

Felix's Missed Opportunity

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[0 : 00] Now, if you turn with me, please, to the passage we read in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 24. We'll read from verse 24, and we're looking at this passage from verse 24 down to the end of the chapter.

After some days, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus, and as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you, and so on.

Last week, we looked at, remember, at Agrippa, where we find in the chapter 26, Paul speaking to Agrippa, and how Agrippa heard the gospel from Paul and how he himself felt under the gospel. Now, here we come back a little bit to Felix, the governor of the province, and him under the gospel as well, and as he hears the gospel, we read here about how he himself reacted to the gospel.

This is Felix's lost opportunity. We called last week's study, Agrippa has lost opportunity, and tonight we're looking at Felix's lost opportunity. If you look at verse 25, this is what he said to Paul, When I have an opportunity, or when I have a more suitable time, when I have a better opportunity, I will summon you. Well, this was Felix's opportunity. The opportunity was there and then, as Paul reasoned of those great issues of the gospel, under the gospel, in the gospel, of righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. Felix reacted in a way that we'll see, but this really was his opportunity. I want to look at this just under three headings very simply.

[2 : 08] First of all, looking at Paul's three-point sermon. Three church ministers have often said, more or less, always preach three-point sermons, whether that's true or not. It's a good example that we're following when Paul here preached a three-point sermon, if you like, because he focused on three things in the sermon, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment. These were his three main points. And then secondly, we'll look at Paul's method in preaching, and that really will take us into the meaning of this word reasoned. After verse 25, as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment. And that word reasoned is very important because it tells us how Paul, how Paul presented his message. He didn't just throw the thing out and leave it carelessly before Felix and leave it to himself to work through what he should do about it. He reasoned. It was something that really was designed in the structure of what Paul was saying to get into Felix's mind and conscience. He reasoned about these great truths. And thirdly, we're going to look at Felix's response when he put Paul off. When he put Paul off by saying he would get an opportunity, this was immediately after. It says that he was alarmed. He was very scared. He was terrified, in fact, as he heard about these things that Paul was preaching in the gospel, these three issues. These are three points, really. Paul's three-point sermon, Paul's method in preaching, and Felix's response to Paul's preaching. Now, for the three-point sermon, you know, it's important, actually, that you notice here in verse 24 that Paul preached about faith in Christ Jesus. That's really a summary, if you like, of what the sermon focused on. It was faith in Christ Jesus, something absolutely central to the Christian life, something central to our coming to know Jesus as our Savior, to have salvation through Christ in our own possession. Faith in Christ Jesus, trust in Christ Jesus, coming to place our lives in the hands of Jesus, different ways of describing it, but it's all to do with trusting in

Jesus, with presenting the Jesus that is the Savior in the gospel so that we may trust in him. And that's what Paul was really doing as Felix heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But then, look, as he's giving us this account. He breaks that down for us. That was the main theme of the sermon. That was the burden of the sermon. But he broke that down into three points. Faith in Christ Jesus involves righteousness. Faith in Christ Jesus involves self-control. Faith in Christ Jesus involves knowledge or acknowledgement and preparation for the coming judgment. And all of

that, as it fits into this faith in Christ Jesus, really brings us face to face with what Paul was preaching. And let's look at these three points in the sermon. Paul began, as he reasoned here, about righteousness and self-control and judgment. He began with righteousness. We believe that this is really Luke, a very careful recorder as he wrote the book of Acts. He was very careful always to look at things like order and arrangements. And this would be probably how Paul actually presented the sermon, beginning with righteousness, with righteousness, and then moving from righteousness to implications of righteousness on a personal level, self-control. And then coming finally to bring the whole thing up to the issue of coming judgment, of the return of Jesus and the judgment of God, the final judgment. Now, he begins here with righteousness. Righteousness is, of course, a very big word in the scriptures. It's a big word in theology. It's something you need some time to actually open up if we're going to focus simply on that tonight. We could spend time on what righteousness is, what the Bible means by righteousness.

