

Pako Evening Service 24/04/2016

Scripture Reading: Rom 1:8-17; John 20:19-31; (LD7 Q&A 21-22) Message. "What is the content of your faith"

Brothers and Sisters,

Those of you who know me a little, know that one of my favourite challenges to people who quote a Scripture verses, is "Give me chapter and verse please." It's not that I expect people to know every verse in Scripture, but if we are to have a credible Christian witness, it is good to be able to quote chapter and verse. Don't just pull something out of your thumb and say, "Somewhere in Scripture it says..." The Apostle Paul and the writer to the Hebrews can get away with that, but we should know chapter and verse.

And of course that implies the need to know your Bibles. And you can only really know your Bibles if you spend time prayerfully reading or listening intently to it. As Christians, reading the Scriptures and memorising it is one of the most important exercises we can be involved in. It's more important than reading a daily devotional booklet or what John Piper has said or John MacArthur because our faith is based on Scripture and not on what someone has said, although that can be very useful.

It's on Scripture that we profess with heart and voice that God is the Creator, and that Jesus is our Saviour and the Holy Spirit is our sanctifier. It's on Scripture that we can say with confidence that our faith is in the Lord Jesus' completed work on the cross and subsequent resurrection that not only guarantees forgiveness of sins but also eternal life.

So our faith is not based on our feelings perse. We don't base it on our feelings for one day we feel great and the next day we may feel lousy! Nor do we base faith on our net worth, or our associations, for that may all disappear and indeed one day they will disappear. We come with nothing into this world and that's the way we depart! Our faith is based on what we know and read from Scripture! So let me ask, "What makes up the content of your faith?"

Please think carefully for your forgiveness and eternal salvation rests upon the answer. It's not enough to say to me or anyone else who may ask that you love God. We shouldn't be satisfied with just some nice cliques about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We for certain in our hearts and that means we need truth and the only truth when it comes to faith in God and His Son is from the Scriptures.

For instance, Scripture teaches that there is only one true God who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them (Gen 1). Scripture teaches that there is only one Saviour. John 14:6; "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me!" Scripture teaches, that God through the work of his Holy Spirit quickened me to life when he gave me the gift of faith (Eph 2:4-8).

In some ways, we live in very interesting times. Many people admit they are spiritual. On more than one occasion of have heard great sportsman and women profess their faith publicly in Jesus Christ after they have won an event. A lot of Muslims are disillusioned about the Islamic faith because they don't like what they see happening in northern Syria and other places. So today as Christians we have extra opportunities to tell people from all walks of life about our Christian faith, for people more open to it than ever before.

So what do you say when people ask you what your faith is based on and what is its content? It can be difficult and embarrassing when we do not have a clear understanding of what Scripture teaches. Let me put it this way. If we wish to be fair dinkum about our Christian faith and Christian witness, then we need to know what we believe and be able to at least in some part give the reason for the hope that we have based on God's word.

We want to be able to give an informed answer when an opportunity presents itself to tell someone about Jesus and what he means for us and what he has done. And I am sure we have all felt bad and disappointed when an opportunity has escaped us to give a nice clear answer about the content of our faith due to lack of biblical knowledge. In this regard, we also need to understand, that not only do we need a sincere faith, but a saving faith.

Allow me to explain the difference. I can have faith in my car in that it will get me from A to B. Every time I travel by plane I have faith that I will arrive safely at my destination. I can have faith in the laws of the universe that God has set in place, that when I jump I will come down again. However, these things are not saving faith! We can take another example that is perhaps a little closer to home.

Many 'religions' have sincere followers based on what they think is a sincere knowledge of truth. Muslims are sincere in following Mohammed. JW's impress us with their sincere devotion to their understanding of Scripture. Even liberal

theologians are very sincere about their Christian faith yet some no longer believe and accept God as Creator, the virgin birth, the conception by the Spirit, the physical, bodily resurrection, and so on. All of the above are not examples of a saving faith. They do not work or help me with a definitive answer to the most important question, "What will happen to me when I die?" Nor do they give rest or comfort to my soul. True, saving faith is concerned about our eternal salvation and what is it based on.

We know with confidence that when we believe the saving message of the Bible, namely Jesus Christ crucified and risen, we will be saved! That is the crux of the matter. The question that counts with God is not if you believe, but what you believe. It is simply not enough to say you believe in God without putting some flesh to that statement. I mention this because even James says, "that even the demons believe and shudder." Bible believing Christians acknowledge that it is only those who believe in Jesus as Saviour and Lord who will be saved to eternal life of glory.

So by faith we believe and embrace the entire Word of God, and agree fully to it, for that is the gospel, the good news for sinners, and that is what we must believe. And we need to handle it with great respect! The Bible doesn't just contain the Word of God, as some theologians would like to have us believe, but it is the Word of God, in its entirety. It is the Good News and that is what we must believe. This is the content of our faith! So do you know what the gospel is?

