

# KINGS NORTON BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022 10 am

Bible characters

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Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture

Hymn MP 109 Crown him with many crowns

Scripture Psalm 145 (page 631)

Prayer

Children's talk wordless book

Chorus MP 454 Majesty

Notices CWG, SFOI

Prayer time

Reading Luke 16:19-31 (page 1050)

Acts 26:1-23, 24-32 (page 1123)



Hymn MP 663 the price is paid

Sermon Festus and Agrippa.

Hymn MP 730 we have heard a joyful sound Jesus saves

Closing Prayer:

Close

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1. Let earth and heaven combine,  
Angels and men agree,  
To praise in songs Divine  
The' incarnate Deity,  
Our God contracted to a span,  
Incomprehensibly made man.

## Prayer & Exordium

■ Who said: "Et tu Brutus"? W. Shakespeare. The last words of Julius Caesar as he saw his friend Brutus among his assassins.

■ Do you remember Barak Obama's "Together we can"

■ A friend at work often says: "that's good".

■ Maybe you have yours? The phrase that sums you up?

For my mother "These things happen" x2 summed up her fatalism.

A single word will often immortalise a man, or a woman. "Am I my brother's keeper?" was all that Cain said. And "What will you give me?" was all that Judas said. One word will sometimes, unintentionally, sum up a person's whole life. Like a Freudian slip a man will reveal to us his deepest heart. With one word he will seal down on himself his everlasting destiny, - with just one spoken word.

Did not Jesus say: **For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.**" Mat 12:37

✚ What will it be for you? What will be carved – and remembered in perpetuity - on your gravestone?

As Paul spoke v24 **Festus interrupted** his defence in a loud voice "**You are out of your mind, Paul!**" he shouted. "**Your great learning is driving you insane.**" "**You are out of your mind**, how often have I heard people shout the modern version of that in the street.

Festus is saying Paul is 'Mad'. - With these words Festus is known to us, this is enough: Festus that Roman procurator who shouted that Paul was **insane**. **Mad** is the word, **mad**. That one word sets Festus sufficiently before us. We can say we know the man.

I could stop there, but to fit the scene, we also have to include King Agrippa. so it is - two for one - this morning! As you listen ask yourself: "am I like Festus? Or am I like Agrippa?"

## What is going on?

Paul has been arrested by the Romans, - or should I say protected by the Romans - from the accusations of those hostile Jewish religious leaders, of whom Paul was once one.

The seat of Roman authority in the occupied Jewish territory was the Mediterranean coastal town of Caesarea. A garrison town. Here Felix kept innocent Paul under guard only bringing him out to hear him speak.

Festus, Felix' successor wants to send Paul to Jerusalem for trial. But Paul knows that to go there means to be killed. So he uses his right as a Roman citizen to be tried by Caesar. Festus in sending Paul to Rome is at odds as to what the charge should be. As it happens the Jewish King Agrippa is in town so he uses the opportunity to have an audience with him and seek his view.

So we pick up the story as Paul is brought to explain himself before them both and this austere gathering. They are looking to see what crime he has committed, a charge to send him on to Rome with.

**Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defence:"** Acts 26:1

There he is hand raised with the chains hanging down. **"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews,**

Paul speaks as a Jew, to a Jew. He recounts his life from the days when he was a zealous Pharisee. He lays out how the Lord met with him on the Damascus Road, how he was humbled and changed. Once hostile to the Lord, he has now come to love Him. he gave his story, his testimony.

Paul says with the Psalmist: **Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.** 66:16.

✚ Every believer should be able to tell his story. Can you? What has the Lord done for you? To you? In you?

Paul is very clear 19 **"King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, that's us here - I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.**

The gospel of Christ is a Gospel of repentance. Then as now this is a word people don't like to hear. Me, change, never!

21 **That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.**

But the Lord stands with those who stand for him. 22 **But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike.**

In other words, check this out, this is what is found in all the Bible.

**I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."**

✚ Paul is preaching the gospel – he's turned the dock - into a pulpit.

24 **At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted.**

*you are beside yourself*, like one with a heated brain, you're talking nonsense **"Your great learning is driving you insane."**

Had Paul by now become more animated and urgent in his preaching?

