

Procrastination

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage we read in Acts chapter 24. And I'd like to look especially at verses 24 and 25.

Several days later, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.

As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, That's enough for now. You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.

At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. Procrastination is the thief of time, the old proverb says.

But procrastination is also the thief of eternity, as we see in this passage. Here was a man who was very close to the kingdom of God, hearing one of the greatest preachers of the gospel ever.

[1 : 19] And yet, he put off that opportunity which he had. You may have heard what God has to say to you many times.

And yet, up until now, at any rate, you have put off any decision about the matter. You have put it off, as Felix says here, to what you think may be a more convenient time for you.

Well, Felix was someone just like you, if that is your feeling today. Felix, in many ways, was a very modern person.

And, in many ways, the Romans were very modern people, in the sense that, I suppose, many people today are like what the Romans used to be.

And that's no accident, I believe, because the Romans had a profound influence on the whole of the Western world and upon its history. We might even say that there have been two main influences on the Western world.

[2 : 32] One is Christianity, but the other is Rome. And with Rome, we would include the influence of Greece, because the Romans very much took up the influence of Greece themselves.

These two forces have influenced the Western world. And sometimes one-fourth is uppermost at any particular time in history, and sometimes another.

And in many ways, we may see today that the thinking and attitude of the Romans is in the ascendancy in our society today, rather than the influence of Christianity.

We can see that influence, even in what may appear to be very small ways, but I think quite interesting.

One of the few aspects of history which children still do in primary school is the history of the Romans. Children today may be very ignorant of many other aspects of history, but at least they know a little bit about the Romans.

[3 : 39] And a lot of modern humanism and scepticism can trace its history back to the thinking of ancient Greece and Rome.

Felix was someone from that kind of background. He's quite an interesting character. He actually originated as a slave, but he was freed by the royal house, perhaps by Claudius himself, and he climbed up the ladder of government till he got this position as governor of this area in Palestine. But as a governor, Felix was a failure. In spite of all the words of praise heaped upon him here by this lawyer that had been hired to represent the Jews, in spite of all this lavish praise, the verdict of history is given by his own countryman, the Roman historian Tacitus, who said that in savagery and lust he ruled as a king with the mind of a slave.

Tacitus didn't mince his words. So this was the kind of person that Felix was. He was also a failure in marriage.

Now perhaps he didn't think so, and perhaps the people at the time didn't think so, and perhaps even people today wouldn't think so, because he was married three times, and each time he was

married to a princess.

[5 : 21] The first one was a granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra, and his third wife, the present one that we're reading about here, was Drusilla, who was a daughter of King Herod Agrippa.

So in terms of worldly success, he seemed to be getting on very well. But if we ask the more penetrating question, why was he married three times?

Why did he seduce this Drusilla away from her own husband with the help of a magician? It is because of sin.

It is because of lust. Here was this woman Drusilla, who was considered to be the most beautiful woman living at the time, and that was the reason why Felix wanted to have her.

So in these areas, we can see from something of the background that we know from the historians of that time, as well as from what we're told here in the Bible, that in certain areas, Felix was a failure, although he perhaps didn't think of himself in that way.

[6 : 30] He perhaps appeared to be successful in his own eyes, and successful in the eyes of flatterers, like this Tertullus who comes trying to influence him on behalf of the Jews against Paul.

But what we are most concerned about today is not his general background or character, but we're interested in his contact here with the gospel of Jesus Christ and his reaction to it.

And the first thing we notice about it is that he was interested in Christianity. We're told in verse 22 that he was well acquainted with the way.

The way was a title that was given to Christianity around this time. He was well acquainted with the way. And in verse 24, several days later, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess.

He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. So there's two aspects there. The first is that he had considerable knowledge of Christianity.

[7 : 36] He was well acquainted with the way. Now it would appear that he was not the only one who knew of Christianity around that time, of those in authority.

We know that the Apostle Paul, just a little bit later, appeals to Agrippa and says that he knows that he knows about these things because these things were not done in a corner.

And it would appear that some of these men in authority knew about the events of Jesus' life, his death, his resurrection, and they knew quite a deal about the church and its growth.

