

Talk – Acts 28:17-31 – They will Listen!

Bible Reading/s

Isaiah 6:1-13

Acts 28:17-31

Central Truth

Preach the Kingdom of God – in attitude, articulation and activity

Purpose

In this sermon, I want my hearers attitude, articulation and activity to be shaped by their faith in Jesus Christ.

Outline

Desire

Paul's final defence speeches

 The Hope of Israel

 Explaining and Declaring the Scriptures

The Nature of Unbelief

They will listen!

Godly Desire

 A _____

 A _____

 A _____

One Last Challenge...

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CHECK TIME

Talk

Prayer

Lord and Father,

Help us to have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand – so that we might know your salvation as revealed here by your Spirit, your prophet, and your Apostle.

And we ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

PAUSE

Desire

- What is it that you most desire?
- You may be thankful that that is a rhetorical question!

- Please excuse me for asking what may seem like a personal question.
- That which we ‘desire’ – that which we long for and hope for - may seem to be a solely private matter (and for some things it is).
- Yet, in many ways our desire is actually on display each day
 - it is seen in what we do and
 - what we give priority too
 - the decisions we make about how we use our time and energy and money
 - the are decisions which are to varying degrees open and visible to others around us.
- And they are often shaped by the world around.
- The whole reason we have reality TV is to feed and cultivate desire.
 - We have building shows, food shows, relationship shows, lifestyle shows, travel shows – they all exist because they tap into particular desires that we collectively want and hope for.
 - If you consider the what is commonly known as the seven deadly sins – then there will be a reality show about each.
 - We wouldn’t watch them if they didn’t tap into something that we desired.

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- Today, we finish our time looking at the *Acts of the Apostles*.
- It was Jesus' desire that his Apostles would take the good news about him and tell it to the world – (Acts 1:8) first in Jerusalem, then on to Judea and Samaria, and beyond to the ends of the earth.
- The whole book of Acts has been an account of how the Apostles have fulfilled their commission and spread the good news.

- Over the last two months, in the sermons, we have focused on what has happened to the Apostle Paul as he has tried to fulfil his commission – which has led to his arrest, imprisonment, and repeated trials, an eventful journey including shipwreck before eventually arriving in Rome, the capital of the Gentile world – to await a hearing before Caesar – in those days the dreaded Nero.
- The circumstances that have faced Paul have been varied, yet it has not changed his desire to preach the Kingdom of God and to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ.

- There is much for us to learn, so would you please come with me to Acts 28 – from verse 17.

Paul's final defence speeches

The Hope of Israel

- What we have before us here are Paul's final two defence speeches.
- Paul is in Rome under house arrest – and as has been his pattern – he goes first to the Jews. More correctly, they come to him.
- And when they have assembled, Paul addresses them ...*[Read 28:17b-20]*

- His quick account aims to reassure the Jewish leaders that Paul is not against them or against the Jewish customs.
- Yet Paul is a man awaiting trial before a Caesar who is not particularly fond of religion of any form including Judaism.
 - So, Paul makes clear that he is not in Rome to cause further trouble for the Jews – he is not bringing any charge against them.
 - You would have to say, given how badly the Jews have treated him over the last two or three years – that it is a pretty gracious gesture.

- Paul explains – it is because of the 'hope of Israel' that he is bound in chains.
 - As we have been reading our Bibles – we know what that hope is.
 - It is the hope of the resurrection.
 - He has stated that before the Sanhedrin in Chapter 23,

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- before Governor Felix in Chapter 24,
 - Governor Festus makes mention that Paul is on trial because of his hope in the a dead man whom he claimed to be alive in Chapter 25,
 - and before King Agrippa in Chapter 26.
- Paul’s desire to preach the Kingdom of God and to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ by highlighting his resurrection has not changed – his circumstances, as hard as they have been, his location, those he has addressed, that has all changed – yet in all that Paul’s hope has not swayed.

Application

- Without making too big a thing about it at this point – have you noticed that often we site our life circumstances as the reason why we drift in our faith.
- Things get tough, life gets busy, work takes over, family life is pressured – and often what that translates into is a watering down of what we are committed to in faith.
- With Paul, his circumstances have certainly hampered his movements – but it has not hampered his desire to speak about Jesus.

PAUSE

Explaining and Declaring the Scriptures

- Well, surprisingly the Jewish leaders reveal that they have heard nothing bad about Paul – but are intrigued by his message – so they arrange to meet again and this time an even larger group of Jews turn up.
- Verse 23 – *‘from morning until evening Paul explained and declared to them about the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from their scriptures’.*
- You can see the result.
 - Some were convinced, and others would not believe.

Application

- If you have had the opportunity to talk to others about your faith in Jesus (which I hope you have) – then I suspect that Paul’s experience here will resonate with you – despite your best efforts some will not believe.
- We have a terrific message – about a terrific guy – who did a terrific thing – to save us from a terrible situation – and bring us to a terrific place – and yet despite our best efforts, some will not believe!
- Why is that?
- Paul gives you the answer – as his hearers begin to leave he offers his final statement in verse 25 and following...

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‘The Holy Spirit spoke truth to your forefathers when he said through the prophet Isaiah...You will be ever hearing but never understanding, you will be ever seeing but never perceiving, for your heart has become calloused, you hardly hear with your ears, you have closed your eyes’

- Does that passage sound familiar to you?
- Perhaps it is familiar because you know your Old Testament – our passage tells us that it is from Isaiah – in fact the Prophet Isaiah’s commissioning as recorded in chapter 6 – when he is told to go to the people and warn them that when they ignore God, they bring judgement down upon themselves.
- But hopefully that passage is familiar to you for another reason – because Jesus taught it!
 - Jesus used it to explain to the disciples why he spoke in parables – in the Parable of the Sower (in Matt 13, Mark 4, Luke 8).