✚ **Spurgeon said he fired out the scriptures and when that was spent he loaded himself into the canon and fired himself.**

"You're mad" says Festus, you're crazed, you should be in Broadmoor. He is not bad like a criminal, but mad, a lunatic, someone to be pitied. Pitied – and certainly not listened to. No Festus will not heed his words.

What makes a person like that?

Many have come past us and shouted. "Your crazy" or worse, or "Allah Akbar" And what do they have in common? They are unthinking, x2.

They are sensible ones, they are the sane ones – everyone else is insane. They are right – any other view must be wrong.

- The two girls in the city centre, who could not entertain a view other than their own. A view contrary to theirs - is no view.
- The fact that their statements were easily shown to be false is overlooked! Any counter statement is seen as an act of aggression!

With these six-formers we had a discussion of sorts. But Festus shouted, the purpose? To stop Paul in his tracks, to break off his preaching.

- Felix his predecessor said "no more, that's enough for now"

✚ Festus is saying "stop, no more – ever, ever!"

Festus is not so much angry, but in scorn, in contempt. He did not understand Paul and his words, it was above his capacity, it was all a riddle to him, and therefore he thinks Paul a hot head!

The prophets of the OT were shouted down as madmen. Elisha's man 2K 9:11 **"The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man - a maniac."** Hosea 9:7

When John Baptist came they said he was demon possessed.

As of Paul - so too of his Master. It was Jesus' family and friends who went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, **He is beside Himself."** And many of the Jews, as soon as they had heard His sermon on the Good

Shepherd, of all His sermons, had nothing else to say about the Preacher but this, **He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear Him?**

Yes the difference between preacher and hearer is so great that either He was mad, or those who insulted Him were. Jesus loved nothing that they loved. He hated nothing that they hated. He feared nothing that they feared.

Of the things people love: status, wealth, comfort Christ emptied Himself, and made Himself of no reputation.

Did not Jesus say: **What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.** Luke 16:15

As Jesus was ridiculed and rejected – so too those who follow Him - Meekness under insults and injuries, patience amid persecutions, a poverty of spirit, a humbleness of mind, a readiness to serve others rather than take the high place — such are the things that the world detests - but they are seen, praised and rewarded by the Master.

The world despises them – but they are the lot of those on the narrow way to heaven. The things of the world Jesus Christ cared nothing at all for. Paul said – and so should every true follower say: **I am alive to Christ but dead to the world.**

✚ Festus was as far from God as you could get.

What kind of person shouts out against the things of which he is ignorant? Shouts down those things he does not know? He is like the brute beast.

Jude says of people like this: “**these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.**” Jude 1:10

✚ Such is Festus.

Is there a Festus in the room? You don't shout out with your mouth, that is indecorous in a church – but you do in your heart. It is a closed heart, there is a wall around it, Christ the Lord - is kept out.

#### Hindering others

Festus has closed his ears, that's bad enough – but he is trying to close the ears of others, - to stop others from hearing. That is very serious.

- There a collection of clips of people being interviewed and when the person starts to speak of Jesus - the Media cut the transmission

It is an evil thing to stop others hearing. Many times, I have seen a husband or wife steps in try to stop me speaking in the street or at their door.

- Talking to a teenage boy – and when I came to speak of Jesus one could hear from the Ringer doorbell: “close the door”, x2

Woe to parents who hinder their children from coming to church/SS or from hearing the word of God, learning about the Lord and the way of salvation.

It is a sin to push others away from God. Jesus warns “**It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied round his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.**” Luke 17:2

#### *But King Agrippa did listen x2*

Paul from the start is addressing King Agrippa. Why? partly because that is why he is there they want to find a charge against him to send him to Rome.

But Paul addresses Agrippa a Jewish King who knows the Scriptures.

He was the grandson of Herod the Great, whose kingdom became divided. Agrippa was a king, but he was a king only in name. The Jews, as they themselves once said, had no king but Caesar. Caesar sometimes set up sham kings over certain portions of his great empire. Agrippa was one of those puppet sovereigns. Bernice, who here sits beside Agrippa, was his sister.