So they were well acquainted with the way. He had considerable knowledge concerning Christianity. But not only considerable knowledge, he had a keen interest.

He sent for Paul and he listened to him as he expounded the Christian faith. He sent for him to try to understand more about this message that this man was speaking.

[8 : 45] Perhaps he was intrigued by the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul, obviously a great intellect. And perhaps a man like Felix was wondering why this man got himself into so much trouble by supporting this way that was called a sect by the Jews when he could have perhaps been anything he would have wanted to be.

And he was intrigued to find out what made the Apostle Paul tick. And he was keen to find out what his thinking actually was. But we know that neither of those two things would make Felix a Christian.

His considerable knowledge about Christianity, his keen interest in hearing about it and hearing this great creature, none of these things would make him a Christian.

And it's exactly the same still today. You may have considerable knowledge about Christianity. You may know much more about it than Felix did.

You may think you even know more about it than the Apostle Paul did. And you may certainly know more about it than I do. But that will not make you a Christian. Knowing about these things is not what changes your life.

[10 : 07] Many people know about these things. There are many professors of universities who study these things in detail. The history of the times, the actual language used in the Bible, yet they do not believe it.

Similarly, Felix had a keen interest in finding out more. A keen interest in hearing about Jesus. But that did not make him a Christian. You may have an interest, and an interest obviously enough to cause you to be here on a Sunday morning to hear God's word.

You may have an interest in hearing those things. But that in itself will not make you a Christian.

You may sometimes congratulate yourself on the knowledge you have and on the interest you have.

But that is not enough. That does not change your life. That does not bring you to belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the way in which your life is to be changed.

So, Felix has something to teach us in that, in his interest in Christianity. But then secondly, he heard a challenging sermon that day.

[11 : 18] In fact, it would appear that he got a lot more than he bargained for from the Apostle Paul. And isn't that often the way? We may know a lot, we may be interested, but then sometimes, because we've placed ourselves in the way of hearing the gospel, of being in church, sometimes we will hear something that will shake us.

And we get more than we bargained for. Well, this day, Felix heard a very challenging sermon. There was a challenge to personal commitment.

Now, maybe, although Felix had known a great deal about Christianity, maybe he had never grasped this fact before. The Apostle Paul spoke to him about faith in Christ Jesus.

That was the real theme of what the Apostle Paul was getting across. As always, that is the great subject of his preaching, faith in Jesus Christ.

And that must be the great theme of all gospel preaching. Personal commitment to Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul would speak about who Jesus is and what he has done.

[12 : 31] He would speak about the Lord Jesus as the one who is the eternal Son of God, yet sent by God into this world to take a human nature to represent man and to deal with the sins of the world.

He would speak concerning the cross of Jesus Christ, concerning his death on behalf of sinners, concerning his resurrection from the dead. He spoke concerning this person, this unique person. And his speaking concerning him was not just so that Felix would be interested in this great historic person, but he was speaking about him concerning faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, Paul's great concern was not that people should know about Jesus or just be interested in him or think that he was a great person, but that they would come to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, that they would have faith in him.

That was his concern. Here, as a prisoner, he stood before this Roman governor. He wasn't concerned just to please the Roman governor. He wasn't concerned just to give him the things that he would like to hear.

[13 : 44] Paul, with the true heart of a preacher, was making known to him the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, was telling him the things that he needed to know to be saved. So every preacher must still do the same.

And if we want the kind of preaching that just tickles our ears and tells us the things that we like to hear and confirms us in our own prejudices, then that is not preaching. The preaching of God's word challenges us to personal commitment, to personal involvement with this person, Jesus Christ, to personal faith in him, trusting in him as the one who laid down his life for us.

So the major part and certainly would appear the first part of his message was concerned with Jesus, who he is, and the need for personal commitment to him.

And at that level, perhaps, Felix was still quite intrigued by what he was hearing. Perhaps he still found the whole thing very attractive because it's a strange thing.

I've noticed, I don't know if you've noticed it, but there are many people today who will oppose Christianity, but they will not oppose Jesus Christ.

