

Reading: Acts 24:24-28

Theme: The Most Dangerous Place to Be!

Where is the most dangerous place to be this morning? I suppose we have to ask "*Dangerous for what?*" Where is the most deaths through driving accidents? Last year's figures show it is Zimbabwe with 61.90 people per 100K – the UK had 2.42/100K. What about the place for murders? Top of the list for Tijuana as the most dangerous city in the world with 138 murders/100K people; while UK had 11.7/million. Or camping out on an active volcano; or a camping trip up in the hills that border Pakistan and Afghanistan; what about being in a small boat in a tropical storm or typhoon; having to undergo major surgery somewhere out in the wilds? Each of those situations has a danger of its own, as each situation it would threaten life.

None of these places and situations are the most dangerous place to be - for that place is found throughout the world in many places and in situations we would not consider as dangerous at all. The most dangerous place to be is where the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached! There are no bombs, guns or weapons being used, but it is the preaching of God's word that makes those places dangerous – even dangerous here this morning! Hearing about Jesus makes it a most dangerous place - not dangerous to life, but to something far more precious - our eternal souls and its eternal destiny.

We may have picked this up in the short reading in v25. Paul had reasoned with Felix, who was "*afraid*" (NIV) or "*trembled*" (AV); the Amplified Version translates it as "*Felix became alarmed and terrified*". This is quite an amazing situation - Paul was a Jewish prisoner, whose occupation was a missionary for this new Jewish sect – Christianity. He was an insignificant

person, was even mocked by some who had benefited from his ministry, a man not eloquent in the debating style of the day; nor was he of an impressive build or stature. Yes, he was an intellectual giant, but he was nothing much to look at or to listen to. Felix, on the other hand, was the governor of Judea for Rome. Felix had the power of life and death; he was the authority in the area, with his Roman troops, garrisons etc. All respected him - at least outwardly! Yet Felix is trembling, afraid, alarmed and terrified before one of his own prisoners, not because Paul had a sword, or by the curses Paul uttered, but for what Paul had just said in a sermon!

What did Paul say to cause the hard-nosed governor, politician and Roman ruler to tremble, be afraid, alarmed and terrified? Paul had reasoned, discoursed or preached about certain things and what he said affected Felix in this way. Paul reasoned and spoke about:

### **1. Faith.** (v24)

Paul spoke about faith in Christ Jesus - what it meant to be a Christian. Paul may have spoken of how he became a Christian –read of that in Acts 9. Perhaps Felix's wife wanted to know about Christianity as she was a Jewess and no doubt had heard of Saul of Tarsus and how he had sought to destroy Christians and then he'd become one himself!

Perhaps you've been in contact with someone who is or just become a Christian; hopefully you have noticed a gradual or even a dramatic change in their lives - they are different – in a good way! Maybe you want to know why, how and what happened. Or you are thinking about God and Jesus - to know if these things are true and relevant for your life, especially in

this pandemic time, in the confusion of your life. You may have asked people who are Christians about these things and heard it is something to do with Jesus, conversion and church, but you're a bit confused, hazy, or uncertain about these things. You may have gone to church for a while and begun to understand things, even got to know the people, but feel you are not like them.

Like Felix you need to know of faith in Christ Jesus. You need to realise who He is; what He has done and what it involves to have faith in Christ - not by an intellectual belief alone, or by some emotional high or experience, but by an opening of the heart, your innermost being by God - e.g. Blondin story

Paul would have told him who Jesus said and showed He was – God united to a real body - His miraculous conception, birth, His life, miracles, power over death, demons, sickness and nature. He would have spoken of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension - would have dwelt upon these events. Paul would have presented the real living Saviour to Felix and Drusilla - as this church does week in, week out. When confronted by such a faith in such a historical person as the Lord Jesus, Felix trembled. Paul also reasoned of:

## **2. Righteousness.**

The pagan religions of Paul's day had little idea of right or wrong. Paul reasoned of righteousness - that which is right, but not right to his perspective and culture only, but of that which was right to God and was shown to be right from God. Paul told Felix of God's standard of righteousness as God Himself had revealed it in the Bible e.g. the 10 Commandments and their high standards, yet also of Christ and how Jesus showed it was

to be applied to our thoughts, hearts and motives as well as to what we say and do.

This is the standard God expects even today - perfection as God Himself is perfect. Have we ever realised and recognised God is holy and pure, as the One who cannot tolerate even the nicest little lapse from His perfection, even the least going away from or breaking of His law? This is the righteousness Paul would have spoken of – a revealed perfection in Jesus and God’s law which shows and exposes, how short we all come of God standards and how weak we are, as Paul went on to speak of:

### **3. Self-control** (Temperance AV)

Paul could have pointed Felix to the fact the Romans and Greeks with all their learning and power were unable to control their own desires - their lusts and cravings had the better of them in so many areas of their society and lives. Things haven't much changed since then; as it is the same in society now, people find more and more they are unable to control their desires - this comes out in many ways in society as people have many fears, anxieties; sex and lust seem to dominate many; many people struggle for power, for possessions, even struggle to maintain or regain their youth. For so many, self-control is not an ‘in’ or acceptable idea. If people want to do something, they just do it! We are the Nike generation! Don't hold back - for it causes harmful repression if suppressed and people do what they want to do...

