

Happy Feet – Going Deeper

Week 5 – “Happy Feet”: the importance of worship through the good times and the bad

Acts 7 v54 – 60 and Acts 8 v1-3

Context

We learn in Acts 6 that Stephen was ‘one of the seven’ chosen (likened to role of Deacon) and in Acts 6 was:

- V5: ‘a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit’
- V8: ‘a man full of God’s grace and power’ and ‘performed amazing miracles and signs among the people’
- V10: ‘none of them could stand against the wisdom and the spirit with which Stephen spoke’

In Acts 6 Stephen is caught up in heavy debate with a group who are clearly out to cause trouble. Stephen is arrested by the High Council (likely to be the same that interrogated Jesus and Peter) and then in Acts 7 Stephen addresses both the Council and the crowd that has gathered. The first 50 verses of Acts 7, Stephen eloquently narrates the history of the Jewish nation and prophets and then in just 3 short verses delivers the punchline – the Council are furious.

Question: How clearly could you narrate a summary of God’s great plan from Creation, the Fall, the Old Testament narrative up to the birth of Jesus, the life / death / resurrection / ascension of Jesus, Pentecost and the birth of the early church, the end times and promises in Revelation? In particular, the reason for your faith and fluency in the Gospel (good news)?

Stephen – in a state of Worship?

Stephen was facing death (and then killed), but he appeared to be in a state of worship. Why? Because his spirit was clearly connected with the throne room of Heaven:

- ‘at this point everyone in the High Council stared at Stephen because his face became as bright as angels’ (Acts 6v15)
- He spoke with such wisdom and insight
- Full of the Holy Spirit he gazed into Heaven and saw the Glory of God, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7v55). Note: most references to the risen Jesus in Heaven have him sitting at the right hand of God, not standing – this is significant as Jesus is acknowledging Stephen’s witness.
- As they stone him, Stephen is praying (v59)
- He falls to his knees (v60), in surrender
- He calls for forgiveness for the people who are stoning him (v60)

Stephen is the first recorded Christian martyr and many have followed. Even today atrocities like this (including stoning) happens across the world – see Open Doors website for a better view on the persecuted church.

Questions: When was the last time you had to stand up for your faith? Would you be prepared to pay the ultimate price to stand up for your faith or that of others?

Prayer: Father forgive us when we moan about our church or the state of the UK church. Help us to be people of encouragement and boldness.

Acts 16 v16-34

Context

We fast forward temporarily in our preaching series to Acts 16. Paul’s 2nd missionary journey has begun and starts in Turkey. We are briefly introduced to Timothy and then Paul and Silas travel around the regions of Turkey with the Holy Spirit clearly directing where they should and shouldn’t go.

They go to the sea port of Troas, where Paul has the vision of the ‘Macedonian Man’ (a person calling from mainland Greece) asking for Paul to come to them for people to be saved. It is at this point that the apostle Luke joins them – how do we know this? Well Luke wrote Acts and when the narrative changes from ‘they’ did this, ‘they’ did that, to ‘WE’ it is an indication that Luke is there recording it first hand.

They sail to Greece and travel inland slightly to Philippi, an affluent Roman colony on the main trading routes from Asia. They decide to go to a riverbank outside the city where people will be praying so that they can preach the Gospel. We hear about the first recorded European convert – Lydia who is a trader in fine linen’s. As a result of

this (and no doubt Lydia's witness) her whole family are saved and baptised. She invite's Paul and the apostles to stay at their family home whilst they are on mission. This is where the reading in v34 picks up from.

This is not going to be an in depth sermon on Worship, but we will draw out 4 key points.

1 Worship as 'WONDER'

- Pete Grieg: "If you want to learn to worship, learn to wonder". Our worship has to focus on God, not us. Only He is worthy, His Worth-ship!
- Matt Redman: "Our worship songs should address a God of Holiness, more than a God of Helpfulness"
- Rick Warren: "The heart of worship is surrender"

Paul and Silas were in a cold, dark, damp jail with their feet bound and no doubt in a lot of pain from the beating and flogging. Yet it is reasonable to assume that they were upbeat and singing hymns of praise – anthems! I believe that their prayers and songs were focussed on God, not themselves. Worship as Wonder – focussing on who God is. They counted it a privilege to be part of Jesus' mission and Kingdom purposes. I don't think they were arguing about song choice or style.

Questions: When it comes to our prayer times and sung worship times, what proportion is about us versus about God? Do we worship God more for what HE can do for us, rather than for who He IS? Has sung worship become more about our preferences / what we want, or do we connect with the truth behind the words?

2 Worship as 'WHOLENESS'

- Psalm 103 v2: Let ALL that I am praise the Lord
- God wants it all!
- 'For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth' (John 4 v24)
- We need to worship with our heads and our hearts
- Body / Soul / Spirit
- Our whole of life worship (not just Sundays, not just singing)

I think Paul and Silas worshipped with all that they had – in their day to day life as well as from a nasty jail.

Questions: Is there anything you need to surrender to God to enable better 'whole of life worship'? Do you worship him with all that you are or do you hold stuff back? Do you worship with your head (truth) and your heart (emotions, desires, choices, deep within your spirit etc) or is this out of balance?

3 Worship as 'WARFARE / WARCRY'

There are times and seasons to lament. The Book of Psalms is full of lament and heart cry, arguably we don't do this enough. However sometimes we need more of a WARCRY (think about songs such as 'I raise a hallelujah' or situations when the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho etc). It is so important that we worship when we face the storms of life, when we are in intense spiritual warfare – worship based on victory and proclamation. This disarms the devil as we proclaim our assurance and faith in the power and work of Jesus.

There are many Scriptures that point towards being joyful, praising and praying through all circumstances. As well as many Psalms, here are a few examples:

- Philippians 4 v4-7
- 1 Thessalonians 5 v16-18
- Romans 5 v3-5
- Romans 12 v12
- Habakkuk 3 v17-18

I believe the apostles were aware more of spiritual warfare than their own needs. Through prayer, that God was doing something bigger – hence why they were signing hymns of praise and didn't escape the Jail when they had chance. They knew there was a gospel opportunity.

Questions: What is our tendency when we are going through tough times – do we dig in or retreat? Do you have any testimonies that you could share as to the faithfulness of God through the tough times or times of intense spiritual warfare? Could you sing 'in spirit and in truth' the song "Blessed be" by Matt Redman?

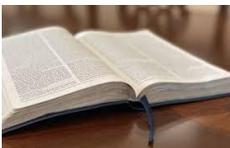
4 Worship as 'WITNESS'

People can spot phoney worship and Christians a mile off. We need to act like followers of Jesus all the time. The fellow prisoners were clearly impacted (they stayed and listened). The Jailer was clearly impacted – he fell at their feet trembling and asked how he could be saved. This led to the salvation of his whole household.

Questions: Is your life worship a good witness or a bad witness? If any of your friends or neighbours were asked, would they all say that you were a Christian as well as a Christian of integrity?

Challenge

As we replant DCF into Hope Church, what might God be saying about our personal and corporate (church family) worship? What do we need to leave behind? What do we need to take with us and build off?



Reading plan for this week: Acts 9 and Acts 10

Next Sunday: "Tales of the Unexpected" (Acts 9 v1-19, Acts 10 v9-16, v24-28, v44-48, Acts 15 v1-12)