

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Place to Stay: A Place of Persuasion - Acts 28:23

The place of persuasion was found in the city of Rome. It was the lodging where Paul was held under guard while awaiting trial. Yet, he had the liberty to call the chief Jews of the city to him in order to discuss the hope of Israel for which he was in chains. We pick up the story with the words of the Jews in Acts 28:22: "But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (Acts 28:22-29).

In this talk we will look briefly at:

- the seekers for truth;
- the main subjects that would have been considered; and,
- the result.

Firstly, those who sought the truth were Jews who had heard about a "sect" we now call Christianity. As this sect had arisen in Israel, they were keen to hear what it entailed. So we can immediately see that curiosity can lead to truth if it is followed through. Furthermore, we can see that these seekers for truth must have been, at least to some extent, open-minded. They were prepared to give Paul a fair hearing.

Are you seeking for the truth? Absolute truth is embodied in a Person, namely, God. We know this from simple reasoning. If God is the Perfect Being, then truth must mark Him. When the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6), He was, indirectly, claiming to be God.

The exhortation to seek the Lord is found in Isaiah 55: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near..." This directive is more than just looking. It involves trusting as well. There is always a purpose in seeking.

A further exhortation is found in Hebrews 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." This is initial faith. A person may only approach God if s/he believes He exists. There would be no purpose otherwise.

How can we know the existence of God? Well, there are at least four things that support it. First, there is creation. Second, there is the revealed Word of God including its prophecy. Third, there is the life of Christ. Finally, there is the change seen in the lives of people who believe.

Romans 1:20 states: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead..."

There are many scientists who deny that God created. Therefore, they cannot use the word "Creation" because that requires a Maker. Unbelieving scientists have to believe in a massive series of convenient accidents and that matter, as we know it, is eternal. This does not alter the fact that there are also scientists, past and present, who believe that God created and have been helped in their scientific investigations as a result. Isaac Newton is an example of such.

The Bible also supports the existence of God. The fact that it has survived the criticism of unbelieving men is a proof of its authenticity. Furthermore, a book written over hundreds of years by many authors that is perfect in its unity is

evidence of its being God-breathed. Also, many prophecies relating to Israel and to the sufferings of Christ have been fulfilled already. The mathematical probability for this would be far greater than winning the lottery. This is a proof that there is One who exists and knows the past, the present and the future.

The life of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, supports the existence of God. There He is presented as the King of the Jews (Messiah), the Perfect Servant, the Perfect Man and the Son of God. He went about doing good. His work involved signs and miracles even witnessed by His enemies. He even raised the dead. He led a sinless life. No-one could have made up such a record and written it without it receiving extraordinary criticism. But there are no records of the day that I know of that contest this witness.

The changed lives of sinful people also supports the existence of God. When the Gospel is presented, often in the simplest of ways, there are people who believe. Their lives are turned around! They have a new objective for living, namely, to glorify God! You may say, "This is because people in general are easily deceived." In some ways you would be right; but doesn't that work the same way for evolution and other major theories. The difference is, when you find the truth, you can be so assured of it in your heart that it will rule your life. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and the necessities of life will be granted to us.

The Jews who came to hear Paul had an advantage in that they were conversant with the Old Testament scriptures and were expecting a Messiah to set up the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Paul was able to use this knowledge as a springboard to try to show them that their Messiah was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This was done previously by Philip the evangelist when he spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch. This rich man had been reading these words from Isaiah 53: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32-33). Philip, beginning at the same scripture, preached Jesus. No doubt, Paul would have used this marvellous chapter in his argument for it speaks of the Messiah as a lowly, humiliated and suffering man here whose soul was made an offering for sin. It speaks of His death; but also of His exaltation and glory.

So, the Kingdom of God relates to a time when Christ shall rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will reign in righteousness. Oppression will be put down and the poor shall be blessed. The earth, set free from its curse, will blossom beautifully and even the animal creation will be at peace with itself. Today, the kingdom of God is seen in a moral sense in Romans 14:17: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

However, there are three other aspects to the Kingdom of God. In John 3:3-6 we are told by Jesus that it is formed by those who are born again. The Spirit and Word of God (depicted by water) have acted upon people to bring them to a living faith in the true God. However, the truth widens in Matthew 13:24-50 where we find that the kingdom includes all those who "profess" faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that some may not be real believers but only pretend to believe. Finally, the kingdom of God includes the whole universe (see Daniel chapters 2, 3 and 4). Here it consists of a few believers and professors, but is mainly composed of those who reject the true God altogether. God is the Sovereign Ruler over all people whether they like it or not.

George Davison spoke of these in this way: "Another place where these three circles are clearly seen is in Ephesians 4:5-6, 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.' Here we have the first circle in line with John 3. 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism,' Here we have the second circle in line with Matthew 13. 'One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' Here we have the third circle as seen in Daniel 2 and 4."

In our previous studies in Daniel, we have seen how Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an awesome image of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay was God's way of showing the king the future empires of the world beginning with the Babylonian, then the Medo-Persian, next the Grecian, the Roman and, finally, the revived Roman Empire. It was then that a stone, cut without hands, fell upon the feet of the image and it was dashed in pieces. It became a great mountain. The Stone speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Living Stone – the Shepherd and Stone of Israel. The mountain speaks of the kingdom that He will establish. So the history of Gentile dominion over Europe and the Middle East will cease with the coming of Christ in power and great glory. The period that Jesus Himself called the "Times of the Gentiles" will be over. He will establish a kingdom that will never be superseded. In that day, a New Jerusalem will be the metropolis of the earth.