Well, you begin with God himself. We're not going to have time to do much more than a brief definition. Righteousness, you begin with God. God is righteous. It means that God, in the perfection of his being, is someone who is altogether perfect and upright. There is no darkness with God. There is no unrighteousness. There is no sin. There is no unholiness with God. He is perfectly righteous.

And the standard that he sets is a standard of righteousness for us human beings. And as he himself is righteous, so he requires righteousness of us. The righteousness that basically is a meeting with God's own standard. In other words, when you come to be a Christian, when you come to know God as your God and Jesus as your Savior, you come to think about justification, a big word in the Bible, New Testament especially, justification through faith in Christ. It means that through faith in Christ, we come to have righteousness by God put on our account. We come to be accounted by him as righteous, with the righteousness of Christ.

The righteousness that is perfect, that meets with God's own standard, God's own requirement. That's why faith in Christ is so vital, because that's what puts you in connection with the person of Christ, and therefore with the righteousness that's in him. And so that righteousness is really, first of all, a standing in Christ, a standing before God, a certain status, if you like, legally, in terms of spiritually, legally, in relationship with God. God looks upon that relationship as one that is perfectly acceptable to him and approved of by him. But then it follows on, you see, into our way of life and our behavior, our conduct. Because it's one thing to say that in our justification, we have righteousness, the very righteousness of Christ. And in terms of status, that meets with God's approval. But then we have to live our life. We have practically to live our life in this world. And what the Bible tells us is that this is the other side of righteousness, this practical righteousness, which you can see is essentially the same thing as living a holy life.

[9 : 09] Living a life that seeks to be as near as you possibly can to the likeness of Christ himself. Of course, we're not dependent on our own efforts and our own ability to actually bring that about, though we have to apply ourselves to it. The Holy Spirit works in the matter of our sanctification, which is basically working in God's people to make them holy, to make them righteous practically.

So that the two things, the legal righteousness that you have in your justification, the practical righteousness that is going on in the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, as a Christian, that's what meets with God's righteous standard, a standard of righteousness.

Our fallenness in Adam has not displaced the need to actually come to be righteous before him. The fact that we cannot ourselves create this righteousness does not mean it's not required of us. That's what we're trying to say. That's why God has provided it for us in Christ Jesus. So we come to Paul's sermon, faith in Christ Jesus, speaking about faith in Christ Jesus, and that means, first of all, essentially righteousness, a righteous standing, a righteous relationship with God, a righteous way of life being pursued.

And that means our own personal conduct too. So our relationship to God, our relationship to other people, righteousness is something that touches upon all of that area of human life.

[10 : 55] And it does not mean that those who are not Christians or not even interested in being Christians don't come under this requirement. We were talking, we were singing actually of the righteousness of God, singing of the righteous requirement of God, the righteousness of God's law.

Righteousness is something that God requires of all human beings. There's no one in the Bible you find it suggested that God does not require righteousness of anyone who doesn't profess to be a Christian.

That he doesn't require the same standard of every other human being along with his people. For all of us tonight. For the whole world of humanity tonight. God has only one standard.

And whatever people follow, whatever religion they belong to, outwith the Christian religion, or no religion at all, it does not displace the requirement, the demand of God.

And the fact that we ourselves cannot give him this righteousness, there's really no excuse whatsoever. Because he's provided it all for us. In Christ Jesus.

[12:04] And that's his alone. You know, you can understand from that why in John's gospel you find it stated quite categorically that there is only one way to God to know the Father.

God is our Father. Where Jesus himself said plainly, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.

And of course that's thrown out many times today in the world in which we live. In certain species of theology, that's no longer acceptable. It's far too tight. It's far too narrow.

It's far too restrictive. It's not liberal enough. It doesn't give enough scope to human beings to provide something themselves towards their salvation. Why do you want something more than what you have in Jesus?

Isn't it all there? That's why Christ says, No one comes to the Father but by me. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. And that's here, you could say really within what Paul is saying, although it's not specified here.

[13:10] So righteousness, first thing that he mentions. Secondly, self-control. Now, here's something for Felix to think about along with righteousness. Righteousness, as God's standard, demands a self-controlled life.

