

Righteousness, Self-Control and Judgement

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[0 : 00] I'd like to turn once again to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 24, reading verse 24.

Acts of the Apostles, chapter 24, verse 24. And after some days, Felix came with his wife, Priscilla, who is Jewish, and he sent for Paul, and her to speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, Go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. Or in words that we recognize more comfortably.

He reasoned to them of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come. And Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time.

[1 : 04] When I have a more convenient season, I will call for you. The real power of the gospel is seen in the person of someone like Saul of Tarsus.

His heart was changed. His whole life and mind was captivated by Christ.

And it changed him from a man who was self-centered. He was very proud about his hereditary gift of being a Jew.

We read them in Philippians chapter 3. And he was born a Hebrew of the Hebrews. A Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. According to the law, blameless.

All these things were characterized what Paul was. A man self-centered. A man very proud. A man who thought he could deal with God on his own terms.

[2 : 11] And live the life of scrupulous honesty and integrity and law-keeping. And in that way, make himself acceptable to God.

And that's the way it is for all legalists. They think that somehow by keeping the law, they will make themselves acceptable to God.

And it's not something that only occurred amongst the Pharisees of 2,000 years ago. I'm sure it occurs in many of our lives even today. But as I mentioned this morning, know me a man since the fall is able perfectly to keep the commands of God.

But this daily break them in thought, in word, and in deed. But this meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus changed Paul from that into the man that we read about in his letters to the various churches in Galatia and Ephesus and Philippi and all these churches.

And we see there a totally different man. He does not deny what he was. But his boast now is in Christ Jesus into what he has become.

[3 : 34] Not by his own intellectual advancement or knowledge or the gifts he had been given by God. But his boast is only and continually in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it changed him from that man who was self-centered into someone who was willing to suffer the loss of all things that he might win Christ.

And in that desire, we know that Paul suffered many hardships. He suffered shipwrecks. He suffered beatings, pedals on land, and pedals by sea.

And all these things had no real effect on the way that he attached himself to Christ.

Sometimes difficulties and hardships cause people to turn back. If you remember the parable of the sower and the seed, where those who fall on stony ground, they grow up quickly because they have no root.

[4 : 41] And when difficulties and hardships arrive, they fall away. But that didn't happen to Saul of Tarsus. He was a changed man. The Lord had entered his expedience and his life and had changed him forever.

He was now prepared, they said, to suffer the loss of all things that he might win Christ. Almost everywhere Paul went, he was imprisoned, he was attacked, he was accused, he was tried.

And in all these different experiences, he always maintains the same passion. If you put him in prison, the day he got out, he would again preach the gospel.

In fact, he preached in prison, while he was in prison, to anyone who would hear him. And so more than that, he preached before his judges, he preached before the Sanhedrin, he preaches here before Felix, and later on before Festus.

And so again and again, he preaches the gospel in here. In this particular incident, we have Paul not defending himself, not trying to seek his own release.

[5 : 58] As he says in the letter to the Philippians, he's found himself in all states therewith to be content. He's not complaining, he's not trying to make excuses, he's not trying to get released from prison, he simply wants to preach the gospel.

And that's what the Lord said he was being called for, that he was going to send them to many places, and there proclaim the righteousness of God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

and so here in that text, he stands before Felix. Instead of defending himself, he preaches about righteousness, temperance, or self-control, and judgment to come, until Felix trembles under a life message.

What we have here is a very appropriate sermon. Now, there are three people here in this particular narrative.

We have Felix, we have Drusilla, and we have Paul. All of them have a very checkered career. Felix is a man who was originally a slave.

[7 : 16] He was freed by the emperor Claudius. Now, one thing you have to realise is here in the scriptures everything is historical. All these people actually lived.

It's not fables that have been drawn up into a story and filled the pages of scripture. Felix was a real person. He was a slave. He had been freed by the emperor Claudius, and he was promoted and promoted until he becomes governor here of the province of Judea.

