

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“The Problem With Procrastination”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 24:22-27

Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes”, he said, “I will decide your case”. 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.

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on 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”. At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

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.

‘As God’s fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you”. I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.’

II Corinthians, 6:1-2, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“THE PROBLEM WITH PROCRASTINATION”

Do you have a problem with procrastination?

I do... and, starting tomorrow, I am going to do something about it!

C:\ My Documents\Word\Ministry\David Ellison\
The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\23 The Problem With Procrastination

PROCRASTINATION

DICTIONARY ‘To delay action’.

ENCARTA ‘To postpone doing something, especially as a regular practice’.

THESAURUS ‘To adjourn, dally, defer, delay, drag your feet, postpone, put off, stall’.

Procrastination is the thief of time, the grave of opportunity, and the road to hell.

‘Procrastination: A hardening of the oughteries’ (Anonymous).

‘Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday and avoiding today’ (Wayne Dyer).

‘Procrastination is like a credit card: it’s a lot of fun until you get the bill’ (Christopher Parker).

‘Procrastination and worry are the twin thieves that will try to rob you of your brilliance – but even the smallest action will drive them from your camp’ (Gil Atkinson).

One of the many things men do better than women is procrastination.

Men tend to think that anything worth doing is worth doing tomorrow, but the truth is that putting things off often causes additional problems...

‘A farm boy accidentally overturned his wagon load of corn in the road. The farmer who lived nearby came to investigate. “Hey, Willis”, he called out, “forget your troubles for a while and come on in and have dinner with us. Then I’ll help you get the wagon up”. “That’s mighty nice of you”, Willis answered, “But I don’t think my dad would like me to”. “Aw, come on, son”, the farmer insisted. “Well, okay”, the boy finally agreed. “But my Dad definitely won’t like it”. After a hearty dinner, Willis thanked his host. “I feel a lot better now, but I just know my Dad is going to be really upset”. “Don’t be foolish!” exclaimed the neighbour. “By the way, where is he?” “Under the wagon”, said Willis.’

One of the many things women do better than men is procrastination.

‘My evil genius Procrastination has whispered me to tarry ‘til a more convenient season.’

Mary T Lincoln

Procrastination is my sin. It brings me naught but sorrow.

I know that I should stop it. In fact, I will – tomorrow!

Gloria Pitzer

We skip forward in ACTS and find Paul on trial before the Governor Felix.

If ever a man failed both personally and officially, that man was Felix, he was a procrastinator. Faced with the right moment to receive salvation, the Governor balked at the prospect.

‘Felix sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on 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”.’

Acts, 24:24b-25, NIV

1. THE PREACHING THAT CONVICTED HIM

'Hugh Latimer often preached to King Henry VIII, and on one occasion he offended the king with his boldness, so he was commanded to preach the following week and make an apology. On the next Sunday, after reading the text, he addressed himself as he began to preach: "Hugh Latimer do you know before whom you are this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away your life if you offend him; therefore, take care that you speak not a word that may displease; but then consider well, Hugh, do you not know from where you come; upon whose message you are sent? Even the great and mighty God! Who is all present, and who beholds all your ways, and is able to cast your soul in hell! Therefore, take care that you deliver your message faithfully". He then preached the same sermon he had preached the week before – with even more energy!'

"ACTS: THE CHURCH AFIRE", R Kent Hughes

PAUL DISCOURSED ON RIGHTEOUSNESS, SELF-CONTROL AND THE JUDGMENT TO COME

Luke records only the briefest of outlines about Paul's sermon before Governor Felix...

THE STANDARD REQUIRED: RIGHTEOUSNESS

Felix and Drusilla had to do something about yesterday's sin.

In 1973, **Karl Menninger**, one of the world's leading psychiatrists, published a book entitled, **"WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?"**. He pointed out that the very word 'SIN' has gradually dropped out of our vocabulary – 'THE WORD, ALONG WITH THE NOTION', he wrote. We talk about mistakes, weaknesses, inherited tendencies, faults, and even errors; but we do not face up to the fact of sin.

'People are no longer sinful', said Phyllis McGinley, an American writer and poet.

'They are only immature or underprivileged or frightened or, more particularly, sick'.

People do not like the idea that they must be saved from their sin.

Today if you tell someone they are a sinner standing in the need of salvation, they will find your words offensive. Nonetheless, that is the way the Bible calls it.

Once upon a time, drunkenness was a sin – now it is a disease.

Once upon a time, pregnancy outside marriage was a sin – now it is a mistake.

Once upon a time, abortion was a sin – now it is a woman's right to choose.

Once upon a time, rebellious children was a sin – now they are maladjusted.

Once upon a time, cohabitation was a sin – now it is a lifestyle choice.

Once upon a time, homosexuality was a sin – now it is an alternative lifestyle.

We live in a world that admits man may be ill, but he is not evil.