[15 : 10] Many people who will write against what the Bible says, or write about what they think the God of the Old Testament was, but they will always add a disclaimer, but we really like Jesus.

We've got nothing against Jesus. You see, there is still to this day this feeling of being intrigued with Jesus Christ because Jesus is unique.

Because in him we see perfect love and perfect righteousness combined in this fascinating way.

People are still intrigued by him. There is still this testimony that shows, just as was shown at the time in which he lived, that no one could really pin any blame on him.

Nobody could really make any charge stick against him, even his enemies who hated him. They couldn't find anything wrong with him. Still, the testimony of this world today is just the same.

But you know that does not make you a Christian. You may have a high regard today for the person of Jesus Christ, for his life and for his love and for his death which perhaps you see as a great example of his love.

[16 : 30] You may have a high regard in all these ways but that does not make you a Christian because it does not get to grips with what Jesus said concerning himself. It does not get to grips with this personal commitment to him, this faith in him as your Savior and Lord.

Well, there was a challenge to personal commitment but it was really when Paul got on to a second area that things started to hot up.

He went on to speak about a challenge to personal change and that's when Felix started to get really worried.

It would appear, might appear to many people today that here Paul spoiled it all. After all, here was a man, a very influential Roman who was interested in Christianity.

He was keen to find out more. He was perhaps fascinated by the person of Jesus Christ and perhaps he listened maybe with enthusiasm, certainly with toleration to what the Apostle Paul had to say concerning Jesus Christ and concerning personal commitment to him.

[17 : 54] But then it looks as if Paul goes and blows the whole thing. He goes to speak about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. The very things that were going to raise Felix's hackles and cause him to turn against the whole thing.

Many people would say exactly the same thing today. They will say to us in the church, speak positively, speak about Jesus, speak about his love and you'll attract people.

Well, that may be true, it may not be true. But what I know is definitely true is that many people who may seem to be attracted to Jesus Christ are not truly coming to faith in him because they don't know or understand why it is Jesus came and lived and died and rose again.

And that is what the Apostle Paul goes on to speak about here. He goes on to speak about why there is a need for personal commitment to Jesus Christ. You see, so much modern preaching is left in the air.

It says, come and commit yourself to Jesus Christ, but it doesn't tell us why. It tells us, come and join the church, but it doesn't tell us why we should do any of those things.

[19 : 15] The Apostle Paul is not such a preacher. He tells us exactly why we need the Lord Jesus Christ. He told Felix to his face exactly why he personally needed Jesus Christ.

And here we see the tremendous boldness of the preacher of the Gospel. Here we see that boldness that we see also in someone like John Knox of whom it was said he feared the face of no man.

Now that is the kind of preaching which we need to pray God for today. Not preaching to people what they want to hear. Not preaching the things that are just echoing ideas that the world already has, but preaching God's word.

Preaching concerning the need of salvation. Because it's only surely when we truly appreciate and understand our great need of salvation.

But then we become interested in Jesus Christ in this living and vital way. so the Apostle Paul preached the law as it used to be called.

[20 : 27] He spoke concerning God's law and concerning man's failure to keep that law. And if one thing is guaranteed to get our hackles up it is that.

If one thing is guaranteed to get the hackles of the world around us up it is this. To speak concerning the demands of God's law and his condemnation of our sins.

But Paul didn't beat about the bush. He didn't try to cover this over because he knew that this is the only way in which people can come to a true faith in Christ.

So he spoke of righteousness and ah didn't that hit home. Felix as the governor. The governor who was flattered by people like Tertullus but whom Paul didn't flatter even in his introduction to his speech.

He didn't say how good the governor he had been. He just said I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation. Well that was true nobody could argue with that. Paul didn't flatter him when he came to speak to him man to man concerning the gospel of Christ either he spoke to him concerning righteousness.

[21 : 38] The man who ruled with savagery and lust as a king with the disposition of a slave said Tacitus. This man had no real concept of righteousness of what was right.

And isn't that one of the great flaws in the world today around us? At every level at every political level at every social level there is no concept of what is absolutely right.