And self-control is not something Felix was known for. He was a rather nasty man. He's spoken about in history as someone who was greedy, someone who was really full of avariciousness, greed, corruption.

His wife Bernice here. She was actually, sorry, his wife Drusilla was Jewish. And she was actually a daughter of Herod Agrippa I.

Not the Herod in the chapter 26 we saw last time, but his father. The Herod mentioned in Acts chapter 12, who put James to death and imprisoned Peter, who was an enemy of the church, against the gospel.

She was his daughter. And she had left her husband, who was actually a king in Syria, in order to marry Felix. This is really a web of corruption. We mentioned this about the Herods last time, but here Drusilla is really just part of that setup, of that debauchery, of that horrendous amount of deviancy and immorality.

[14:30] She belongs to that, as does Felix. So here is Paul, you see, knowing this very well. Here is Paul, and he's now preaching the gospel to him.

And what does he focus on? He focuses on righteousness, and then he moves to self-control.

Because he wants this man to know that God will have him to control his life. That God will actually have him, and require of him to live a life of discipline.

A life where he keeps in check his sinful tendencies, which he's not doing. Now, you go to the gospel, and to the Bible, of course, you find that as Paul writes his letters to, for example, Galatians, self-control is something that he mentions very clearly in that, where in Galatians chapter 6, you see he's talking there about, chapter 5, rather, he's talking about the fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 22 of Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Self-control is one of the marks of a Christian life, of a converted life, of a life that's been renewed by God, a life that sees things differently to what we once did, or to how the world sees it.

[15:55] You find the same in Colossians, essentially the same Colossians chapter 3, where Paul is arguing from the perspective of being in Christ. Verse 3, he says, you have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God.

You're anchored in Christ, you're joined to Christ, you're receiving your life from Christ, therefore, he says, therefore, you see, there's implications to that.

therefore, put to death what is earthly in you, what is fleshly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry.

On account of these, the wrath of God is coming, put away anger and wrath and malice and slander and obscene talk from your mouth and so on. You see, he's saying, that's the opposite of a

self-controlled life and when you come to know Christ, you come to know something of self-control, you come to know his standard, not your own, not the world, not whatever is supposed to Christ. And of course, that's such a crucial emphasis in the society that you and I belong to today, isn't it? And you look around you, you're not, you're not actually looking at a society that's known for self-control, are you?

[17 : 12] It's the very opposite, isn't it? It's very often the very opposite of self-control of that Christian standard because people will actually say to you by and large, you know, who are you to actually tell me how to live even though you're a minister of the gospel?

That's not my business. I have nothing to do with the gospel. I live my own life. I'm in charge of my own life. I take my own decisions. I'm not on anybody else's authority but my own. I've got my own mind.

I know what to think. I know what my aspirations are. Or do you think of abortion? A woman insisting that she's in control and charge of her body as it's very mistakenly often put.

The life inside her pre-birth is not her life. It's an independent life in the sense in which it's an individual life though still dependent on the mother. don't accept the idea that a woman has control over her body therefore abortion is acceptable.

The question is who dies? The individual that's within the womb dies. That's who. It's one of the examples, the primary, one of the main examples today in which you find the lack of self-control and a hostility to self-control.

[18 : 37] find the same thing in other areas of life of sexual conduct. All of those ideas that you come across that are sadly now being presented to young people, to children, well certainly to young adults as well in terms of self-control.

The idea is not keep a control of your desires, of your sexual proclivities but rather just exercise it but be careful as long as it doesn't end up in pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies.

It's acceptable, it's right. And to actually suggest that sexual relations are only acceptable to God within the relationship of marriage, you're laughed out of court.

You say, where did you come from? What century did you belong to? Why is that? Because self-control is really no longer at the heart of people's thinking.

It's just self-advancement, self-promotion. What seems good to me is what I want to live my life by. Well, here is Paul saying to this unrighteous man, to this man who lacks self-control, to this wicked man in many ways, he's arguing, faith in Jesus Christ, self-control.

[19 : 57] control your urges, your appetites, your lusts, because that's what the Christian standard is, that's what righteousness is about.

