

Park Road Baptist Church 11.07.2021

Opening Prayer

Call to worship

God, our God, how glorious is your name in all the earth!

Your glory is sung by all of your creation!

When we look to the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, we wonder — Who are we that you care for us and for this world?

You are the God of life, crowning us with glory and honour to serve you all our days. O God, our God, how glorious is your name in all the earth! (From Psalm 8)

Song – You are amazing God <https://youtu.be/-fgen24eKiM>

Song – How great Thou art <https://youtu.be/aYTKYpnRnAQ>

Personal Calling to Christian Ministry

This morning I thought I would begin by sharing how God called me into full-time Christian ministry and then we will take a look at a key characteristic from the life of the apostle Paul which should be true of pastors specifically and all who are called to follow Jesus Christ generally.

So, how did God call me?

It would be helpful to have some context. We are going back to 1992. Carol and I got married the previous year and were just settling into our first home. I was working as a Greenkeeper, which I had done for 12 years since leaving school.

In many ways, we were happy and content and totally unaware of what was about to unfold.

One morning I was reading my Bible and a verse seemed to leap of the page. It was 1 Timothy 6 verse 7, ***‘for we brought nothing into this world, therefore we can take nothing out of it’***.

Well, for the best part of a week I could not get that verse out of my mind. It was like a constant shadow that followed me all day long.

Although I was a bit slow on the uptake I began to wonder if God was asking me to give something up that I was holding onto. As I thought that through what came to mind was our house and my job.

Was God asking me to give all that up?

After much soul searching, I eventually told the Lord that if that is what he required of me then I am prepared to do it.

Soon after this, Carol and I were showing a DVD to the youth group at church. And in the DVD, we saw a pastor in Africa (Mozambique) cycling around various villages as he visited his congregation.

As we were watching that, I heard the Lord say to me, ***‘that is the kind of ministry I have for you’***. This wasn’t an audible voice, but it might as well have been because it was so clear and unmistakable.

Then that same evening we travelled into Dundee to attend a Church of Scotland service where they were showing a film about the work of (YWAM). The film began with lots of images to do with the shortness of time – so you had a clock ticking in the background, you had images of a graveyard and an egg timer where the sand is filtering through the hourglass.

And then, in big bold letters, the words ‘GO NOW’ came up on the screen. At that point you could have knocked me over with a feather.

When we put all that together, we felt the Lord was saying, I want you to be prepared to give up your home and your job, that I have a pastoral ministry for you, and I want you to go now and start preparing.

We shared this with our pastor and a few trusted friends, and all were very encouraging and affirming.

And so, we sold our house, and I gave up my job and the Lord wonderfully provided, as Carol and I did a two-year diploma in theology together and later I did a degree in theology at London Bible College.

Song – Cast your cares <https://youtu.be/CgeRInCtq-E>

Intercessory Prayer

Bible reading: Acts 27:1 -3

Called to a life of integrity

As followers of Christ we should be known for our trustworthiness and integrity. I think that is especially true for Christians in positions of leadership, but it should be true for every Christian.

And so we will spend a few minutes looking at the apostle Paul and his integrity.

Let's turn to Acts Chapter 27

Acts 27 tells of the remarkable journey that Paul makes by sea from Caesarea to Rome where he would be tried in the court of Caesar. We know that he is one of a number of prisoners on board the ship and that he is in chains.

Our main focus is verse 2 where we are told that on the second day of the journey the ship docked at Sidon where Paul is allowed to go ashore to visit friends so they can provide for his needs.

So, just take a mental note of that and we will return to it later.

So, Paul leaves Caesarea, and his destination is Rome.

But let's ask the question, why was Paul even in Caesarea?

To answer that we have to go back to Acts 21.

In Acts Chapter 21 Paul is in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was in great need and Paul had written to a number of churches about this and many had agreed to help the Jerusalem church financially and now Paul is bringing the whole collection to Jerusalem.

While he's in Jerusalem, he goes to the temple where he is spotted, by some Jewish worshippers who recognise him. They knew that Paul was travelling with a Gentile by the name of Trophimus and so they assume that Paul must have taken Trophimus into the temple which was out of bounds for Gentiles. And so, a simple misunderstanding, fuelled by their hatred of Paul eventually led to a riot, which then led to Paul being arrested and taken to Caesarea for trial.

Paul had done nothing wrong so we can only assume he was arrested to pacify the Jewish leaders but Paul was to spend the next 2 years in custody there. I don't think the Romans quite knew what to do with Paul.

During those 2 years Paul was heard by 2 Roman governor's, Festus and Felix and also by Herod Agrippa. And they all concluded that he was innocent, and yet they still refused to release him.

And it was while he was being heard by Festus that Paul appealed to Caesar.

