

Judgment to Come Pt 1

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

The sermon emphasizes the importance of presenting the gospel through reason and intellect, and listening to it with a trembling heart, in order to understand the message of righteousness and judgment.

Duration: 29:33

Scripture: Exodus 20:17, Matthew 5:21-48, Matthew 6:33, Mark 12:30-31, Acts 24:24-25

Topics: "Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the opportunity the apostle Paul had to address the Roman governor while being a prisoner. The preacher emphasizes that the presentation of the gospel is a rational and thought-provoking message, contrary to the misconception that Christians are simply emotional and simplistic. The preacher highlights the importance of understanding how the gospel is to be presented and listened to, using the apostle Paul as an example. The sermon also emphasizes the significance of understanding the context and characters involved in the biblical narrative, drawing parallels to studying Shakespearean plays.

Transcript

The words to which I should like to call your attention this evening are to be found in the chapter, most of which was read to us at the beginning, namely the 24th chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. But I'm going to start reading where the previous reading left off, namely in the 24th verse, and I'm going on to the end of the chapter. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife to Scylla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time. When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.

Wherefore he sent for him the offner, and communed with him. But after two years, Corcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews of pleasure, left Paul bound. Now here we're going to look together at one of these great dramatic stories in which the Bible abounds.

It's a remarkable book, this. It has one great message, but it presents it in many different forms. Sometimes it's plain, explicit teaching.

Other times it's in the form of history, an anecdote. And at other times it puts it in parables, and in what almost appears to be an enigmatic form. However, here tonight we are looking at a great story.

And as I say, it is a great dramatic story. It's a little drama. Now, if we're to really understand and grasp the message of this dramatic incident, it's very important that we should know something about the people who take part in it.

That, I know you'll all agree with me, is something that's always important with any drama, or any play. There are many young people here tonight who are either studying the plays of Shakespeare at the present time or have had to do so. And they will know, and all others who have ever had to do this, will know that when you take up a book with a play of Shakespeare, you open the book, and there you look on the right-hand side, you see Scene 1, Act 1. But before you come to that, generally you'll find on the opposite page a heading which reads *Dramatis Personae*.

And there you'll get a list of names. They're the names of the people who are going to appear in this drama, in this play. And there you're told just a little bit about them.

Why do they do that? Well, for this reason, obviously. You can't fully understand the meaning of what happened to these people unless you know something about them, as to who they were, and something about their characters and their background. So that is done, put in there, for our help and for our aid.

Well now, if that's true of almost any drama, it is particularly true of this one, which we're going to look at together now. And so, let's start by looking at the characters who appear in the drama. There are only three of them.

Two of them are to be found seated on some magnificent kind of bench or couch, probably, in great luxury. Who are they? Well, they're Felix, the Roman governor, and his wife, Drusilla. And there, standing before them and addressing them, is a man who has chains hanging from his wrists.

He's a prisoner. Who is he? Well, that is the Apostle Paul. Well, those are the three characters that appear before us in this drama.

But, as I say, it's very important that we should know something about them. So let me tell you something about them. Look at this man, Felix.

He's the Roman governor. That means, of course, this. Just before this time, the Roman Empire had conquered the land of Palestine, as it had conquered most of the then known world.

And Rome, whenever she conquered a country, she always imposed her system of government on that country. And one of the provisions was to set up a governor who was directly responsible to the emperor and who was responsible also for law and order in the conquered territory. Well, there he is.

His name was Felix. But I can tell you something about this man which we're not actually told in the Scripture. I'm not inventing this.

This is found in secular history. Felix was one of two brothers. In fact, he had a twin brother whose name was Pallas.

P-A-L-L-A-S These two boys had been born as slaves. But they were intelligent boys. They had ability.

And they used it. And they'd been so successful that they'd succeeded in achieving their liberty. Now, that was no small thing to become a free man of the great Roman Empire.

