



COVENANT

Bible-Presbyterian Church

Preaching Christ for His Glory and His Kingdom

Order of Worship – 20 May 2018

Theme for the Year: "King Jesus Must Reign" (1 Corinthians 15:25)

Prelude	<i>The Lord Is in His Holy Temple</i>
Call to Worship	
*Opening Hymn	19 - <i>I Sing the Mighty Power of God</i>
*Invocation & † <i>Gloria Patri</i>	
Scripture Reading	Isaiah 6:1-13
Hymn	TP 81:8-16
Tithes & Offering	
**† <i>Doxology</i> & Offertory Prayer	
Scripture Reading	Acts 28:16-29
Hymn	215 - <i>Come, O Thou Prophet of the Lord</i>
Confession of Faith & Pastoral Prayer	
Sermon	"The Softness and Hardness of Heart"
*Closing Hymn	441 - <i>Dear Saviour, Thou Art Mine</i>
*Benediction & <i>Threefold Amen</i>	
Silent Prayer & Postlude	
Announcements	<i>*Congregation standing</i>

†Glory be to the Father, and to the Son:
And to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning,
Is now and ever shall be:
World without end. Amen.

††Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Covenant Bible-Presbyterian Church meets every Sunday at 10:00 am
at 47 Davis Road, Attadale, Western Australia

Website: www.covenantbpc.org.au

Contact: pastor@covenantbpc.org.au

The Conversion and Martyrdom of Roman Christians

We are coming to the end of our study of Acts. We have studied Paul's detention in Caesarea. Now in Acts 28, he's finally in Rome. He had suffered much pain.

In Rome, he would testify of Christ. He had converts among the Jews and the Gentiles. Many of Caesar's family believed through his ministry.

In 1892, Rodolfo Lanciani, an Italian archeologist, researched historical records of the conversion, life, and martyrdom of Roman Christians.

What he found was fascinating. He found that many nobles believed, and for a time the emperors considered legalizing it.

But this eventually fizzled out because there was general hatred for Christians. Yet many nobles continued to follow Christ despite the pain and persecution.

Many of the Roman Nobility Converted to Christ and Were Martyred

While there were conversions from the general populace, there were many Roman nobles who believed.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:22 that many were Nero's relatives. And these conversions continued after his reign.

During the reigns of Vespasian and his sons, Titus and Domitian, conversions of the nobility continued. Domitillae and Petronilla, two of their high ranking relatives believed. The historian Herodianus called them "*the noblest among the noble.*"

Not only were they converted, but they were also martyred. In the year 95 AD, members of the imperial family were condemned by Domitian. They were charged with atheism. Christianity was "atheistic" because it denied that Caesar was god.

During this purging, several officials were also martyred. This included many Roman senators and consuls.

One of them was Acilius Glabrio. He was condemned by Domitian. The behavior of Glabrio at his trial was particularly interesting. It was recorded that he "*assumed an air of stupidity.*"

This was the common description of Christians.

The pagans couldn't understand why Christians did not participate in Roman worldly pleasures, why they declined public honor, and praised modesty.

This was stupid to the pagan mind.

Chief of all, the pagans could not understand why Christians faced persecution with peace. This was the "*air of stupidity*" that Glabrio exhibited.

The Emperors Considered Legalizing Christianity

While the emperors persecuted Christianity, they had considered legitimizing it as a religion.

According to some biographers like Lampridius, some even tried to promote it by suggesting their citizens worship both Jesus and Jupiter at their family altars.

The first was Tiberius. Because Pilate reported that many had converted to Christ in Judea, Tiberius asked the Senate to include Christ as a god.

Even Nero initially showed favor - not in the least because many of his family members were Christian.

Similarly, it was said that Hadrian built temples in every city to an unknown god, for the eventual worship of Christ.

Despite these probable historical accounts, what is definite is that these emperors hotly persecuted Christians.

Christians Were Hated Because They Were Different

Suetonius, a biographer, recorded how Nero came to hate Christians.

The Jews stirred trouble in Rome because they opposed Christianity. Nero

expelled them as a result. But this did not get rid of Christianity. It grew even in the absence of the Jews.

And the Christians were different. They did not live life like the Gentiles.

They lived a quiet life, eschewed honor, when they sinned they sought forgiveness, and when they were sinned against they forgave. Because they rebuked sin, their communities were pious and holy. Such radical living was seen to be subversive.

When Nero blamed the great fire of Rome on the Christians, this charge stirred the blood lust of the people. The charge of arson inflamed the anger they already had against the piety and holiness of the Christians.

It was said that if the magistrates could prove the charge of arson, the storm would have been confined to Rome.

For the charges to stick, the Christians were convicted of anarchy. And once this charge was admitted, the persecution was no longer limited to Rome.