And that brings us to Acts Chapter 27 where Paul is in Caesarea, and he is being sent to Rome to stand trial before Nero.

Paul is a prisoner. He has no authority, he has no rights and he certainly has no privileges.

As they board the ship Luke tells us that Paul has been placed in the custody of an army officer by the name of Julius, who is a captain of the Imperial Regiment.

Julius has lots of men under his command, and they were specifically assigned to work for Caesar. In other words, he is one of the highest-

ranking officers in the whole of the Roman Empire and the soldiers under him would be elite soldiers.

Luke also mentions a man by the name of Aristarchus.

What do we know about him?

Well, according to Acts 19:29 he was with Paul when a riot broke out in Ephesus, so he has been a long-time friend and companion of Paul's. Presumably, he has been visiting Paul in Caesarea and now he is travelling with him to Rome, along with Dr Luke.

Hopefully, that sets the scene. Paul is a highly sensitive prisoner. He is on his way to Nero, and he is being held under the tightest security that Rome has to offer.

Let's just put it this way – there are to be no slip ups with this prisoner.

And yet remarkably, after only one day's sailing, the ship docks at Sidon and Julius allows Paul to have his freedom so he can go to his friends and receive care – presumably because he had some severe ailment.

Nevertheless, this is highly unusual.

Of course, it's possible that Julius sent a few soldiers to accompany Paul, although we're not told that. But even if that was the case, he is still taking a huge risk to allow a hot-potato political prisoner like Paul to have this much freedom.

Remember - This is Paul who has stood before governor Felix and governor Festus and king Agrippa.

This is Paul who is deemed a serious threat to the peace of the Roman Empire and who has been incarcerated for 2 years in Caesarea.

This is Paul who was accused in Acts 24:5 ***as being a trouble-maker who constantly incites the Jews throughout the world to riots and rebellions against the Roman government and is a known ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes.***

On top of that, Julius knows full well that if a prisoner were to escape under his watch that he would pay with his own life.

Julius, what are you doing? Or in the words of John McEnroe, ***'you can't be serious'***.

How can we explain the actions of this highly trained Roman General? It can only be that he trusted Paul.

Somehow, either during his time in custody at Caesarea or during the one day's journey (or both), Paul must have been able to convince Julius that he would never do anything to jeopardise Julius's authority, let alone his life.

Julius must have been convinced that Paul would not take advantage of this moment of freedom that has been granted to him.

And remember, Julius is allowing Paul to go and see the very people who you think are most likely to assist Paul's escape.

And yet, Julius has no qualms about letting Paul visit them.

And what about Paul's friends in Sidon! They must have trusted Paul because they opened their homes to him.

Remember that Paul is a prisoner, and so if anything, they could have seen this as casting doubt on his integrity, and yet they welcome him and refresh him.

How do we gain trust and respect like that?

I think it's when people know that we truly have their best interests at heart and that we would do nothing to cause them harm.

Paul must have cared about Julius. He was aware of his duty and sensitive to his concerns and he would do nothing that would discredit his honour, let alone jeopardise his life.

I love what Paul was able to say about Timothy, his son in the faith, *'I have no one else like him, who shows a genuine interest in your welfare.'* Philippians 2:20

Called to journey together

For the last few week's I have had a picture or image in my mind about the church which I believe is relevant for us.

I'm sure we have all had the experience of traveling on a train where we are sat by the window facing the opposite direction of travel.

It can be quite a strange or even unnerving sensation because we can't see where we're going – all we can see is where we've been and where we are (assuming we turn your head to the side).

So, we can see what's gone before us (the past), we can see where we are now (the present), but what lies ahead (the future) is hidden from us.

Not knowing what lies ahead can be a little scary for some. If that's you, then I want to offer some reassurance. The past, present and future are not disconnected from each other. In other words, what God has already been saying and doing in the life of the church should have a large bearing in understanding His future plans for us.

In many ways I think this is a good analogy of the church.

Of course, with any analogy, it will break down if stretched too far. For example, on a train we are all passengers, whereas, in the body of Christ we all have an active part to play.

Anyway, I hope we are all aboard and therefore committed to the journey, travelling in the same direction for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom.

Song – One more step <https://youtu.be/9-VS-jqXryY>

Benediction

Go this morning, surrounded by the presence of the Holy Trinity.

God in three persons. Three in one and one in three.

Go as you are, having received and responded to God's voice in your heart.

Go with the God who sees all and knows all.

Go with Christ whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

Go with Holy Spirit whose council is wise and gentle.

Go this morning, just as you are, to connect with the world, trusting in the everlasting, never-ending love of God.

Go this morning, to live out your life in obedience to Christ.

Go this morning, in peace, in the sure knowledge of God's grace and mercy.

(Words by Jane Henderson)