Now, these two boys brought up in slavery had so used their intelligence and ability to obtain freedom. Not only that, they'd got on really well. And Pallas had actually become the great favorite of the then emperor.

He was his right-hand man. He was the one to whom the emperor constantly turned. The kind of ancient Dr. Kissinger.

You know, the man who seems to be advising President Nixon of the United States at the present time. He was in that sort of position. And Pallas, of course, having got into this good position himself, thought about his brother.

So he used his good offices and influence with the emperor to obtain promotion for his brother. You see, they did that sort of thing in the first century. That's not confined to today.

And the result was that we find Felix now as the governor of this conquered province or territory of Palestine. Well, there he is. All honor to him for having used his ability and his intelligence.

And here he is in a very high position. But unfortunately, as the reading at the beginning reminded us, though he held a very high position, and though he was no longer a slave, there was something still very mean about his character. The apostle Paul is brought before him.

There's no charge really to answer at all. Paul was guilty of nothing. And any man with any sense of justice would have set the apostle at liberty.

Not so those men. One of the Roman historians, I think it was Tacitus, has said of this man that he exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave. Well, there he is, Felix.

Now, seated next to him is this woman whose name is Drusilla. And all we are told about Drusilla here is that she was a Jewess. But I can tell you a good deal more about this woman also.

And these are the facts concerning Drusilla. She belonged to the royal family of the Herods. You know, you read in the Gospels about the Herods.

Well, she belonged to that family. Actually, it was her great-grandfather who'd been guilty of murdering all those innocent children at the time of the birth of our Lord. It was her great-uncle who beheaded John the Baptist without any excuse or reason whatsoever.

Well, we're not responsible for our relatives. But that is, it's interesting to know something about the family history and the background, isn't it? But this is much more serious. It was, as you know, an unwritten law amongst the Jews.

In fact, it was a written law that they were not to marry anybody outside their own nation. A Jewish man had to marry a Jewish woman. A Jewish woman had to marry a Jewish man.

But this woman, Drusilla, was a very ambitious person. And she was very anxious to become a princess. So she trampled upon all the sanctities of her great nation.

And she had married a pagan prince in order to be a princess. You see, she'd still go principles in order to get advancement in position and prominence. But unfortunately, the story about these two doesn't end even there.

There was a great occasion once. A great reception was held by a certain person. And amongst the people who may be invited to the reception were Felix, the Roman governor, and Drusilla and her husband, the pagan prince.

And the moment they met, as the films put it, you know, in the television and in the novelettes, the moment they looked at one another, they fell in love. Of course, it's got nothing to do with love. It is pure lust.

But that's what it's called. They say they fell in love. And the upshot was that Drusilla left her husband.

It was a simple matter in those days to get a divorce. Purely a papal matter. Could be done quite simply.

But this was what had happened. And in reality, Felix and Drusilla were living in a state of adultery. Well, there they are.

The Roman governor and this woman, his consort Drusilla, living a life in adultery. Then standing before them, as I say, and addressing them, is a little man. Nothing much to look at.

Nobody would ever have mistaken this evangelist for a film star. We are told that he was short, that he was bald-headed with a beak, nose, and he suffered from some terrible inflammation of his eyes, which almost made him look repulsive. But he happens to be one of the greatest men who's ever lived.

None other than the mighty Apostle Paul. And he's a prisoner. And he stands there with his chains hanging heavily from his wrists, and he's addressing these two great people who are seated up there, looking at him and listening to him.

Well, now you would have expected, wouldn't you, that in such circumstances, that the Apostle Paul would have felt very nervous. He's there appearing before the men in whose power it is to set him at liberty or to put him to death. And you'd have thought that the Apostle would have been so nervous that he would have been trembling.

But the story tells us, you remember, that it wasn't Paul who was trembling, but Felix. Felix trembled. Why? Ah, that's the thing to which I want to call your attention.