Man may be weak, they say, but he is not wicked. The only problems that mankind faces today has to do with his environment and his chemistry. When you get those two things right, everything else will work out well. The Bible points to the very root of the problem and calls it 'SIN'. We are all born with a 'SINFUL NATURE'. We 'SIN BECAUSE WE ARE SINNERS'.

'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

II Corinthians, 5:21, NIV

'To the man who trusts God, his faith is credited as righteousness.'

Romans, 4:5, NIV

THE SIN REVEALED: SELF-CONTROL

Felix and Drusilla had to do something about today's temptations.

Man can control almost everything but himself. Here were Felix and Drusilla, prime illustrations of those with a lack of self-control.

Drusilla was one of the most beautiful women of the day.

She had divorced her previous husband in order to become the third wife of Governor Felix, with promises of wealth and power. Although she was a Jewess, Drusilla lived as though God had never given the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

Felix was attracted to Drusilla by her youthful beauty.

He was an unscrupulous and corrupt official who did not hesitate to lie, or even to murder, in order to get rid of his enemies and promote himself. As a politician, Felix lived by the maxim of 'what buttered his bread determined his conduct'.

Self-control was something neither of them knew much about.

They were sinners by birth, by nature, by choice, and by practice. The lives of Felix and Drusilla showed a couple who were totally out of control. Their relationship was built on his lust and her greed.

'So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.'

Galatians, 5:16-17, NIV

THE SUMMONS RECEIVED: JUDGMENT TO COME

Felix and Drusilla had to do something about tomorrow's judgment.

Paul had laid the whole situation out clearly and simply. He told his listeners what God demanded – righteousness – and what their hearts and actions were – lacking in self-control – and if there was no change, they would both experience the judgment of God.

Jesus is either your Saviour or your Judge.

Perhaps Paul told Felix and Drusilla what he told the Greek philosophers: **'FOR HE HAS SET A DAY WHEN HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD WITH JUSTICE BY THE MAN HE HAS APPOINTED. HE HAS GIVEN PROOF OF THIS TO ALL MEN BY RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD'** (see **Acts, 17:31**).

'Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his

righteous judgment will be revealed. God “will give to each person according to what he has done”. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath.’

Romans, 2:5-8, NIV

Although God does not usually punish us immediately for sin, his eventual judgment is certain. We don't know exactly when it will happen, but we know that no one will escape that final encounter with the Creator.

2. THE PRESSURES THAT CONFRONTED HIM

FELIX WAS AFRAID AND SAID: “THAT IS ENOUGH FOR NOW”

When Paul finished his sermon, Felix trembled.

Roman leaders prided themselves in their ability to be stoical and restrain their emotions under all circumstances, but a conviction from God gripped Felix's heart, and he could not hide it. Paul had diagnosed the case and offered the remedy. It was up to Felix to receive it. Felix trembled because he was under conviction. This was the moment he should have been saved.

When Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God in their prison cell, an earthquake shook the prison and the doors flew open as the prisoners' chains came loose. The jailor trembled and that night he was saved (see **Acts, 16:25-34**).

When the Holy Spirit moved in to convict Felix, the Devil moved in to comfort him...

THE TRAPPINGS OF THE WORLD

Located in Caesarea, the centre of Roman authority in the region, Felix was used to the trappings of power and praise that came with his position. Rather than act upon his accepted need to receive God's salvation, the Roman Governor preferred to keep his pride and position in tact.

‘Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.’

1 John, 2:15-16, NIV

THE TANTALISING OF THE FLESH

Felix had become so accustomed to the pleasures of the flesh – his beautiful young wife Drusilla, the bribes he hoped to receive from Paul and the Church, the soft job he was holding down – he felt that he could never give them up. However, God never asks anyone to give up anything that makes them truly happy, healthy, holy and wholesome.

‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!’

Romans, 7:24-25a, NIV

THE TACTICS OF THE DEVIL

If you read between the lines, you can almost hear the devil whispering in Felix's ear...

Clarence McCartney used to tell a story about a meeting in hell.

‘Satan called his four leading demons together and commanded them to think up a new lie that would trap more souls. “I have it”, one demon said. “I’ll go to earth and tell people there is no God”. “It will never work”, said Satan. “People can look around themselves and see that there is a God, there is just too much proof”. “I’ll go and tell them there is no heaven”, suggested a second demon, but Satan rejected that idea, “Everybody knows there is life after death and they all want to go to heaven”. “Let’s tell them there is no hell”, said a third demon. “No”, said the devil, “conscience tells them their sins will be judged. We need a better lie than that”. Quietly, the fourth demon spoke. “I think I’ve solved your problem”, he said, “I’ll go to earth and tell everybody there is no hurry!”.’

‘As God’s fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you”. I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.’

II Corinthians, 6:1-2, NIV

What are the pressures that confront us today...?

BUT I WANT TO ENJOY MY LIFE!

Some people have the idea that there is no joy in the Christian life. Unfortunately, many Christians help underscore this dry, boring image. Such people need to understand that life in Christ is a joy beyond anything this world can offer.