Standards can be twisted and changed to suit. There can be compromise. There can be horse trading. no concept of what is absolutely right and true.

And we need to hear again this absolute of God's word as to what is right. There is a standard of rightness and truth because God exists and he is that kind of God.

He hates sin. He hates untruth. He hates lies. He hates everything that is opposed to the truth. Therefore there is an absolute standard because God exists and he is that God.

[22 : 44] And so God demands right of his people and of all the people he has created. He demands righteousness. He demands these standards.

And he has shown us these standards not just in commands like the Ten Commandments. He has shown us these standards in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. He has shown us what it means at a practical level to have standards of truth and right.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the truth so that when we look at him we see what is right and the kind of way in which we should treat other people the kind of attitude we should have to truth telling and all the rest of it.

So when we look at that and when we look at God's standard of righteousness we see how different we are. Felix was here confronted with his own heart. He had to look into his own heart as Paul spoke of righteousness and he had to see that he was unrighteous.

He didn't care about the rights of others. He didn't care about what was true or false. He only cared about his own advancement. And if we would be truthful with ourselves so often that's the case with us.

[24 : 06] Oh yes we may paint it over and we may try to present ourselves always in the best light. But we know in our hearts of hearts it's not so.

We know that so often as we speak of others or as we tell something that we've done we sort of change things a little bit to make ourselves appear better and others appear worse.

These kind of thoughts are in our own hearts and it's just perhaps the fact that we haven't been put in a position of authority like Felix that things aren't worse than what they are.

So the apostle spoke of righteousness but he also spoke of self-control and these two surely must go together. Felix a failure as governor because of his lack of righteousness but Felix also a failure in marriage because of his lack of self-control.

He was characterized not only by savagery but by lust. We see this in his disposing of one wife and his getting another, taking her away from her own husband simply because he fancied her.

[25 : 22] Isn't that exactly the way the world around us works today? That's all that matters whether you fancy somebody. So at this level again we see the failure of the human heart.

We are incapable of being faithful, incapable of being true absolutely. And if we say well I haven't had three wives, I haven't gone off with somebody else, what have you done in your heart?

Jesus said whoever has looked on a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart. You see these things may not be true of us outwardly but they're true in our hearts and it's on the heart of man that God looked for.

So God demands not only righteousness but he demands self-control and we are not self-controlled. We want to let the self dominate. And that's a characteristic of the age in which we're living.

But self- gratification is far superior to self-denial. But God says because we are sinners we need to control the self. Not only controlling the self for our own sakes but for the sake of others.

[26 : 37] But this in our sin we refuse to do. So Paul spoke about two things that were guaranteed to get Felix's back up.

Concerning his failure. He put his finger right on the sore point. And God's word puts its finger right on our sore points too. And points out to us our sins.

But Paul had even worse to come we may say. Paul spoke not only of righteousness and self-control but of judgment to come. He said it matters how you live now.

You see again the world around us like the world of Rome at that time says it doesn't really matter what you do. Do whatever you want. Live as you please.

But God's word says it matters what you do now. It matters what you think of God's law and how you relate to it and how you break it. It matters.

[27 : 43] Why does it matter? Because there is a day of reckoning coming. The world says no no there's no day of reckoning coming. we just live in this life and then we die and that's the end of it.

Or many people nowadays believing in we'll be reincarnated as something else and everything will go on. There's not really going to be a day of reckoning. But you know there are days of reckoning in our own experience now.

There's the time when the truth will out. There's the time even when politicians just as powerful as Felix are found out. The time when the world comes to see their corruption, their unrighteousness. Days of reckoning come in the world as it is now in our present history. You get found out because God has created a world where unrighteousness will never pay in the end.

and he has decreed that there will be a time when there will be a final day of reckoning. When all will give an account to him of what they have done.

[28 : 55] There will be a day of judgment. And if there is one message that is guaranteed to be unpopular it is this. It would be unpopular with Felix.

Equally unpopular today. Because today we want a no fault morality. where people can do what they want and do whatever they think is the best thing and get away with it.

We want not to have this idea that there is going to be a day of reckoning. But the apostle Paul says there is a day of reckoning. The Lord Jesus Christ says there is a day of reckoning.