Hopefully, most of you will say that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. That he died a cruel death on a cross and that he rose victoriously, and that death is now not the end, but the door to eternal life for all those who believe! This is not something that some man has made up or sucked out of his thumb, rather it is revealed in the Bible, the infallible word of God. That is what we believe.

Now many people are not all that happy with this supposedly narrow definition of what we believe. And so they add to it, or even take away from it. Allow me to give some examples. Some churches have added to Scripture by saying what their leaders or past Synods have said is also binding. The JW's are called upon to believe in the interpretations given by Charles Russell. The Mormons have added the writings of Joseph Smith in the book of Mormons. The Christian Science movement follows Mary Baker Eddy and her health teachings. Other churches have added a sprinkle of tradition or man's ability to reason. There are several so called Christian leaders who have now written books saying that science has trumped Scripture in regards to creation vs evolution and so on.

These people don't realize that as soon as you add or take something away from the Bible, it's bound to be faulty, for every man is deceitful and false. We need to realize and remember that we are all tainted with sin, and that even our purest thoughts are not 100% pure. And that is why the writings of Charles Russell, Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy cannot be trusted. And that is why we do not follow them. Nor do we follow and trust in tradition.

The trouble is that our foe the devil is very subtle. He makes what these false leaders say sound attractive. After all - to love is better than to hate. We don't like being reminded that the Bible speaks more about hell than heaven. Congregation the fundamentals of the Christian faith is a personal acceptance and confession that the word of God is 100% truth, without error and is the good news for you.

You need to be able to say, "I believe in God the Father, Creator, I believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, my Saviour, I believe in the Holy Spirit, my sanctifier because that is how the Bible speaks about them! Our faith, my faith rests in God's revealed word. That is my sure hope! And that is why in true Christian churches, the Scriptures are placed above all. It's placed above the minister, above the elders, above Classis, above Synod, yes, even above our traditions. Each one of us must receive and believe the gospel alone, as it is said, "Repent and believe." Our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (Mk 1:15; 1 Cor 2:5). And the power and wisdom of God is Jesus and him crucified and risen!

Where will you find that? In God's special revelation, the holy Bible and nowhere else! Yes, our creeds and confessions are very useful, but they are but summaries of what God's word says. So I come back, "Do you read your Bible, the gospel?" Do it! For the word of God is able to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16-17; John 20:31). So do you read it?

Now please, don't come to me and say we don't need the OT, just give us the NT. That is dangerous, for all of Scripture points to Jesus Christ. God already began to reveal the Gospel in Paradise. The Bible, all of it, is essentially the gospel. That's why when you read the Bible you must expect to meet Jesus for that is who it is about. The Bible, the Gospel is really the history of God's plan to save sinful mankind to eternal life.

And for us to understand it we need to pray that the Holy Spirit would give us understanding. A prayer for the Holy Spirit to illuminate his word is much more than just a little fringe thing. Without illumination by the Holy Spirit the Bible remains a closed book, even though we may read it. Unless the Holy Spirit opens the Bible, we cannot see Jesus. And that is why an uneducated person who reads the Bible as God's good news, aided by the Holy Spirit has a better understanding than a scholar who just reads without the Holy Spirit and hence fails to find Jesus Christ.

Yet, beware of the tall poppy syndrome. Some people think they don't need anyone to explain the Scripture's to them - they can do it all on their own. Well, there may be one or two who can do so, but generally that is not the case. I for one, am thankful that there are many gospel believing scholars who can show us the treasures of God's Word. (John Piper, John MacArthur, Tim Keller, Michael Youssef and others).

Now what are some of the promises that are contained in the gospel that we need to believe? Allow to just briefly state some of the promises of the gospel contained in Scripture and summarised for us in the Apostles' Creed. The first thing that we must believe is that God is the only true God and Creator of all. The second thing is that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord. That he was born, that he suffered the agony of hell while on this earth, which culminated in his death on the cross for our sin. That Jesus rose from the dead and that he is seated at God's right hand and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. Finally, we must believe in the Holy Spirit who sanctifies God's people, who makes them holy, who assures them of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

All these things are promises of the gospel, which we find in God's word. The Triune God is calling a people to Himself. That is the work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. That is what I am on about - that is what we should all be on about! So I ask again - do you read the Gospel? Do you prayerfully meditate over it, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate it so that you may know what your faith is based on?

I challenge you - if you don't read the word, start today. If you spend sixty minutes reading the newspaper or watching the news on TV, spend six minutes reading God's word. If you spend sixty minutes updating your face-book page and reading everyone's wall, spend six minutes in God's word. Don't just get up every day and go to bed every night without having read the word of God at least once! One day your unbelieving friend or neighbour will ask, "What is the content of your faith?" Oh may we be able to give the reason of our sure hope and faith in Jesus Christ, with chapter and verse.

May we be able to give say that our faith and sure hope rests on God's sure word, nothing less but the glorious gospel! That is what we stand on, everything else is sinking sand! Amen.