That's what Paul is actually arguing with Felix about, or as we'll see, reasoning with Felix. So that's self-control, that's such an essential part of living a Christian life, and it's a marker very often of a life that's not dedicated to Christ and doesn't want to know of the Christian life.

But when you come to give your life to Christ, it's under his control, and that means self-control on your part, being dedicated to the Lord's standard.

But then thirdly, he moves on to coming judgment. And you see, logically, that's why I'm saying at the beginning, this seems to be the way that Paul structured his sermon, beginning with righteousness, the standard of God, then moving on to self-control, the implications of that for a personal life and conduct, and now he comes to this third matter of coming judgment, the judgment of God.

You see, Paul is bringing the governor, Felix, face to face with the governor. And he's saying to him, yes, there's righteousness, whether you accept it or reject it, doesn't really make any difference to this particular matter.

[21 : 19] Whether you exercise self-control or not, it doesn't make any difference as far as this is concerned, there is a coming judgment. What he's really saying to Felix is, your lack of self-control is going to come under God's scrutiny.

God's going to examine your life. God's going to hold your life up before you in the coming judgment. And he's going to require of you, he's saying to Felix through this, he's going to require an account for you.

Why did you live your life this way? Why didn't you listen to Paul? Why didn't you comply with the standard that he set before you? So he's reminding, he's reminding Felix of this coming judgment.

So the gospel reminds us of these three things too. We have to come back to these central issues of the gospel time and again because they're often reiterated and re-emphasized in the Bible. And preachers of the gospel have to take note of what is most frequently mentioned in the Bible in terms of the gospel. And these three things are mentioned very frequently. That's why we have to come back to them.

[22 : 27] That's why I have to remind myself about them. I have to face God as a judge for what I've said in this pulpit or anywhere else and for my own personal life just as you have. Every single one of us individually.

We have to reckon with this tonight. There is a coming judgment. That coming judgment impinges on what kind of life I'm living now. It impinges on what my standard of life is now or what my relationship to God is or will be when it comes to judge us.

Very solemn thing, friends, but so incredibly important, so critically important to a human life. So there tonight is the measure with which God is measuring you and me.

Righteousness, self-control, coming judgment, where do they feature in our thinking, in our conclusions, in our lifestyles. Let me move on to the second, more briefly, the second point.

That's Paul's method in teaching. I'm just going to skip through this fairly quickly because this word reasoned is important. As he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment, Felix was alarmed.

[23 : 31] You see, Paul wasn't content just to put the truth in any sort of arrangement or form before Felix. Felix actually knew the gospel. Look at verse 22. You go back there and you see that Felix having a rather accurate knowledge of the way.

Now, the way here is in the book of Acts that's how faith in Christ had come to be described or commitment to Christ, the Christian way, the Christian walk.

The way is how it came to be recognized and spoken about commonly. And so Felix knew that. Felix having a rather accurate knowledge of the way. Paul didn't lose his opportunity.

He knew that for all that Felix was living a debauched life, he knew the truth. He knew about the way. He knew about Jesus. He knew about God.

And so Paul addressed this message accordingly. And that's how it is for you and for me, isn't it, tonight?

[24 : 36] I doubt if there's anyone here who doesn't know the way already, who doesn't know about the faith and about Christ and about God's standard. And the business of the preaching of the gospel is to reason the great truths of the gospel and of the Bible so that they're carefully argued and carefully aimed and that the consequences of it are set out for us.

You see, Paul is, what he's doing is he's really, he recognizes the fact that the truth of God is designed to do this very thing and not only that, but the mind, the human mind, even our depraved and fallen human mind hasn't lost its ability to think, hasn't lost its ability to reach conclusions, to meditate, to assess, to reflect.

and that's why the truth has to be reasoned into our minds and souls. God has given you a mind and in giving you a mind, God has given you the ability to think, to reason, to reach conclusions, to spend time dwelling upon certain points, to meditate.

One of the most important things for us really is to come and spend time after the preaching of the gospel myself as a preacher as well as you hearers and just, as somebody put it, just meditating upon what was heard.