Why am I interested in this incident, this anecdote at all? Let me assure you immediately that it isn't because of some kind of antiquarian interest. My dear friends, the world we're living in is in too much trouble for any of us to indulge some mere historical or antiquarian interest. The world is in a desperate state tonight.

And I'm calling your attention to this not only because it is history and very interesting and important history, but I'm using it rather because it seems to me to present us with a perfect picture of the Christian church addressing the world. The world is represented by Felix and Drusilla. And the church and her message are here to be found incarnate in this mighty man, the Apostle Paul.

Now then, here's our picture. What are the lessons? Well, there are some most interesting lessons here. The first one, I'm not going to stay with this, but I do mention it because it's so important.

The first lesson that I always find here is a lesson concerning the way in which the gospel is to be presented and at the same time the way in which it is to be listened to. Now this is most important. How is the gospel to be presented? You'll never find a more perfect answer to that question than the one which you have here.

Here you see the greatest preacher, the greatest evangelist the church has ever known. What did he do? Well, isn't it interesting to notice? He reasoned with them. Reasoned.

He didn't entertain them. He didn't sing to them. Not sure that he could sing, but he certainly didn't attempt it either.

No element of entertainment. He didn't tell them stories. Still more interesting, he didn't even talk about himself.

He reasoned with them. Why do I emphasize this? Well, for this good reason. People seem to think today, don't they, that Christianity is what they call sob stuff.

The majority of people in this country never enter a place of worship. They wouldn't even dream of doing so tomorrow. The masses are outside the church.

And they say that they're in that position because of their great intelligence. They think of us as some simple sentimental people who spend our time singing choruses and indulging in some riot of emotionalism. That's what they fondly think, but you know it's quite wrong.

The presentation of the gospel is reason. It's something that makes us think. My dear friends, the whole trouble in the world tonight is due to the fact that people don't know how to think.

And what we are going to do tonight is to think. Look at these people who would laugh at us as Christian people who wouldn't dream of coming to a meeting like this and who wouldn't dream of going to a place of worship tomorrow. What are they doing? How do they spend their time? Well, most of them would have a football match this afternoon.

I'm not against football, but I don't think that you can call that a good intellectual exercise, can you? And what else do they do? Bingo hall. Is that intelligence? Reading the news of the world on Sunday. Is this intelligence? Is this reason? My dear friends, it's the absence of reason.

No, no, Paul reasoned with them. And the business of the preaching of the gospel is not merely to try and get people somehow, anyhow, to take some kind of decision. It is to confront them with the truth and to call upon them to think, come, let us reason together, saith the Lord.

Very well. But then look for a moment at the way in which we are to listen to this gospel. You know, we need instruction on that, my friends.

It isn't only the preacher who needs instruction. The listener needs instruction. You've got to listen to this in the right way if you're really one to benefit from it.

And I feel that this is a very important point at this present time. You know, look at these two people, Felix and Drusilla. Here they are one afternoon, and they send for Paul.

And they say, well, now tell us something about this gospel. Why did they do this? We don't know. We're not told exactly.

But it's not difficult to imagine. I imagine that they did it because they were bored. You know, the sinful life, the godless life, becomes a very boring life.

That's why they're always having to invent new sins. That's why they're always moving from drink to drugs. The world and all it has to offer us can never satisfy us.

And the man of the world is a man who is bored. He doesn't know what to do with himself, nor with his time. So I imagine that there they were.

They may have had their lunch, and they said, well, now what on earth can we do this afternoon? And they couldn't think of anything. One of them suddenly had a brave, ah, said this one, let's send for this man Paul again, and let's put a few questions to him. You know, if you've got nothing better to do, you can always have an argument about religion, can't you? We've all done it many times, haven't we? And you know, we are very good at it.

Who was Cain's wife? What was that creature that swallowed Jonah? Very amusing. Very entertaining. Religion, as a matter of debate, you'll get it on the television and on the wireless tomorrow.