And as governor, he committed every act of extortion and bribery and everything else he could think of.

Any unrighteous act he could commit, he did so. And he went so far that Nero had to recall him back to Rome in case the people in Judea rebelled against Rome because of his excess.

of unrighteousness and greed and all the other acts that he committed against the natural law. And see how appropriate this particular sermon that Paul preaches is concerning righteousness and self-control and judgment.

[8 : 45] As I said, Felix here was a man who was totally unjust. He was an extortioner, he was someone who took bribes and Paul purposely took righteousness here as his first subject.

Now what does righteousness really mean? being right before God. It means appearing in God's sight as one who walks in accordance with God's laws, somebody who honours God with his lips and with his actions, who lives out his life as one who does right before God and before man.

And Felix is just the sort of man who does not do these things. So that's Felix. Also, sitting beside Felix, we have Drusilla.

In these verses, she's called his wife. But she's not really his wife.

She was a Jewess. she was actually a daughter of Hera the Great, a woman who was noted for her beauty and also for her brazenness.

[10 : 12] She was very brazen in the way she lived, in the ways that she behaved, even in the royal courts in which she lived. She had once been engaged to Antiochus who was on Herod's death refused to marry her.

So Herod obviously arranged a marriage with Antiochus and when Herod died Antiochus said, no, I'm not going to marry her. So why that was we're not told, but that marriage never took place. she then married a king called Acidus whom she deserted and she eventually came and lived as the wife of Felix.

Now Paul, we can imagine looking at Drusilla reasons concerning temperance or self-control. When we talk about temperance and that's what the author version recall, we think of those who are all indulging in drink.

But the word has more general connotation to self-control in every aspect of life and we look at that later on. So he reads the term regarding self-control.

[11 : 37] And he publicly rebukes both Felix and Drusilla for the shameless lives in which they were living.

I wonder what he would say about the world in which we live today. That there are those who live shameless lives and boast about their shameless lives and have no regard for any of God's laws or any of the things that God considers holy and just and righteous.

Jesus. And so Paul standing there before the court reasons also of judgment to come. It's not very hard to imagine how Paul would deal with that without heading to be to be a subject.

Felix no doubt expected to hear some grand terms of speaking about the philosophy of religion, speaking about the resurrection that Paul had mentioned in his first meeting.

Remember Paul had two meetings here that we read about with Felix. The first time he's there with Tertullus and the Jewish Sanhedrin and he's being accused of raising a riot in the temple.

[12 : 55] And Paul befriends himself very accurately there. He says none of these things are true and those whom they are citing to be witnesses they should be here to accuse me if they have anything to accuse me with.

But then he goes on on this second occasion when he has a private interview with Felix to deal particularly with the preaching of the gospel.

He's here engaged. wholly and completely in declaring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to him. The gospel in regards to righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come.

He didn't speak about the resurrection of the dead. He didn't speak about philosophical subjects such as predestination and election and free will.

God's thought for a time that he would have some sort of philosophical debate with Paul and he finds himself all of a sudden faced with a sermon which is directed at himself and at the woman that he is living with.

[14 : 14] God's and so surely thought he tells me matters in which the gospel differs from Judaism and I can judge it.

We can have a discussion about it but no, not in this place. In another place, Paul engages in discussion and debate with those who are philosophers.

Remember, in Athens on Mars Hill, that's what he does there. He engages there in a philosophical discussion with those who are philosophers. believers. But in this place, Paul speaks about the God who is a just God, the God who is a righteous God, the God who expects self control from those who he calls to himself and the God who will one day judge us.

And so, this was not the place for Paul to engage in the philosophy of religion. he's preaching the plain gospel and he's dealing with the people who are before him.

John Kennedy has a book called The Roshiah Fathers.

[15 : 43] And he there talks about those who had gone before him in the preaching of the gospel and he said, many people engage in different methods of the gospel.

He says, some people preach over their heads, some people try and dumb down the gospel so that they don't come up to the expectation or the intellectual abilities of those who are speaking.