It acts a bit like the harrows did or do in relation to the seed that's put onto the ground. The harrows work that seed into the ground and the seed of the gospel and the seed of God's truth needs to be worked into our minds.

[26 : 28] How do you do that? By reasoning. It's reasoned, I hope, to you. This is what we try to do in preaching the gospel, that we try and reason the truth of God.

We don't just throw it out to you and say, there you are, get on with it. We use the information in the Bible itself to reason, as Paul did, or not anything like his ability to reason the truth, that you have the ability to reason for yourself, to think, to think it through, to dwell upon it.

Let it sink into your soul. Do that. Please do that. Keep doing that. Don't just go home and put the telly on and just think about something else.

Take some time to reason, to think, to meditate, to dwell upon what you've heard. So important. It's vital.

So Paul's method in preaching was that he reasoned. And the great thing about God's truth is it's designed for our human minds. It's designed not only for our human minds prior to coming to know Christ so that the truth makes its way into our mind or conscience, but after you become a Christian, after you're saved, when you come to know the Lord, you don't go to another truth.

[27 : 44] in order to feed your mind, it's the same truth. The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it's effective as God used it in order to come to know Christ, but equally, it's effective and important to feed your soul from as you've come to know him and as your life goes on.

That's one of the most important things to remember, that design of God's truth fits the design of your mind, of your soul. So he reasoned, I'll just leave it at that for tonight, he reasoned his sermon into Felix's soul and then Felix's response.

As he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, now you get the impression from that, that Felix interrupted as Paul was going on in preaching about these three great points, Felix became alarmed and he put a stop to it and he said, go your way, I don't want to hear any more just now.

It's really effective what he's saying but you see this word alarmed, it's important too. It's not just a little bit of fear, it's not just something like goosebumps going up your arm.

He was terrified. He'd been brought face to face with God, with God's righteousness, with God's requirement of self-controlled life, with God's coming judgment and nobody can be brought face to face with that to confront that without to some extent or other feeling something of what Paul, of what Felix felt before Paul.

[29 : 24] If you've never felt a tremor of fear, you've never come to know God's truth properly. as you think of the immensity of God, of the importance of God's righteousness for you, of all that Jesus suffered and did, as we saw this morning, on the cross, dying, the death of the cross.

As you come to appreciate in a measure, it'll only be in a measure, but even in a measure, something of that, of the enormity of that, of the hugeness of what that is, the Son of God in our nature, coming to this.

As you think of the coming judgment, having to face God, having your life exposed before God, every single issue of your life known to Him and taken account of in that coming judgment.

Don't listen to the world out there that says that's just a figment of human imagination, that's just something the church invented to keep people under their control. It's not. It's part of the gospel. It's a fact.

It's something that's true. One day, you and I are going to come to stand before Christ, before His judgment throne, before God, the judge of all the earth.

[30 : 46] And He's going to require demand of you and for me in account of our life. You can't say to Him at that day, Lord, sorry, I need more sleep. I need more time to think about it.

You can't do what Felix did here with Paul. You can't say to God when He comes in the judgment, I'll send for you when it's more convenient.

This will be it. This will be it. This is the final assize, the final tribunal, the final court, final judgment. That's why Felix trembled. He knew his life didn't measure up. He knew something about the grandeur of God, the righteousness of God. He knew something about the enormity of this coming judgment.

And he was alarmed. He trembled. He was scared. It really got to him. He was like, he was going to be there. He was going to be there. He was going to be there. Well, it doesn't mean that in order to be saved, you and I need to come to a tremendous experience as if you were just dangling over the very edge of hell.

[31 : 54] But you need to have something of an experience of the tremendousness of God and of His righteousness and of the coming judgment and deal seriously with that and realize the implications of not being prepared, of not having the righteousness that will actually meet with God's standard on that day.

And if you're in Christ tonight, you don't have worries of that kind because that's going to stand you. That's the greatness of what Christ has done. He's provided everything we need to stand in the judgment of God.

That's why in the offer of the gospel, it's so vital that you and I really realize that God is really saying, here is all that I have done so that you might be saved and might have righteousness.

