching position.

He is taking up this theme as a theme that he has embraced from the beginning. A theme that he expound perhaps most clearly in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 3 chapter verse 21. When writing to the Romans having reminded them, reminded them, as he still seeks to remind us through these letters, that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked.

That we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. That the righteousness that we seem to think will be good enough for God is not a righteousness that is acceptable at all.

[16:17] And the righteousness that is necessary is not a righteousness that is human, but a righteousness that is divine. And that's why he says in verse 21, that now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed before and unpunished.

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

And so Paul learned, and Paul taught, and Paul confronted Felix on yesterday's sin in the context of his righteousness, reminding him that his own righteousness was not a righteousness that would save him, that he needed the righteousness of Christ imputed to him.

[17:53] But then you notice second, not only does the courage and the boldness of Paul speak to Felix about yesterday's sin, it comes and it speaks about a today's temptation.

He spoke to Felix not only on righteousness, but on self-control, that is, on ethics, Christian ethics. And again, what an amazing moment that must have been.

Because here, he's before Felix and before Adrissila. And he stands before two people that, in terms of models, where, you would say, models of Paul are in to Paul's mind, of what was totally unacceptable to God.

And he spoke to a man who, throughout his political, unpersonal life, had never exercised for one moment self-control. He was a man who struggled at every level with the whole issue of self-control.

One Roman historian tells us that he gave himself to every kind of barbarity and lust. And he did so with a conviction that he could do so with impunity.

[19:26] But Paul speaks to it about the issue of today's temptations, about the issue of self-control. And isn't that an amazing thing?

That you and I have so many abilities. We can control almost anything. We can control so many things in our lives, but yet, we cannot ultimately control ourselves.

And they are, as I've already said, a classic example of that. She divorced her, a husband, to Marie Felix. And also, she was a Jewess, who knew the commandments of God.

She flung the commandments of God in order, as we feel it, to give ourselves to every kind of self-interest.

People that you and I know, and even amongst ourselves, whenever we come across something ugly in society, we watch it on Sky News or whatever channel we watch.

[20 : 39] Something ugly happens in the street. Something ugly happens in the office, in the place we work. And whether we're Christian or not, the conversation inevitably comes round to the fact that something's wrong.

Something's wrong with society. And we talk about the something, and we talk about the something because we have jettisoned the reality of absolutes.

We have jettisoned the categories of absolutes, of guilt, of sin, and because we've done so, we can only blame something.

We cannot see that the something is not the problem, it's the someone who's the problem. You and me, we're the problems. Because we cannot control ourselves.

We cannot say no to the things we should say no to. And so often we're caught up in this conflict, the good that we would, we don't do, and so on.

[21 : 46] Just like Paul experienced. And so Paul is speaking to Felix. And he's speaking to his wife.

And he's reminding them. He's reminding them of the reality of yesterday's things, of the reality of today's temptations.

But thirdly, you notice, he speaks to them also on tomorrow's judgment, on the judgment to come, verse 26. And in many respects, Luke summarizes what Paul is saying, reducing it to these three intensives, to what is past, to what is present, and to what is yet to come.

But we can imagine that what Paul is speaking, when Paul is speaking to Felix, what Paul is doing is sharing with them and with them gathered, with Priscilla, what he shared with the Greek philosophers.

You remember what he said in Athens? Amongst many things that he said that day, he said, yet God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.

[23 : 01] We don't like to think too much about judgment to come. We don't like to project all too often our lives much more than beyond next week, next month, perhaps the rest of this year.

And it is one of the great delusions of too many of our lives is that we imagine that life is all that there is. And death the end.

But we come back to the word of God that reminds us. As we said this morning, it is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment.

But we sit very uneasy on the theme of judgment to come, but the Bible is so plain in respect to it. And when Paul confronts him, confronts him in all his Roman precision and power and pomp and one of the features of Roman officialdom in the face of difficult times, was to stand stoically and show no emotion.

But Paul has been so bold, so direct, so specific in talking about the faith, that Luke tells us that Felix was afraid.

[24 : 28] He was troubled. And some would suggest, Keddie, for example, would suggest that he's not so much troubled out of the conviction of sin, but troubled because in reality he is unable to get his head around the fact, or the possibility, that there's a day coming when he, the great official of the Roman Empire, will stand one day accountable, not to himself, but to the judge of all men.

And as we come to a close here this evening, my friends, whenever you read chapter 24 of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's defense to charges alleged against him.

But what's more important in chapter 24 is the issues that Paul speaks about before Felix in respect to man's sin, in respect to man's inability to control himself, and in respect to the judgment to come.

And I close this evening just thinking for a moment around the impact of that defense by Paul to Felix and Drusilla.

We're told that Felix was afraid. But more than afraid, what did he do? He says to Paul, that's enough now.

[26 : 18] You may leave. And when I find it convenient, I will send for you. I wonder how many of you in church this evening, perhaps over a long period of time, have behaved like Felix to the call of the gospel to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may be saved.

To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may know what the writer to the Hebrews spoke of of that great salvation. I wonder how many of you have reacted and do react and perhaps are reacting tonight like Felix.

You're maybe not putting your hand up and beckoning me to say, that's enough, I've heard enough. At a more convenient heat and I'll talk it again over with you. I wonder if that's been some of your experience here in Aberdeen.

Or if you're visitors in your own congregations where you come from. Can I remind you and remind you solemnly my friends this evening, that Felix's position, as well as Paul's approach to Felix being a timeless lesson to us.

Felix's behavior in response to Paul is a solemn and timeless lesson to all of us. In respect to our response to the call of the gospel to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 10] The gospel tells us and tells us simply that the approach don't call me, I'll call you is out of order.

It is unbiblical. It is unacceptable to God. today, today is the day of salvation, we're told.

Harden not your hearts. You hear his voice today, harden not your hearts. What about this evening with you?

are you hearing the voice of God coming to you this evening? Are you hearing that voice saying to you, whoever you are, what about yesterday's sin that's still not playing?

What about today's temptations that are still a struggle to you? what about tomorrow's judgment? What about it?

[29 : 24] What are you doing with that voice I'm asking you? Today, that voice is speaking to you. The solemn truth is this, tomorrow, that voice may be silenced.

Spurgeon said on one occasion, all men who perish have had one last warning.

Isn't that a solemn thought? You may come to that tomorrow's judgment and the voice will say to you, I spoke to you.

The voice will say to you, I warn you. The voice will say to you, I gave you your opportunity. What are you doing with it?

Today, this evening and other days, if you hear his voice, don't say, I'll call you.

[30 : 48] Humble yourself before that God. Acknowledge yesterday's sin. Claim the grace of God for today's living.

And look at the coming judgment in the knowledge that now there is no condemnation. for if a man or a woman, boy or girl is in Christ Jesus, they are a new creation.

Let that be your life this evening. Let us pray. day. in all saints in sock