But the way to do it, he says, is to speak to the people. Respect them for who they are, respect their intellect, try and broaden their understanding, and bring them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in respect to the gospel in this invitation, in its demands and its rewards.

And that's really what Paul is doing here in these three headings. And we see him here, first of all, addressing Felix concerning righteousness.

Now, as I said before, righteousness is that aspect of life in which we are in favor both with God and with man. Now, Paul obviously realizes that Felix has no regard for God.

[17 : 09] He lives a life without the fear of God, without regard for God's laws, without any regard even for the laws of men.

And so he brings before him all those whom he had wronged in this life. You can imagine him bringing to mind the widows that Felix had defrauded.

How on the judgment seat where he should have judged him partially, he'd have judged unfavorably the widows and those who could not in some way bribe him and influence his judgment.

The fatherless also who were forced to beg of the many bribes he had taken, of the many false decisions he had given on accordance with those bribes.

And so more and more Paul would have brought these claims before Felix. And you can imagine Felix wondering what have I let myself in for here?

[18 : 12] Sometimes perhaps when we're talking to those who are non-Christians and we want to somehow influence them with regard to the gospel people, they want to engage in some philosophical doctrine again about the resurrection or perhaps predestination or election.

And the right way to do it is to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ in righteousness. The very basis of righteousness is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him.

And no doubt in this heading of the righteousness that Paul is speaking here to Felix, he would have brought the Lord Jesus Christ in him. How the Lord bore our sins, whereby he went to the cross for us and for our salvation.

And the great need there is in all our lives to know Christ and to accept him as Lord and Savior. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man is thought, let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy on him and who is God for he will abundantly pardon.

That's the heart of the gospel as far as righteousness is concerned. There is none righteous, no, not one. And so we have broken situations where righteousness brings us face to face with the fact that we are unworthy of being saved on our own nets.

[19 : 43] If we stand before our judge, the Lord Jesus Christ and our heavenly father we will be found unrighteous. And if we want to face God on what we are, we are going to find ourselves totally failing that particular test.

Our righteousness is in Christ Jesus. We are saved by faith, by grace through faith. And that not of ourselves.

It is a gift of God. We are saved by God's grace. The gift of grace is through the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, what he has accomplished.

And this aspect of righteousness is a righteousness which is not ours. All our righteousnesses are as though he rams. Now, at one level, Paul would have been declaring the aspect of his unrighteous acts to Felix.

But as we speak about unrighteousness, we can't level these sort of charges to us as we sit here, we're not in that position. You know the phrase which says power corrupts, total power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

[20 : 59] Well, we're not in that situation. We don't have power, we don't have absolute power. And so there's this other aspect of the gospel which is declared to us. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

And that's the righteousness that can be applied to us. The righteousness that Paul is talking to Felix is about his own unrighteous acts, his own unrighteous judgment. And he will be bringing before Felix his debt that he owed to God because of the way that he had lived his life and the way that he had occupied the position of privilege and power that he had been given.

For us there is the fact that if we refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ there is no righteousness that we can establish on our own accord that is going to make us acceptable to our Father who is in heaven.

We need the Lord Jesus Christ. And so in this righteousness as it applies to us it is the righteousness of Christ that Paul here is speaking to us about.

The righteousness that Christ alone can offer us. The righteousness that Christ alone can make us favourable to God.

[22 : 16] There is no way we can stand before God. We know that God is a purer eye than to behold iniquity. And so he cannot look upon us, he cannot talk to us, he cannot have furniture with us except in Christ Jesus.

And that's the great privilege of those who are in Christ and those who hear the gospel. The offer of the gospel is held out there to us in the righteousness that there is in Christ Jesus.

And so he begs him to repent, no doubt. He begs him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he begs him to turn to Christ that his sins might be forgiven and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the same way as we do it today, to turn to Christ, to know that only in him can our sins be forgiven, that only in Christ can we be made acceptable to our heavenly Father.