You don't need anything else. And Felix, as he interrupted Paul, he eased his conscience with, when I have a more opportune time, I will send for you.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. In other words, he's really saying, he's trying to pretend really that actually he does want to be a Christian, which he doesn't.

[33 : 13] But he's trying to pacify his conscience by assuring himself that there will be other occasions, that there will be better occasions. This is his occasion. This is his opportunity. And he's lost it.

And he's missed it. Don't do the same with your own life. What opportunity is there if you're not yet saved tonight? What better opportunity is there than now?

What assurance do you have that you'll have a better opportunity next week or tomorrow? A better opportunity is a delusion of the devil. He doesn't want you to believe this is your moment.

This is the time. This is the critical moment for accepting Christ if you haven't done it already.

Remember that God's today is not tomorrow.

It's now. The devil's tomorrow may never happen. And he remained unchanged. He sent for Paul often.

[34 : 14] And he wanted some, he hoped that some money would be given him by Paul. What a desperately wicked man. What a tragedy of a human figure he is. After all he heard.

After this great three-point sermon. After being alarmed under it. After the effect of that being one that really filled him with fear. What does he do? He sends Paul away and says, whenever an opportunity better than now I'll call for you.

But actually, as we read there, he was hoping that Paul would give him some money. That he would get rich over this prisoner. How despicable.

How hard-hearted. How close to the gospel is that? Wouldn't you have thought that hearing such a sermon, even if he didn't quite finish it, would be enough to change this man?

Not so. He closed his heart against it. And when for two years he kept asking for Paul and conversed with him for the whole two years.

[35 : 20] And then he was replaced by Porcius Festus, who was actually a better man than Felix. But desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

No change there. Please look at this carefully. Please dwell on this carefully if you're not yet committed to Christ.

I don't say that in a condemning way. It's not my business to be condemning from this pulpit.

Preaching the gospel is not about preaching our condemnation our dissatisfaction, our disapproval of certain ways of life.

We preach Christ. We preach God. We preach God's standard. And if God disapproves, that's one thing. That's what you have to take into account, not what I think of it. In 1981, in Minnesota, a radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California.

And the police were carrying out a very urgent search for that car for the vehicle and the driver. So they placed announcements on local radio stations to try and contact the thief.

[36 : 40] Because you see in the car, on the front seat of the car, was a box of biscuits that, unknown to the thief, had been laced with rat poison.

Because the owner of the car had intended using these biscuits that had been infected with a rat poison as rat bait. So the police were desperate to catch this man, not in order to recover the car, primarily, but in order to save his life.

That became the great concern, to save the life of the thief, rather than recover the car. And so often, when we run away from God, we feel it's really rather to escape his punishment.

But in actual fact, running away from God is eluding his rescue. It's turning your back on his rescue.

Don't do that. Running away from God is disastrous. You can run to him. He invites you to do that. But escaping from him is impossible.

[37 : 57] And eluding his rescue is something that many will regret for all eternity. The three-point sermon, Felix's reaction, and the way in which he remained no different to what he was.

Righteousness, self-control, judgment, to come. May God bless his words to us. Let's conclude.

And we're singing in conclusion from Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 at page 38. Tune this time is Arlington, singing verses one to five. words that, of course, set out for us and the importance of confessing our sin coming to God and the blessedness of all who have found forgiveness with God whose sins have been covered by God from his sight.

That's basically righteousness. It involves forgiveness of sin. How blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, whose debt is cancelled in God's grace.

There's no deceit in him. Verses one to five to God's praise. whisper. Oh, blessed the one who hath received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered From God's face Whose death is cancelled In God's grace There's no deceit in him When I kept silent All my bones

[40 : 20] With going whereward I Beneath your heart I felt a trap O day and night My strength was sad As in a summer ground Then I laid bare my sin To you the guilt That lay within I said, O Lord I have transgressed

And you forgave When I confess You pardon all my sin I'll go to the main door This evening after the benediction Now may grace and mercy and peace From God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit You would And you would To you To you Wait