Exchange of views, dialogue, discussion, and so on. Pure entertainment. And most people approach these things in that way.

But my dear friend, that's not the way to listen to the gospel. If this gospel has never made you tremble, you've never really heard it. You can listen to it without hearing it.

And people can take an intellectual interest, or some general interest. But the real test of listening to the gospel is this, that it makes us tremble. Felix trembled.

And I'm going to tell you why he did tremble. But what I'm asserting at this point is this, I care not how many times you may have heard preaching, if the preaching of the gospel has never made you feel uncomfortable, you've never heard it. You've never really heard it.

If it hasn't made you troubled about your soul, your life, your death, and your eternal destiny, you rarely haven't heard it. When this gospel is truly presented and preached, it has this effect of causing people, either physically or metaphorically, to tremble. Tell me, my friend, has this gospel ever disturbed you? Has it ever made you ask yourself questions? Has it ever put you into difficulties about yourself? It's meant to do that.

It's to call people to repentance, to a thinking, to a changing of their minds, and to a reception of the truth. Well, those are preliminary lessons. But what is much more important is this, what is the message of the gospel? Now, here's a great question today, isn't it? What is the message of the gospel? What is the content of this preaching? And here, again, you've got the perfect answer.

What did Paul preach about? Isn't it interesting? Here he is, you see, a prisoner. Suddenly he has a marvelous opportunity of addressing the Roman government. How is he going to use it? Well, it's obvious.

What a wonderful opportunity to make a protest against the injustice of Palestine being conquered by Rome, so the still greater injustice of Rome putting these taxes on these people and imposing her way of

life upon them. What a handsome opportunity for a political or social or an economic protest. That's what many people think the Christian gospel is, don't they? I'm not surprised the people are outside the church today.

You see, they only think of Christianity in terms of what they read in the newspapers and what they hear on the television and the wireless, the great ecclesiastics and others, and this is what they find. They say Christianity is a form of protest against war. Christianity is nothing but a political and a social movement.

Christianity is that which is opposed to the war in Vietnam. It's opposed to apartheid in South Africa. It's opposed to capitalism and militarism.

This is Christianity. They say that seems to be it. That's what we're always reading about.

A perpetual protest against this, that, or the other. But you know, that's a travesty of Christianity. That's not Christianity.

Paul doesn't mention these things. He doesn't mention the injustice from which he was suffering. He doesn't make any attack on the Roman government nor on the governor.

None of these things. There is no protest here at all. What did he preach about? Now, here is the message of Christianity.

He reasoned with them about righteousness and temperance and judgment to come. What's this mean? Oh, that we might realize that this is the greatest need in this country and every other country tonight. I haven't come here, my dear friends, to tell the government what to do about the pound.

It would be impertinent for me to pretend to attempt to do so. I don't know enough. I'm not here to give advice to governments or to leaders, prime ministers or leaders of the opposition, or to express my personal views on apartheid and all these various other matters.

That's not the Christian message. The Christian message is a message about righteousness. What is this? Well, you know, this is the great word of the Bible.

From beginning to end. And it's the greatest need of this present hour. What is this righteousness about which Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla? It's very difficult to put it into words.

Let me try it like this. Righteousness, ultimately, is a characteristic or an attribute of God. God is righteous.

God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. God is holy. God is just.

God is true. Righteousness, in other words, is the extreme opposite of antithesis, of everything twisted and perverted, everything that skulks, as it were. It's upright, it's noble, it's clean, it's pure.

It is absolutely true. Righteousness. That's the character of God.

But the Bible goes on to tell us this. That when God made men, He also made men righteous. God made men in order that He might have a companion.

That's why He created men. That He might have a companion for Himself. And of course, if you have companionship, there must be a likeness.

And as God is righteous, He made men righteous. Man hasn't evolved through the animals from some primitive slime. That's the mere theory of certain scientists, without any proof whatsoever.