The Nature of Unbelief

Right, let’s push down on this one a little bit and see if it helps us to understand the nature of unbelief.

- Notice, as Paul explains that:
 - The Holy Spirit spoke
 - That the Spirit spoke through the Prophet
 - And that the words of that prophet were repeated by both Jesus and Paul
 - A message with that kind of backing should pack a bit of a punch!
 - And yet, some will remain in unbelief.
- Why is it that people don’t understand and refuse to turn to God – there seems to be two mutually exclusive answers to this question.
 - a. they don’t believe because it is the judgement of God upon a person,
 - b. yet equally they don’t believe because they are obstinate.
- It is difficult to reconcile these two perspectives – yet both can be held to be equally true.
- There are times in Bible, in God’s economy, when two seemingly exclusive truths can both be upheld
 - Saved by faith, yet called to work (if there is no works, then a Christians faith can be called into question)
 - Chosen by God, yet humanly accountable (how is it that a Christian can be called to account for their sin, if God has already chosen them)

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- Death experienced in order to bring life (Christians know that it is only through death, that they experience life)
- When it comes to unbelief the tension is that folk can close their ears, eyes and hearts to what God has done for them in Jesus
 - and yet in doing that it is equally an indication that Gods judgement is upon them.

Application

- This may remove some of the pressure you feel if and when you do speak about Jesus to unbelieving friends.
- If there are some who will reject the Spirit of God, the words of the Prophets, Jesus and Paul – then give yourself a bit of a break when they reject what you may have told them about the gospel!
- Our commission, our responsibility is to be a witness – how our friends respond is not under our control – that is a matter for both God and for the individual in question.

- And friends, as a suggestion for next time you are in a gospel conversation – follow Paul’s example here.
- Don’t lead by telling them that they will be judged!
- Spend lots of time (morning to evening if you wish) explaining and declaring the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus.
- You will note that Paul raised their coming judgement as a last ditch effort as they were raising to walk out on him!

PAUSE

They will listen!

- Paul closes his address in verse 28 by explaining that it was because the Jews deliberately rejected the gospel that he turned to the Gentiles – and they listened.
- In fact, look at how he expresses in ‘God’s salvation *has been sent* to the Gentiles’.
- The good news of Jesus didn’t just filter down, they didn’t just stumble over it – it was deliberately sent – by virtue of apostles like Paul who went to reach the Gentiles.
- Looking around this room, it is likely that most here are Gentiles – the reason why we have this gospel today, is because someone was first sent so that we might hear.

PAUSE

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Godly Desire

- Acts closes, telling us nothing about what eventually happened to Paul, or what the outcome of the trial before Caesar was (or if it even happened).
- But what we are left with is a picture of what Paul's ongoing desire was – for two more years he *'boldly and without hinderance preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ'*.
- As I close this series, may I suggest that we allow Acts to shape our desires – that we allow Acts to shape our *godly* desires.
- This friends, should be our godly reality
- Let me give you three suggested ways:

1. First, **Attitude**

- Paul was imprisoned or under house arrest for the best part of 5 years by the time we get to the end of Acts – yet despite that restricted circumstance his *attitude* remained gospel-focused and he made the most the circumstances to live out his faith.
- It would have been during this period of incarceration that Paul wrote his prison letters – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. When you read those letters, there is not even a hint of frustration revealed – his *attitude* was simply to make the most of whatever situation he was in to declare the gospel.
- I am challenged by that – being a Christian, should not be something that I 'do' on Sunday's or when I feel like I have got life together.
- Being Christian should be infused into every part of my existence such that my *attitude* towards everything should be shaped by my faith in Christ.

2. Second, **Articulation**

- As clearly on display through Acts, and in the speeches of Paul – he was eager to *articulate* his faith. To preach the Kingdom of God to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection and to make the most of the opportunities he had before him.
- I am challenged by that – as I consider the different theatres in which I live my life, I realise that in many of them I don't make the most of the opportunities there are to articulate my faith.

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- And I look here at Paul - and we are told that he *boldly* articulated his faith.
- He takes those opportunities be they...
 - in one to one conversations,
 - or before a small groups of people like those in the jail cell or those on the ship or those in his home
 - and in larger gatherings – like when he is standing on trial before everyone from kings, and rulers, to religious leaders or the common folk watching on
- We should be looking for ways to boldly articulate our faith in Jesus.

3. Finally, **Activity**

- Although so much of what happened to Paul appeared to be out of his control, it is clear that Paul is very intentionally to what he does.
 - He listened to what Jesus asked of him and followed
 - he sought out opportunities to speak first to the Jews, and then if that didn't work out, he went to the Gentiles,
 - he used the time he had before him to help others and did that as a way to speak further about Jesus.
- His *activity* was shaped by his faith.

- And again, I am challenged. I was in a conversation this week about what we do with our 'social life' – and I realised that when I thought of my 'social life' I was thinking about it in a very *me-centred way*
 - time for *me* to relax,
 - time for *me* to be refreshed,
 - for *me* to do what I want to do.Not very social really!!

- In Paul, we see someone whose activity *without hinderance* was shaped around his faith – and that he was very intentional in using the time he had for the sake of the gospel.
- He didn't have to add more into his life – he just made the most of the things that happened to him in life – and intentionally used those things for the gospel.

One Last Challenge...

- Friends, may I leave you with a question - how does the gospel shape your desires?
- I am sure it does in many ways – praise God.

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- Allow me to offer one last challenge - is there anything you need to change about your *attitude, articulation* or *activity* so that you might continue in the commission your Lord Jesus has given you?

Closing Prayer