No one spoke more of the day of judgment than the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is strange how people think so much of Jesus still today. But yet they don't take his word seriously.

He spoke concerning that day of judgment. He spoke concerning that time when there will be a separating like the separating of the sheep from the goat. Jesus was taking a picture familiar to the people then.

[29 : 57] How a shepherd would separate the sheep from the goats in his flock. Jesus said there will come a time of division, a time of separating. I remember when I was a boy helping my father who was a shepherd.

We had in the sheep fanks a gate which was for shedding the sheep. That meant as the sheep came along through a narrow passage they came to a point where there were really two ways.

And in the middle there was a door. And that door could be turned to one side or the other.

Depending on which way the shepherd wanted to put the sheep, the sheep would go.

He turned the gate one way and they would turn to the right. He turned the gate the other way they would turn to the left. And I always thought there was something very final about that.

Because you see the sheep could be there being shed, being separated, because some were going to be sold. And perhaps two sheep that had even the same mother, two sheep that had grown up together we may say, two sheep that had eaten side by side, two sheep that had drank water from the same burn, that day they would be separated.

[31 : 25] That day one would be taken away and the other would be left. there was something very final about that. And that is the picture that the Lord Jesus uses here concerning the day of judgment.

There will be a day of division. Why will there be division? Because God will judge this world according to what people have done and especially according to what they have done concerning Jesus Christ.

Christ. There will be a day of division. And if we are still in our unrighteousness, still in our lack of self control, still outside of Christ, then God will separate us to that place of ultimate separation, away from his face, away from his pleasure.

but only where there is his wrath and only where there is regret burning forever and ever. And he will separate others who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and have acted accordingly.

And they will have eternal life. That's what Jesus Christ says. That's what the Apostle Paul said to this sophisticated Roman governor Felix. And Felix, as we know, did not like it any more than some of you like it today.

[32 : 50] Because it goes against the human heart. Because the human heart says, I want to be the center of this universe. I want to say what's going to happen and what's not going to happen.

And I can't accept this fact that one day somebody else is going to decide about me. But my friend, one day that is going to take place. Just as surely as the shepherd separated one sheep from another.

God will separate you from those perhaps that you love if you're still in your sin. So the Apostle Paul brought before Felix here the challenge of a changed lifestyle.

Why do I say that? Because he brought home to Felix's attention his own failure, his moral failure, and his moral corruption, and he had to change. It wasn't just that he was challenged to be interested in Christ, challenged to think about Christ, not just even challenged to be committed to Christ, but to be committed to Christ in this sense, that he was committed to a changed lifestyle, committed to seeing that he needed his life changed and turned around.

And that is what Felix did not like and could not accept. Felix reacted with fear and with procrastination.

[34 : 16] He reacted in fear. The word could even mean that he was terrified. And sometimes, no doubt, we too have been conscience stricken by what God says in his word.

Sometimes, too, perhaps we've been afraid as we've considered what God says in his law, his demands, and what he says concerning that final day of reckoning. Felix was afraid.

Felix crembled, as it's put in the authorised version. But that did not make him a Christian any more than it makes you a Christian today, even if you've been afraid by what I've said concerning the judgment to come.

in fact, there are those who like to hear sermons like that, in the same way as there are people who like to see horror movies.

It gives a certain kind of thrill. Felix was afraid, he was terrified, but he did not accept Christ. And you may have been made afraid, you may even have been terrified concerning things you read in God's word.

[35 : 35] But that has not moved you to being a Christian. And you may, like Felix here, have procrastinated. And one of the first steps in that was that he stopped the preacher.

Now, I don't know if you've ever tried to stop the preacher. It's a difficult thing to do. But in one sense, it's quite easy. All you have to do is to turn your mind off. You say, I've heard all this before. And you turn your mind to other things that are easier, nicer, more attractive. You switch off. You've stopped the preacher, just as surely as Felix did here.

Felix was the governor, he was in charge, he could stop Paul and he could send him back to his prison cell. Well, maybe you can't do that with me, but you can switch off your mind. And maybe you've done that time after time with many preacher.