Man, according to the Bible, was created in the image and the likeness of God. A special creation. And God put something of Himself into men.

Man was pure, He was clean. He made him upright, even in a physical sense. But still more so in a spiritual and a moral sense.

He had a character corresponding to the character of God Himself. No sin, no evil, no wrong, nothing twisted, nothing perverted, nothing shady, nothing in any way wrong. That's righteousness.

But fortunately for us, we can define it a little bit more closely. God, in His infinite condescension, has taken the trouble to define righteousness for us. If you want to know what righteousness means, you'll see it, for instance, in the Ten Commandments.

That's a detailed definition of righteousness. That is how man is meant to live, according to the Ten Commandments. Our relationship to God, we must worship Him and no other gods, we must not make craven images, we must not bow down to them, we must honor God's day and all these things, and then you remember the second table, the more practical ones.

This is the definition of righteousness. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery. These are aspects, you see, of righteousness.

And that's the thing that Paul reasoned about with these people living in adultery. A preacher should always preach to his congregation, not to some people who are not in the congregation. So, you see, we don't preach about South Africa, we preach to those living in Great Britain.

Not a constant attack on people living thousands of miles away. Righteousness, here it is. Ten Commandments, you mustn't corrupt, and all these things.

You get it still more perfectly, perhaps, in the Sermon on the Mount, preached by our Lord Himself. Well now then, this is the thing about which Paul reasoned, that man was meant to live that righteous kind of life. This is what God has made him for, this is what God is going to demand of him.

Our Lord summed it up perfectly one afternoon. If you want to know what righteousness is, here it is. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind, and all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

That's righteousness. But then I'm told that he went on to reason about temperance also. What does this mean? Well, unfortunately, there's been a slight change in the meaning of the word temperance.

And when you hear the word temperance, you think instinctively of complete abstinence from alcoholic drinks. Well, all right, you can include that if you like, but temperance is a much bigger word than that. It really means discipline, self-control, continence.

So Paul not only reasoned about righteousness, but about temperance, discipline and self-control. Well, you say, why did he do this? Isn't it enough just to tell people about righteousness? Why does he talk about temperance? Well, the explanation is simple. The relationship between righteousness and temperance can be put like this.

Righteousness states the thing in general as a principle. Temperance is concerned about the practical application in daily life of this great principle of righteousness. And I want to show you what a great teacher Paul was.

Why he didn't merely leave it at righteousness, but also came down to the particulars, namely temperance and daily living. This is most important. Let me show you why.

There are many people in the world, you know, who can get very eloquent on the question of righteousness, but don't know so much about temperance. I remember hearing what was in many ways the most eloquent speech or oration that I've ever heard in my life by a statesman. It was during the First World War.

And his theme on this occasion was what he called the sanctity of international contracts. You see, his theme was this. Germany had marched into Belgium in 1914.

She'd got a treaty with Belgium promising not to do this. She'd torn it up, scrap of paper. And he was telling us about the sanctity of international contracts.

And it was most eloquent, most moving. He was moved to the depth of his being by a sense of righteous indignation. Sanctity of international contracts.

But by now, the biographies have been written and a number of autobiographies and reminiscences. And we now know perfectly well that while this man was waxing so eloquent on the sanctity of international contracts, he was not being true and loyal to his own marriage contract. He was guilty of adultery at that very time.

You see, it's one thing to get eloquent about international contracts. That's righteousness. But temperance includes the application of that great principle to yourself and your daily life and living.

Well, let me give you another illustration. Many of you remember the 30s of this century. Do you remember when Hitler marched into Austria and raped Austria and annexed Austria to Germany? Men held up their hands in horror at this terrible thing that this man was doing.

Germany marching into Austria and taking over Austria. A terrible thing to do. But you know, when their friends did exactly the same thing in principle, when a friend of theirs would enter into another man's married life and home and steal the affections and even the life of another man's wife...

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