And so we have here this aspect of righteousness that Paul is talking to Felix about. But then as he turns to his second heading, his temperance or self-control, no doubt he also includes Drusilla in this particular aspect of his preaching of the gospel.

[23 : 41] He would remind her that she lost everything a woman ought to live for. No more respect, no more regard of the people around her.

She was an adulteress. She was an unclean person living an unclean life and having no inhabitants in the kingdom of God.

God's love. She turned her back on the privileges she had as being one of Herod the Great's daughters. She had engaged in a life that was totally unclean, totally unrighteous, a life that she lived according to her own whims.

self-control. That's what the lack of self-control means. We live not according to God's laws. We live not according to that which we know to be right, but we live according to what we want.

the catch phrase for the past generation has been it's my life. I live it just the way I want to live it. And yet that's not what the gospel requires of us.

[24 : 56] The gospel requires of us that we live in accordance with God's precepts. Line upon line, precept upon precept, we follow what the scripture reveals to us.

Scripture that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and written down for us by the apostles and the prophets. Remember how the letter of the Hebrews begins with these words in times past, the word of God was revealed to us by the apostles and the prophets, but in these last days, by his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we don't only have the apostles and the prophets, we also have the Lord Jesus Christ, the creator of the ends of the earth, the one who made us in his own image, the one who made the world in which we live, this same Jesus Christ who comes to this earth and brings us to know the salvation that can be found in him and in him alone.

And so he reminds Drusilla of everything she lost as a woman of reputation, warning her that adulterous and unclean persons have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

And reminding her also how the sins of Felix and those around him must also be laid to her charge because she was the temptress, she's the one who went to live with Felix and so brings herself into the situation and finds herself under this charge of being an adulteress and living a life lacking in any self-control.

[26 : 51] people. You can also imagine Felix wanting to respond but Paul not giving him any time as he continues to speak about the judgment that is to come.

You can imagine that he made Felix think he was before the great white throne that we have there in Revelation. The great white throne of judgment with the books being opened, the scales being weighted and our lives being weighed in those scales.

If we can think about all these things we can say them because we read them of what Paul has said, of what the apostles have said before us.

We say no new thing as speeches of the gospel. We say what has been said before. We have no insight into matters in the way the disciples and the apostles had it.

And what we say is we repeat what they say. We proclaim the same gospel they proclaimed. And we are enabled to do so because they have written it and they have proclaimed it and they have passed it down to us.

[28 : 06] And so we can imagine Paul reminding of the situation of the books being opened and that he himself standing before the judgment seat of God.

He no doubt terrified him as anyone would have been terrified before the preaching of such a sermon by the apostle. And he pleaded with them to hear and understand what's being said.

Remember what I said this morning faith comes by hearing the word of God and understanding the word of God. And thinking about the word of God and meditating on the word of God.

There's no point just coming into a service. Hearing what you hear for one moment and forgetting it the next and going away. Have you no effect on us at all.

Talk about in James about the person who looks into the mirror of the word of God and then turns away not remembering what sort of person that word has declared us to be.

[29 : 24] Like someone looking into an ordinary mirror and then turning away and forgetting what we've seen there whether we're disabled or whether we're dressed properly or not. That's what mirrors are supposed to do for us.

it declares us as we are. And the word of God does just that for us spiritually. It declares to us just the way we are.

It doesn't try in some way to flatter us. It tells us the things just the way we are. And so that's what Paul here is doing to Felix and Dussela.

He's telling it just the way it is. and he would have terrified Felix. He'd have pinned him to his seat as he sat there and he'd have opened his ears with the strength of his preaching and made him listen.

No doubt he made Felix feel that he was a prisoner and not Paul. But Paul here was judging him and he wasn't sitting on judgment over Felix.

[30 : 31] That's the way it is sometimes when the gospel is preached. We come sometimes to sit in judgment on the word of God and the word of God inspires judgment upon us.

And we find ourselves judged by God's word and judged by what the preacher is saying. And so here's Felix. He had been immoral.