The apostle Paul had a wealth of scriptures at His disposal by which He could argue this point and the Jews who visited him should have known these scriptures also. Let's take a brief look at some of these in the Old Testament along with a few links in the New Testament.

The books of Moses are the first five books of the Old Testament. They are sometimes called the Pentateuch. Here we find many figures of Christ. For example, in the deep sleep that fell upon Adam we see the death of Christ who is

called the last Adam. In the rib that was taken from Adam and a woman built, we see the blood pouring from the Saviour's side as the means by which He builds His church - His bride.

If we turn to Exodus 12, we find the Feast of Passover instituted. The children of Israel were delivered from God's final judgment upon Egypt because they had taken a lamb, killed it and sprinkled the blood upon the door-posts and lintels of their homes. God had said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." The true Lamb of God is presented as the Lord Jesus Christ in John 1:29 and 36. It is His blood that protects us from God's judgment today. In fact, it is written: "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

Quickly moving into the book of Leviticus, we find that the only way to be cleansed from sin and approach God was by sacrifice. If we turn to Leviticus 14:4-7 we find that two clean birds are taken along with other components. One of the birds is killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The other bird is dipped in the blood and, after the leper has been sprinkled, is set free. This is an amazing picture of the Christ who was the heavenly Son of God (depicted by the birds), made in fashion as a man (the earthen vessel), offered Himself to God by the Holy Spirit (the running water), supplied the blood to cleanse our souls from sin (which was symbolised by the leprosy) and then rose from among the dead (the living bird set free).

The book of Numbers we have the dealings of God with His people in a wilderness scene. This is typical of the Christian being in this world, but not really part of it. We find, in chapter 22, the people murmuring against God because the way was difficult. God sent poisonous snakes among them by way of judgment. When the people petitioned Moses to pray to God, he did so and was instructed to raise up a serpent of brass upon a pole so that all those bitten might look upon it and live. In the Gospel of John 3 we find the Lord Jesus pointing at this event and comparing it to His own death. There had been a symbol of God's judgment upon the pole, now God's judgment was to be seen on the cross where Christ died. In His death He exhausted the judgment of God against sin! Now all who look to Christ are free of that judgment and are given eternal life.

In Deuteronomy, we find that Christ is the prophet predicted by the Lord. We read in chapter 18 verse 18: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." It was the woman of Sychar who declared Christ to be a prophet after He, who had never met her before, accurately described her manner of life (John 4:19). This is supported by John 6:14 where we read: "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Again, in John 7:40 we find: "Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is the Prophet."

Of course, indirectly He is identified as One cursed by God in this book for it is written that those who hang upon a tree are accursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:23). This is confirmed in Galatians 3:13 where we read: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree..." The Lord Jesus Christ was forsaken of God upon that cross in order that we need never be forsaken. The hymn writer, Richard Holden, put it this way:

*Lord of life, to death made subject,
Blessed, yet a curse once made;
Of the father's heart the object,
Yet in depths of anguish laid:
Thee we gaze on, Thee recall,
Bearing here our sorrows all.*

In Luke 24:25-27, the Lord Jesus said to two of His disciples: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

The Psalms give expression to the feelings of Christ and speak of both His suffering and His glory. For instance, Psalm 22 describes Him being forsaken of God, ravaged by His enemies, crucified, raised and glorified. It is in this Psalm we read words like these: "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and feet."

In Psalm 2 we find Him declared to be the Son of God who is established as King upon Zion. Meanwhile, Psalm 16 expresses His holiness and resurrection in the words: "For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Psalm 34 predicts that not a bone of Him should be broken: "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." In John 19:31-37 we are told that the soldiers went out to break the legs of those who hung on the crosses, but when they came to Jesus they found that He was already dead. He then states: "For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken". Psalm 45 describes Him as the King in relationship to his earthly bride, Zion. This is also expressed, in more detail, in the Song of Songs.

Psalm 110 speaks of Him being invited to sit at God's right hand. In this psalm, He is found to be a king and a priest after the order Melchisedec of old. The poetical books of scripture reveal a wealth of material concerning Christ and are well worth studying. We haven't even scratched the surface today.

Furthermore, the prophetic books are pregnant with prophecies relating to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some specific ones are listed as follows: Micah predicts the place of His birth as being Bethlehem Ephrata; Isaiah tells us He was to be born of the virgin and goes on to speak of Him as sitting upon the throne of David. From Daniel chapter 9 the time of His birth may be calculated and the same book predicts that His kingdom will never be superseded. Zechariah looked forward to His entry into Jerusalem on the ass's colt. He speaks of Him as the Shepherd who would be smitten. Yet, also describes Him as the future King of Israel. Joel tells of judgment, but finishes with a description of the kingdom of God. Hosea and Amos speak of Israel's final restoration through Christ. Malachi describes Him as the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings. And so we could go on and on, the point being that the Old Testament scriptures without doubt witness that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah of God expected by the Jewish people.

Yet without faith there will be no response. It is so true that hearing comes by the word of God and faith comes by hearing. Even after Paul had explained the wonder of Christ in all the scriptures, there were those Jewish leaders who refused to believe it all. So much so that Paul had to say: "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" Their doubts proved the truthfulness of God's word.

However, there were those of these Jewish rulers who did believe. Their faith would prove to be very costly. No doubt they would have lost their positions in the synagogue and many of their families and friends would forsake them, even treating them as being dead. How about you? What would you lose if you put your faith in Christ? Make a list of them. Then search the scriptures and find the immense blessings that become yours. Blessings that are not temporary, but eternal. You can start a list of blessings with: eternal life, forgiveness of sins, saved from the torments of Hell, given a place in God's family and given a future home in the Father's house on high. What a wonderful God we have!

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