Why such a charge? Because they were different - they didn't play by Gentiles rules. It is hard to fathom that anyone could be hated because they wanted to be holier.

But Jesus himself said that Christians would be hated because Christ himself was hated.

Some Thoughts

As we come to the end of Acts, we know that Paul came to Rome to testify. Through him, many believed.

But what kind of life was he leading them into? It would be a life of suffering.

But why did the Christian nobles willingly face persecution? Why did they willingly live lives which were so radical?

Because in the gospel, they found forgiveness, the ability to forgive, the desire to live godly, and a community of saints. They found freedom.

While Paul did not come to Rome to bring them pain but freedom, they experienced pain because others hated their freedom in Christ.

This is why the gospel is so subversive. The world can't understand it.

Jonathan Edwards once remarked that men are much more concerned to avoid pain than to miss pleasure. These Christians certainly bucked the trend. Because of the pleasure they found in Christ, they willingly experienced pain.

Is that the same with us today? We go through great lengths to avoid the pain that comes because of Christ.

We don't deny self or take up the cross as we should. Why? Perhaps it is because we have not treasured the pleasure that is in him. And we would rather miss that treasure to avoid the pain. ~ Pastor



Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

Q. 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

Worship Service Roster

<i>Service</i>	<i>This Week (20.5.18)</i>	<i>Next Week (27.5.18)</i>
Speaker	Mark Chen	Mark Chen
Worship Leader	Mark Chen	Johnson Lim
Pianist	Eugene Lim	Ian Tay
Welcomers	Ian & Merrill Read	John & Adeline Ng
Offering Stewards	Ian Read*, Jansen Ng* John Tan, Ethan Huang	Johnny Orchard*, Vincent Chiu* Yen Fye Yap, Lye Heng Chua
Ushers	Josephine Austin, Angela Yap	Jesslyn Leow, Joyce Ng
Kitchen Duties	Jackie Hong*, Angela Yap Nancy Lim	Lydia Orchard*, Debbie Blake May Poon
PA Duty	Jacob Woo	Joel Chua
<i>Prayer Meeting</i>	<i>25 May 2018</i>	<i>1 June 2018</i>
Facilitator	Mark Chen	Mark Chen
Pianist	Ian Tay	Eugene Lim

Announcements

1. A warm welcome to all worshipers. May God richly bless you. Please stay behind after the service for fellowship and tea.
2. Next week's message: "Always for the Gospel" (Acts 28:30-31).
3. Next week's Junior Worship message: "The Church Must Always Be Praying" (Acts 2:42-47). Speaker: Ken Hong.
4. Ladies' Fellowship lunch today. Please proceed downstairs to the lower level at 12:30 pm.
5. CBI just started a 10 part series on the life of Samson.
6. Visitation this week by Pastor Mark Chen and Deacon Johnson Lim; and Elder Jimmy Orchard and Deacon Vincent Chiu.

Appointments for the Week	Last Lord's Day Tithes & Offering, & Attendance
WED 10:00 am Craft Group	General Fund - \$4,876.15
FRI 7:30 pm CBI & Prayer Meeting	(*DD - \$500.00, #793 - \$1,000.00).
SAT 4:30 pm JF & TF	Missions Fund - \$240.00.
SUN 9:00 am Sunday School	Building Fund - \$300.00
10:00 am Worship Service	(*DD - \$300.00).
	Total Tithes & Offering - \$5,416.15.
	Attendance - 154.
	<i>*DD: direct deposit</i>

Elders: **Mark Chen (Pastor)** 6114 4242, 0415 932 373. **Jimmy Orchard** 0413 274 407.
 Deacons: **Johnson Lim** 0402 145 682. **Jacob Woo** 0421 212 206.
Vincent Chiu 0417 929 149.

The Softness and Hardness of Heart
Acts 28:16-29

Why do some people hear and believe and others not hear and believe? Why do some who grow up in church end up as unbelievers? Why do some of us, despite knowing the Word of God, not surrender ourselves to do it? There are many reasons but one of consequence.

1. The Unending Burden of a Gospel Laborer
 - a. Paul was in the will of Christ
 - b. Paul's testimony and burden
2. There Will Always Be a Mixed Response to the Message of the Gospel
 - a. Paul's willing audience
 - b. The essence of the Gospel message
 - c. Some believed, others did not
3. What Unbelief of the Gospel Really Means
 - a. Their hearts were hardened
 - b. The accomplishment of the Gospel

God will accomplish his purposes through the Gospel. Some will believe and others will not. Christ was at work through the gospel. many were saved. And as those who are saved, how are our hearts softened to Christ and his Word?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Is the Word of God, if accurately expounded, the instruction of God to us? What are the things that prevent us from responding with softness and obedience to it, if it is not the hardness of our hearts?
2. Is Christ true in all that he promises to be in the gospel? Are his promises true? How does an affirmative answer to these questions help us to respond to him?