He had been callous. He had been dishonest. but now he trembles. And though sitting on the judgment seat he finds himself being judged by what Paul here was saying.

You wonder what would have happened next if the devil hadn't somehow got into Felix's mind and said it's enough. Go your way for the present. I'll hear you. It's a more convenient season.

But the time had passed. The moment had passed. And the devil had got the better of Felix and he went back to his own ways.

[31 : 36] We're also told here that Felix trembled. You can imagine Felix thinking here's a man who has told me all things that ever I did.

Sometimes under the sound of the gospel we find the preacher getting under our skin. Almost getting into our mind and telling us things that we thought nobody else knew about.

And that no doubt is what happened here to Felix. She said this man has told me all things that ever I did. It's not this man sent to me from Christ, the Christ he preaches.

Hasn't there been times in every one of our lives when we've been brought face to face with Christ. We felt the truth of the gospel touch us.

We felt its power in making our eyes run with tears, finding our consciences pricked, finding ourselves in some sense brought to acknowledge of what we are and what we've become and what we shouldn't be.

[32 : 55] But fallen man could never go as far as trembling, would it not for the Holy Spirit working in us. We could all of us sit under this gospel that if we're not for the Holy Spirit it would not have any influence on it.

It's not what a preacher says, even the most fluent of preachers, even the most eloquent of men could not bring the gospel to affect any one of us without the power and the demonstration of the Holy Spirit at work in our churches and in our communities.

And yet this work of convicting is in and of itself not converting. the Holy Spirit might work a good feeling in us and yet not save us.

Remember even the devils believe and tremble. But what of us who never tremble? We come to church, we come with a proud heart, we are unmoved by being in God's house, and concerned perhaps even about our own souls.

And we are condemned already as the scripture tells us. And so we find here that I'm suggesting this is the way that Felix is. He trembles, he's pricked in his conscience, the Holy Spirit moves him to tremble under the word and yet there's no response.

[34 : 37] again I keep going back to the rich young ruler, he asks the right questions, he wants to know what to be saved and yet when he's offered eternal life he goes away because he has two great riches.

And here's Felix, he's too wicked, too caught up in his own importance, too full of himself to think about the gospel and to bow the knee before Christ.

What a disappointment this must have been for Paul as he preached to Felix and Drusilla. Can we place ourselves in Paul's position as he hears Felix say, go thy way, I'll call you when I have a more convenient season.

We want to cry out and say to Felix, hold on, can't you spare a moment for your own soul? And I say to the Saviour, hold on, can you not spare a moment for your own souls? As you hear the gospel, will you not plead for mercy and forgiveness and grace in every time of need?

And there's no greater need for any of us than that we might be saved. But at the last, we have to save into ourselves.

[36 : 02] believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Count all things but loss for the excellence and the knowledge of Christ. Press toward the mark for the price of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Nothing else matters. It is only in Christ that we will know completeness and wholeness and satisfaction. And may it be that as we go on through life.

That will be what we desire and nothing else is going to satisfy us and nothing else is going to make us complete and whole persons.

May the Lord then bless these pastors. To conclude our worship now, sing into God's praise in Psalm 139, you'll find that on page 432.

O Lord, thou hast been searched and known, knowest by sitting down and rising up, all my thoughts are far to thee unknown.

[37 : 10] Sing down to the end of the verse Mark 6, that's four stanzas to God's praise. O Lord, thy heart in this earth shall knowest and rose by sitting down and rising up, may all my thoughts hort of the earth thine of h■■■■ hilt hilt and e hilt

Gentile, they are the friends with all my ways.

For in my town before I see, not any word can be, but all together, Lord, it is well all to thee.

Behind me for a path we shed, a blade on me like I, such maulichness to pray for me, to hide, to understand.

From thy spirit weather shall I go, or from thy presence dry.

[39 : 54] O say, I have, and all know thy wait, And now may grace, mercy and peace In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit One God rest on you and abide in you now and always Amen