‘Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”.’

John, 10:10, NIV

BUT WHAT WILL MY FRIENDS SAY?

Some people are ‘approval addicts’. They change by the whim of the crowd. They always want to be on the bandwagon – even when they travel in opposite directions. Such people need to understand that it is what God thinks that is more important than what men think. In 100 years time, no one will remember much about you, but God will – and also in eternity!

‘Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.’

Galatians, 1:10, NIV

BUT I HAVE ALWAYS TRIED TO BE GOOD!

Some people think that so long as their good deeds outweigh their evil actions, then God will receive them in the end. They usually compare themselves to the most evil of people and feel that they are doing well. Of course, for this to properly work, they do not compare themselves to the 'saints', because they would come to a different conclusion. Such people need to understand how God views their righteous and their unrighteous acts.

'All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.'

Isaiah, 64:6a, NIV

BUT I WORSHIP GOD IN MY OWN WAY!

Some people say that all roads lead to heaven. They point to other religions and say that we are too narrow minded to claim that we have the right and only way. Such people need to understand that if there had been another way, then God would not have had to send his Son to die for us.

'Peter said, "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".'

Acts, 4:12, NIV

I WILL BECOME A CHRISTIAN ONEDAY –BUT NOT TODAY!

This is the worst of pressures, and it was the one that won out over Felix...

3. THE PRESUMPTION THAT CONDEMNED HIM

"YOU MAY LEAVE. WHEN I FIND IT CONVENIENT, I WILL SEND FOR YOU"

'In a very real sense, his soul died at this moment – a tragedy of infinite proportions.'

R Kent Hughes

Felix did not say that he never wanted to hear the message of the Gospel again.

The Roman Governor displayed a foolish attitude in his failure to act immediately upon what he had seen and heard. Felix displayed a foolish attitude towards God's Word. He felt he could conveniently employ a 'TAKE OR LEAVE IT ATTITUDE' with the demands of Scripture. He also displayed a foolish attitude towards the conviction he felt concerning his own sin.

HE PRESUMED THAT CONVENIENCE WILL COME

Evangelists for centuries have pleaded with their listeners to respond to the Gospel because they might die tonight – "GET RIGHT WITH GOD, YOU MAY DIE", they challenge. But the reality is that we should GET RIGHT WITH GOD BECAUSE WE MAY LIVE! If we wait until tomorrow, we will miss out on the amazing blessings God has in store for us today.

Think about this: you are closer to death today than you have ever been.

You may have been to hospital and been told you were close to death, but you survived and are here today to tell the tale. Truth be told, you were not close to death then – but you are much closer to death now! You are dying!

Tomorrow is never a better time to get saved. Why? Tomorrow there will be more sin to repent of... less time to repent in... and a harder heart to repent with!

'Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.'

Isaiah, 55:6, NIV

HE PRESUMED THAT CONVICTION WOULD CONTINUE

There are inerrant dangers when you ignore the invitation of the Gospel.

Although you may hear the same Gospel again and again, it may never have same convicting effect. Conviction, when passed over, leaves a scar, so the next time you are not as sensitive to the things of God. Although Felix frequently sent for Paul and talked with him, it was in the hope that Paul would offer him a bribe to secure his release.

'Procrastination is not just a hardening of the oughteries; there is a hardening of the heart.'

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Hebrews, 4:7b, NIV

In his autobiography, Billy Graham recalls conversations he had with John F Kennedy.

'On the way back to the Kennedy house following the election, the President Elect stopped the car and turned to me and asked, "Do you believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?" "I most certainly do", I replied. "They don't preach it much in my church", Kennedy said, "They don't tell us much about it. I'd like to know what you think". I explained what the Bible said about Christ coming the first time, dying on the Cross, rising from the dead, and then promising that he would come back again. "Only then", I said, "are we going to have a permanent world peace". "Very interesting", Kennedy said, looking away, "We'll have to talk more about that someday".

Several years later, the two met again, at the 1963 National Prayer Breakfast. "I had influenza", Graham remembers. "After I gave my short talk, and he gave his, we walked out of the hotel to his car together, as was always our custom. At the curb side, he turned to me. "Billy, could you ride back to the White House with me? I would like to see you for a minute". "Mr. President, I've got a fever", I protested, "Not only am I weak, but I don't want to give you this thing. Couldn't we wait and talk some other time?" It was a cold, snowy day, and I was freezing as I stood there without my overcoat. "Of course", Kennedy said graciously.' But the two would never meet again. Later that year, John F Kennedy was shot dead.

Graham comments, 'HIS HESITATION AT THE CAR DOOR, AND HIS REQUEST, HAUNT ME STILL. WHAT WAS ON HIS MIND? SHOULD I HAVE GONE WITH HIM? IT WAS AN IRRECOVERABLE MOMENT'.

**THE BEST TIME TO TRUST JESUS CHRIST IS NOW!
THE BEST TIME TO TELL OTHERS THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL IS NOW!**