

HG notesWorship: Psalm 97Welcome & Word

1. What's the most boring bit in the bible that you really struggle with (no one is allowed to have the same answer!)
2. How do you deal with dull bits?
3. Read Acts 25.1-22
4. What points would you preach off this! (I'd be up for hearing the answers to this!)
5. What were my three points and why?
6. I'm reading into it, but why might Paul feel forgotten?
7. Would you have played the trump card to Appeal to Caesar or would you have Gone with the flow?
8. Why is the Resurrection such a key point to Paul? Why is did it limit the threat of death / execution to those early martyrs?

Works:

Prayer. I know its always praying, and that's okay but I'm conscious of me going away and more falling on people's shoulders, look around you and see what you can do to lighten people's loads. Offer to clean the church, wire up / pack up the music kit, visit people.

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I need to apologise to you today. I sat down at the beginning of the week to read this Sunday's Readings and was disappointed to find it to be **really boring**. Its an astonishingly dull bit of bible.

The story is clear and simple but there's **no miracles**, there are no vision, **Jesus doesn't** appear anywhere, there are no angels, **no teaching, its just history** and a really boring bit.

I asked God if He would mind if I changed the reading to something a bit more exciting and He said – What are you, a **chicken**?! Go on, have a go!

It's normal for me to have 3 points in my sermon. My first point is Have **Faith in your Bible**. It might be a bit boring in parts but have faith and it will **encourage** you and help you and guide you.

This means that sometimes you have to wade through some boring bits because what you find boring right now, you might find helpful on another occasion when you've lived a bit more life.

Have faith in your bible. The author of this Acts of the Apostles is St **Luke**. Luke has gone to **great lengths** to know what happened **where and when and by whom** so that we have all sorts of astonishing bits of detail. If you like History and Archaeology then maybe you will like Acts.

What we have in our hand is a real effort to produce something that is **historically reliable and trustworthy**.

There's a part of us that likes to look at the bible and stand **slightly aloof** to it. We live in the modern age, we know about things, we have wifi and credit cards and we can solve mystery murders in 40 minutes on TV. So we like to stand in judgement over the Bible and say Yes or No

to the bits we like or don't like. We say Oh I can't believe that and to other bits we say Oh that's **barbaric, we're not like** that in this day and age.

Unfortunately **Mark Twain** got it right when he said The problem with the bible **isn't the bits I don't understand**, it's the bits that I do.

So by all means, if it helps you, **pretend to yourself** that you are cleverer, on a higher moral plain, more **sophisticated** than the bible in which case you really won't learn much at all.

OR start to see how there's **enough here** for you to be getting on with **about love and being forgiven and forgiving others**.

In order to do that you're going to have to **read the bible, a little and often**, you're going to have to read it with an open mind and say to Jesus – Okay, what are you trying to say to me through this bit?

The first thing that God says through this passage is **Have Faith in the Bible**, the next thing is **Have faith in God**.

Paul should not be here. He has had the most amazing **career**, God has converted him and then taken him off on not one but three whirlwind tours of the known world where he has seen people **healed**, demons cast out of people, one man was brought back to **life**.

Paul has preached his socks off and he has **reasoned** with people from all sorts of backgrounds and **cultures** and races so that wherever he has been Paul has built up a **church** community. It has been hugely exciting.

Its had its downside – He's made a **few enemies** along the way. He's been **beaten up** several times and flogged but there's no denying that it has been very exciting.

So he returns to Jerusalem all triumphant and everything, when, some **troublemakers** see him and cause a **riot** and then Paul's in prison.

And at first its **fun** because he's trying to make some **in-roads** into the core of the Jewish Religious Authorities. But then it all goes quiet. The man in charge, Felix keeps Paul in prison and then leaves and now along comes **Porcius Festus** and nothing much has happened these last **2 years**.

Porcius Festus – its such a great name, is sounds like he's just walked off the page of an **Asterix** book.

It must feel to Paul that **God is just abandoning** him. His life is on hold, it's going no where. Paul is **trapped**, he can't get out. He can't resign, he can't get promoted. He's in prison!

In charge of him is Porcius Festus who is **busy trying to please** the Jews so Paul can expect **limited justice** if he just goes with the flow.

The **next door ruler** has come over, he calls himself **King** but he is only a king because Rome says he can call himself that, so he's really a **false puppet** of a ruler.

On the plus side this King **Agrippa knows something of Judaism and Messiahs**, whereas Festus is just **embarrassingly ignorant** of what this is all about.