There has been a long line of Jewish kings since Saul and David and Solomon, but this is the last of them now. The Jews are not to have even a shadow of a king anymore. They are to have Caesar only, till they cease to be. What a scene! Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and the whole place full of Roman soldiers and civilians, with Paul standing in his chains.

✚ Jesus said we will be arrested and stand before kings to witness to them.

They heard the wonderful story of Paul's conversion, A man who once persecuted the followers of Jesus - now championed his Name and honour.

✚ This miracle is the miracle of today – a heart changed from hate to love.

How deeply this impressed King Agrippa in Caesarea that day.

Festus tried to kill its power by shouting out that Paul was mad. But for Agrippa, it was different – He knew all these things far better than Festus knew them. Paul knew that and said: <sup>26</sup> “**The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.** <sup>27</sup> **King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? – pause - I know you do.”**

Agrippa believed Paul's every word. He felt the clear and powerful testimony of Paul's conversion - and was *at that moment* x2 on the verge of being converted himself." 28 **"Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"** confessed King Agrippa. I believe that is a sincere statement – and the saddest one.

The preaching of Christ tests the heart, it examines - and it judges.

✚ Who is really on trial here? It is not the preacher but the hearer who is in the dock – “what will you do with those words?”

Jesus said **There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.** Joh 12:48

*For Agrippa it is "Almost"*

Agrippa were so near - and maybe also many others in the court at that moment - so near x2. But not to see it through while they could, make that moment one of the most tragic moments in all the world.

Yes a tragic moment too if you are like Agrippa this morning. You know the scriptures, you know what the Bible says about saving faith in Christ – you know his death on the cross as the only, the only way to avoid judgment, you know it and yet you never make it your own. This morning you will walk out of here – as you walked in. Your state before God has not changed. The curse of sin remains, you have not found the blessings of forgiveness and the hope of heaven. What a sorry place to be. And all because of that one word “almost”

"Almost," is surely the most tragic word that is ever heard uttered on earth or in hell. And yet, both earth and hell are full of it. Almost! Almost! Almost! An athlete runs for the prize, and he almost touches the winning-post. A marksman shoots at the target, and he almost hits it. A runner leaps for his life over a roaring flood, and he almost clears the chasm. A ship is almost within the harbour, when the fatal storm suddenly strikes her till she goes down. The five foolish virgins were almost in time. And Agrippa and Bernice were almost saved, and thus their names ‘almost’ entered into the book of life.

And so it is today with some of you. You are here because you want to find something – you could do - you almost do, - but you don't.

- Like that those backpackers in the Australian outback who died of thirst in the heat. Where they died was just a few yards from water, they almost found it – but they didn't. They died.

Almost, almost. If you go down to where Agrippa and Bernice now are and ask what they would do if they were in your place this morning. They would shout out to you to make sure you do not end up where they now are. Now you can move across from death to life – where they are it is too late - a great gulf is fixed, - and no man can cross over.

Let me tell you with all plainness, and earnestness, and love, what I think you ought to do today if you are like Festus or Agrippa. Do not sleep; do not so much as go home, go upstairs, find a quiet place and stay there until you know your name is written in the book of life.

✚ Make sure x2

*Being a fool for Christ*

If you have crossed over then like Paul we are to do everything we can to warn others - and if that means being a fool for Christ, then so be it.

If the preaching of Christ is to the world foolishness, then it is no wonder that the disciples of Christ are to the world, fools. For, according to the Gospel, a man must die in order to live; he must be empty, who would be full; he must be lost, who would be found; he must have nothing, who would have all things; he must be blind, who would see; he must be condemned, who would be redeemed.

25 **"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable.**

- In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the universal London press, led by *Punch* and the *Saturday Review* week after week, mocked, trampled on, cried madman at, and tried to silence, young Spurgeon, very much as Festus tried to trample on and silence Paul. But *Punch* lived to lay a fine tribute on Spurgeon's grave.

It was true of Paul, and it was true of Spurgeon, and it will be true, in its measure, of every like-minded Christian man or woman.

He is no true Christian," says Mead, " who is not the world's fool." And, yet, no! I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak saving words of truth.

Let us do likewise.

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