Yet in the light of God's word, it is reasonable that if this absolutely pure and holy Being knows a thing to be wrong and we do it, then we do so to our own harm - so we are to fight the desire, urge to do it. The trouble is, since we descend from

Adam and Eve, who chose freely to do what God said not to do, we all have this inclination to go away from the right and to do the evil and it shows itself in a greater or lesser way in our lives as our wills are biased, prone to sin, are magnetically attracted and biased to do the wrong.

Perhaps as Felix listen to Paul, he would have been in agreement with so much of what Paul said. Felix had to know how people ticked, how to size up people, know their weaknesses to maintain his governorship and power. Perhaps Felix thought of people he knew, their areas of weakness, their lack of self-control in many areas. Yet Paul goes further and he speaks of:

#### **4. Judgement to Come.**

As Paul told Felix about all these things, he applied it as he pointed him to the day of accountability, when God would judge the world by the Lord Jesus according to His holy character standards. Have we considered this? We may feel it is great to hear about God and to sing these great hymns and songs, but has it dawned on us that one day God is going to call **us** to account for every wrong word, thought and deed we have ever done? The Bible tells us it will be on the day of resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (v15), when each of us will stand before this holy God, who even the angels, cannot look at - as His holiness, purity and majesty are too great and we will have to explain our life to Him. How do we think we will feel on that day? The Bible (Revelation 6:15-17) tells us we will want to be hidden from Him! It is going to be an awesome and terrifying day for those who are going to face God's wrath. Are we prepared to meet God on that day?

We may think: "*Oh, but God is a God of love, He will not have any judgement day*" - that is a naive and foolish sentiment; it comes from the lips of the devil himself to fool people into plunging headlong into hell. Don't we get angry when we read of attacks on old people or children, or of violence and crime that occurs? Don't we want justice to be done? Why then do we credit God with less feeling than us - that we can wrong, openly or secretly, do as we please against Him and His holy nature, but then we feel He will not mind at all! When we do wrong, we do so in the very presence of this awesome God who is everywhere at all times, in the fullness of His being.

There is a judgement to come and we are not to think we can stand safely there in our own goodness and self-achievements - for all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags compared to God's absolute perfection. We will not stand before God, but we will be condemned for ever to hell which is a real place, where God actively punishes the sin and sinner. As awful as we think hell is like, it will actually be far worse than we could ever imagine.

What things Felix heard! These things caused Felix to tremble, be afraid. Have they had any effect on you? Are you concerned for your eternal standing before God? You have to answer to God alone and not men.

Why then is it the most dangerous place to be where the gospel is preached? What you have heard may have confused or annoyed you, may have alarmed you, may have upset you. Understand that the reason why this place is a most dangerous place is because you could be like Felix. Felix, as a result of Paul's preaching, was afraid and yet he put off, delayed, postponed trusting and believing in the Lord Jesus until another

more convenient time (v25). Yes, he sent for Paul again at other times, but it is never recorded he was affected by God's word, or that he ever believed. It may be that you, this morning, may choose to ignore the claims of God on your life. You can put it off until a more convenient, better time and place; you can think it through again and that is good and right, but be warned you may not have a further time or opportunity as many things may distract you and you may never be bothered about trusting Christ as your own Saviour again. If that's the case then you will perish eternally and you would do so without any excuse. That's why it is so dangerous to hear the gospel, because any excuse you may have had, has now gone - you have been told of the gospel and the need for faith in Christ, you've been told of the judgement to come and that it is a most dangerous thing to delay coming to trust in Christ.

God wants you, invites, commands you to do so - Isaiah 55:6 & 7 *"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."*

Hebrews 2:3 says *"how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?"*

If you are not sure about being a Christian, or want to talk it through because you know you are not, whether you're younger or older, then come and talk with me, someone else you know here. We can't save you, but we can point you to the Lord Jesus Christ who is able to save completely to the uttermost all who go to Him and your life can be changed. If you're not a Christian then you have been in the most dangerous place, you have been

told of the gospel of eternal life and yet you may neglect it and perish eternally. I pray it will not be so.

Yet it can be the most glorious place too; the place and the time you came to trust the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour and receive the free gift eternal life. Those of us who are Christians, we are to realise that we were once in the most dangerous place when we heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus and we came to trust Him and we should be joyful to realise afresh the wonder of what we have been saved from and saved to. We can look back on the times when we heard the gospel as times of great privilege which brought us to the glorious time when we trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we were safe and saved for time and eternity.

When we become a Christian, the Lord Jesus will always be with us - watching over us, caring for us, leading and helping us on every step of the way - even though at times we may go through situations that cause us to be afraid, even terrified; yet the greatest fear of meeting the angry God as Judge has been removed and we are always in the hands of our loving, caring heavenly Father. May we know more and more of His care, have joy and peace in believing as we go on in our Christian lives.