On the downside King **Agrippa is the great grandson** of Herod the Great.

This woman **Bernice**, I've always presumed to be the queen, Agrippa's **wife** but no she is his sister.

That being said they were constantly surrounded by a cloud of **incestuous accusations**. To stop this **Bernice will be** married off to her uncle and then married again to the king of Cilicia and then she'll have a fling with a future emperor **Titus** and that might be the nearest she comes to being loved by someone but for **political reasons** he will have to put her away.

Its hugely sad, she is **this close to having a meaningful** relationship with the God who loves her unconditionally and she's going to walk away from it. But all that lies in the future for her at this point.

So Lesson 1 was **have faith in the Bible**. Luke has gone to a lot of effort to get us what really happened. It might sometimes be weird and boring to you but it's true. Have faith in the bible.

The next lesson was **have faith in God**. God doesn't waste time, you might have a **sycophantic idiot for a boss**, you might feel imprisoned where you are at but **you are not forgotten by God**. Hold on. Have faith in God.

That doesn't make it easy. Festus invites Paul to **go to Jerusalem for trial** there. Festus really must be blind and stupid or he's quite happy to see Paul dead.

Paul is now made to **look like an intolerant religious bigot** because he refuses to do it

and he plays the last trump card he has: I appeal to Caesar.

It's a gamble, **out of the frying pan and into the fire**. The year is sort of **AD 60**, **Nero** is Caesar at this stage and at the moment everything looks okay but we know that sometime after 64AD that Nero loses his **marbles** and then does things like dip Christians in tar and set light to them so as to lighten up his garden at night.

Paul is **not putting his faith in Caesar**, Paul is refusing to take his fate lying down. He is going to take his case to the highest court in the land and this will for Paul **fulfil for him something he has known for a while**, deep down at least, that Paul isn't going to die here and now, he's going to **die**, but not yet and not until he has **travelled to Rome**.

Have **faith in the Bible**, read it a little and often, it will help.
Have **faith in God**, He has not forgotten you.

My last point is have **faith in the Resurrection**.

This is the marvellously stunning ignorance of the new governor Porcius Festus – he's explaining the problem to Agrippa and says – I expected them to come up with some **proper charges** like causing a riot, terrorism, rebellion against Rome, that sort of thing but instead Paul's accusers just came out with a load of **dribble about religious** differences and something about a **dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive**.

And that's it. Festus doesn't realise he's **just tripped over the most important fact in the world**. It is on this truth that all sorts of Christians were being **tortured** to death and refusing to say anything other than **Jesus was dead and is now alive**.

Maybe if Paul could have a **one to one moment** with Festus, maybe Paul could have said to him something about how Jesus' teachings were great and his miracles were miraculous but more than that how **Jesus' death has brought** us an inner **peace** with our **Creator**, a personal **relationship** with the God who sustains you though each and every breath.

Maybe if Paul had had a chance he might have been able to say something about the **resurrection**, the empty tomb, the **burial** clothes all in a **cocoon** like bundle as if Jesus has passed through them, the **facial** cloth is neatly folded to one side.

The body **hasn't been stolen** by women or Jews or Romans. He hasn't **revived** after being flogged **39** times by a cat o nine tails and then **nailed** through his wrists and ankle and hung for hours before a spear pierces his side. Jesus has died and has been buried and has **come through death**.

You might begin to realise why the **threat of death** for these early Christians **wasn't such a big deal** when their own messiah had been there and come back.

Jesus' big advice to them before he died was **Don't be afraid**, trust me, I go, I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me. Don't be afraid, trust me.

But **Festus doesn't** hear any of that. Maybe he will next week – because Festus has **said enough to Agrippa** so that Agrippa knows that Paul is special and worth listening to.

Odd isn't it that Festus is completely missing the plot but even as he tells the story 2nd hand, **Agrippa is sharp enough** to realise that something special is going on here.

Have **faith in your Bible** – it is a reliable source of wisdom and help, it contains what you need to live this difficult life.

Have **Faith in God** - you may have had an awful week, you may feel trapped either by idiots or persecutors and struggling to keep your faith in humanity. Hold on and have faith in God. He has not forgotten you.

Have **Faith in the Resurrection** – it is the proof that there is more to life than what we see and do in the here and now. It is the proof that we need not be afraid, for Jesus has been there and He is with us from now even to eternity. Amen.