And it's been one of the first steps in your procrastinating. You've been interested. You've even expressed a keenness, perhaps at times. You've been moved, you've been affected, you've perhaps even been frightened.

[36 : 46] But you switch off because you don't want to consider it. Certainly not at the present time. You don't want to change your life at the present time. You say, well, maybe in the future, maybe at another time, I will.

Just as Felix here said, when I find it convenient, I will send for you. Isn't that the really telling phrase that we remember concerning Felix? He said, not just now.

Someday, someday when I find it convenient, then I'll send for you and we'll talk about these things seriously again. And you know, Felix did find it convenient to send for him.

And he brought Paul and he spoke to him frequently. But he never, ever accepted what he was saying. Because he kept on putting it off further.

He said, when I find it convenient, then I'll listen to you again. And so isn't that just like the person, perhaps you're such a person, who says, well, it's not convenient at the moment.

[37 : 49] there's too many things to do. I'm too young, you see, there's too many things to experience in life. I don't want to be restricted by following Christ just now. It's not that I'm against him.

I believe, I believe Christ is the saviour and all these things, but I don't want to be committed to him now, sometime later when I'm older. And then you know that person gets older, just as you get older if God spares you.

And then you'll say, well, I'm too busy. I'm very tied up with my work at the present time and my family and there's so many commitments and I can't really consider these things just now. And then you come to when you're old.

And it's one of the greatest tragedies in the world to see someone who's old and who doesn't know the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone who has heard concerning him all their lives.

And now the person who said a more convenient time has arrived at the time when they're deaf perhaps and blind and they're incapacitated and they can't even think about such things.

[38 : 52] What a great tragedy of putting these things off to the convenient season. There is no more convenient season than now when Jesus Christ here offers himself freely to you as Savior.

This is a convenient time. This is the acceptable time. today is the day of salvation, God says. But what a tragedy, Felix.

His final verdict on Paul was to leave Paul in prison. Will that be your final verdict concerning the preaching of the gospel, concerning the gospel itself, concerning Jesus Christ?

you accept it in a kind of a way. You respect the Lord Jesus. There's a corner of your mind where you sort of hold these things, but it's bound, it's in prison.

Once, Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of last century, said, people talk about defending the Bible. defend the Bible, he says, either soon defend the lion, turn it loose.

[40 : 10] Well, this is the one thing, isn't it, that we don't want to do when we're like Felix. We don't want it turned loose. We don't want the Apostle Paul turned loose. We want to have him so that we can leave him in prison, so that we can shut him up when we want to.

Is that the kind of preaching that you want? Is that the kind of attitude you have to preaching that you can shut off your mind, you can close it down, you can keep it bound, you can keep it in prison. And so, you put off any consideration of these things. What a tremendous opportunity Felix got, an opportunity far greater than many other Romans of his time, to have that personal conversation, that powerful presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ from the Apostle Paul, yet he was unprepared to accept it, because he was unprepared to change his life.

We at the present time are again confronted with the Lord Jesus Christ today. Some of you may be saying, well, I'll go along and hear Billy Graham perhaps later in the week, and that should be interesting.

And maybe again, you're just putting things off, because when you get there, you'll just say, oh, well, that was very interesting, but I'll hear it again. Well, the time will come, my friend, when you won't hear it again.

[41 : 40] You may not hear Billy Graham, because the time may come between now and then when God may call you away, as that time will certainly come one day, so the word of God to us now is now, is the day of salvation.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now. That's the opportunity we're given. May God grant you grace to do so. Let's pray. O gracious Lord, loving Heavenly Father, we pray that you would bless your own word to us today.

We confess the deceitfulness of our own hearts, how we trifle with your word and with the opportunities we receive. O grant us, Lord, to do so no longer, but in seriousness of mind and heart, enable us today to close with this offer of the gospel in Jesus Christ.

We pray that you would have mercy upon us. Grant us to see what our sins deserve and what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in taking the desert of our sins upon himself.

Lord, we pray that you would bless your word to us today and to all who hear it, that it may indeed be the gate of life to many today.

[43 : 05] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.