



Sermon Notes, 1 November 2020

Term Autumn 2020

Series Acts: manual for a scattered church

Gatherings 11.00 & 6.00

Title Acts 24:22-27, the 3 tenses of God's salvation plan for you

Preacher Paul Langham

Reading – Acts 24:22-27 (but looking over Acts 24-26)

Key verse: ... *Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come ...* Acts 24:25

Righteousness

Simply, having right standing before God, or God's approval

Not something we can earn by our own 'works', but the pure gift of God because of the work of Jesus on the Cross

Read Romans 3:19-31 (my translation copied below) as affirmation that our salvation does not depend to any extent on anything we can or should do, have or haven't done ... but entirely on what Jesus has done.

Judgement

Something all human beings will face.

For Christians, there is the guarantee of eternal life, heaven's doors wide open, again because of the saving death of Jesus.

But the way we have lived, what we have done with whatever we have been given, that will be 'tested.'

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 as an encouragement to make the most of the life we've been given, with all its talents, gifts and grace.

Self-Control

How quickly, when we read that, we can find ourselves back in that exhausting, futile place of trying our best, then trying harder, working as best we can to achieve this elusive thing called self-control.

But discipleship is never something we have to do alone, but always in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

That's why self-control is listed among the fruit of the Spirit.

As with everything to do with becoming more like Jesus, it's not a matter of external conformity or effort, but all to do with allowing the Holy Spirit to grow his character within us, so that we change from the inside out. Read Galatians 5:16-25 (my translation copied below)

Questions

Paul shared his testimony (chaps 22 & 26). Christian testimony is telling others how God's supernatural reality has intervened in our natural reality. What's yours? When did you last share it? As with anything, it gets easier the more we do it.

Are you confident in your right-standing with God because of the 'once for all' work of Jesus on the Cross?

Are you in any way fearful that, at the final Judgement, you might be denied entry to the new creation?

Are you exhausted by futile attempts to achieve self-control in your own strength?

Pray with someone about your answers to these questions.

Romans 3: 19-31 (taken from Who? © Paul Langham / Bible Society)

19 In revealing his law God has made it clear that we all fall short of his standards. No one will ever be able to claim that God is unfair. 20 Observing the law is not the way to be put right with God. Rather, it drives home the unpalatable truth of our failure to live the way he designed us to live.

21 Well, that's the bad news – for the whole human family, regardless of how 'good' a life you think you lead. But the good news is that God has taken the initiative to rescue us from all this and restore our good standing with him. It's not about keeping the law or reading the prophets, although they both point you in the right direction. It cannot be achieved through human activity. 22 It's God's initiative, and it's as simple as this: you can be put right with God if you place your faith and trust in King Jesus. Everyone starts from the same place, 23 because when it comes to God's standards we've all missed the mark. 24 But that also means that everyone can take advantage of this extraordinary free gift, which has been paid for by Jesus. 25 And what a cost it was. Jesus died in our place so that everything we've ever done wrong could be forgiven. There was no other way the slate could be wiped clean. God couldn't simply overlook all the wrong committed by human beings. If he turned a blind eye to it, how could there ever be justice? No, the price had to be paid; but rather than exacting it from us, God paid it in full himself. 26 So justice has been done, leaving God free to declare that everyone who trusts in Jesus is in good standing with him.

27 Do you see why there's no room for bragging in any of this? It's out of the question, 28 because we don't achieve good standing with God by our own efforts, such as keeping the law, but only by trusting in Jesus Christ. 29-30 So the invitation is open to everyone, because God is King of the whole world. Jews and Gentiles alike are welcomed in on the basis of their trust in Jesus. 31 This doesn't negate the law, because God's free and gracious gift of life is the very thing the law was pointing to all along.

Galatians 5:16-25 taken from Who? © Paul Langham / Bible Society)

16 If you want to kick your old, selfish habits, invite the Holy Spirit into the driving seat. 17 The 'old you' will constantly try to grab the wheel and regain control, which is why Christians often feel there's a war going on inside them. 18 But if you let the Holy Spirit drive, you'll have nothing to worry about. 19-21 The difference between a life driven by the Holy Spirit and one driven by the self is stark. Left to our own devices, we use and abuse ourselves and other people. Our tendency to destructiveness often spirals out of control, damaging our relationship with God and each other. All human immorality is a rejection of God. We usurp his throne, declare ourselves king and find ourselves in a constant battle with our fellow human beings, fuelled by hatred, jealousy and rage.

22 Life driven by the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is like a field planted with good seed, producing wonderful fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Read them again, slowly, savouring each one, imagining them taking root in you. If these things become part of your DNA, the law has nothing left to teach you. 24 If you belong to Jesus you've nailed your old lives and all their selfish cravings to his cross. 25 God's Spirit is in charge now, so let's keep in step with him day by day.