

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 18TH–19TH // BOOK OF ACTS

MINISTRY IN THESSALONICA (ACTS 17:1–9)

AFTER PAUL AND SILAS LEAVE PHILIPPI, THEY TRAVEL TO THE GREEK CITY OF THESSALONICA

Once again, they returned to their basic missionary strategy—preaching first in the synagogue to anyone who was ethnically Jewish.

- Thessalonica was a very diverse port city that contained a significant Jewish population.
- On three different Sabbaths, Paul reasoned, explained, proved, and proclaimed.

REASONED, EXPLAINED, PROVED

Sometimes, we need to help people think through, understand, and form judgments about the person of Christ through logic and reason. This takes time, patience, intentionality, and humility!

PROCLAIM

Other times, we are to declare what we know to be true with boldness and confidence.

WHEN IT COMES TO PAUL'S STYLE OF TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS, THERE'S NEVER REALLY A "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" APPROACH.

It's as if he was motivated more by others truly understanding and receiving the gospel than by simply checking a box (1 Corinthians 9:20–23).

- "Incarnational" ministry is where we live amongst people in our community, love them, and share Christ with them in our action and speech.

The "Paul method" of loving and reaching says that before we seek to correct, fix, and tell people how wrong they are, we should first seek to know them and understand what they believe and why they believe it.

- This kind of approach takes genuine compassion, love, patience, and willingness to let God be the one who does the work, not us.
- It's loving people more than agendas/programs.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THIS KIND OF PATIENT, COMPASSIONATE, AND INTENTIONAL MINISTRY?

A good number of Jews and Greeks believed and "joined" Paul and Silas as Jesus followers.

- Sometimes, when it comes to sharing Christ with others, we get impatient and can be tempted to give up or force a decision on them when they don't fully understand the gospel.
- Other times, we're not motivated by love.

WHENEVER THERE IS SPIRITUAL VICTORY AND IMPACT, THERE IS SURE TO BE SPIRITUAL ATTACK AND PUSHBACK.

In this instance, it came in the form of Jewish religious leaders who were jealous of Paul and Silas's ministry (v. 5).

- These religious leaders went to the "wicked men" of the city—troublemakers who hung around the marketplace because they had nothing else to do.

THIS GROUP FORMED A MOB AND WENT TO ATTACK THE HOUSE OF JASON (VS. 5–6).

We don't know much about Jason, but we do know he was a Believer, and he was hosting Paul, Silas, and the other missionaries in his home in Thessalonica.

- Apparently, when the mob attacked the house, the missionaries weren't home, so they dragged out Jason and some other Christians.

"THESE MEN WHO HAVE TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN HAVE COME HERE TOO!"

The plan of the Jewish leaders was to accuse the Christians of disturbing the peace and claim that they spoke out against Caesar.

- Their plan apparently worked, as the city authorities were "upset" when they heard these things (v. 8). Jesus' claim of Lordship is what caused such a ruckus.

So, Jason and the others gave them money as a security to guarantee that Paul and Silas would be sent away from Thessalonica (v. 9).

- Paul would later write that this was an "act of Satan" to shut down the ministry in this city (1 Thessalonians 2:18).
- Nevertheless, the church there grew and prospered, and Paul eventually wrote to them in the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

The relationships that mean the most to us have a way of changing our lives completely.

- The idea that Jesus is Lord will turn your world completely upside down if you accept it fully.
- This is what prevents so many from receiving the gospel and following Jesus—the idea that there's another king besides us (Jesus).
- Has Jesus turned your world upside down?

EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY (ACTS 17:10–15)

After the incident in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas were sent away by the cover of night to a place called Berea (v. 10).

- Berea was a small city, 50 miles west of Thessalonica. It had a history as a sanctuary city for when people would get into trouble in the larger city.
- Apparently, the plan was for Paul to hang out in Berea until things died down a bit.

In Berea, Paul and Silas entered a Jewish synagogue and encountered a group of people who were of "noble character."

- These Jews were commended for "receiv[ing] the word with eagerness" and "examin[ing] the Scriptures daily" to see if what Paul and Silas were teaching lined up with Scripture.
- It's as if this group is mentioned to give us a profile for how we are to accept new teaching.

THE BEREANS WERE...

Open-minded. Even though the message they were receiving was different, they were willing to hear it and put away their social, political, and even religious biases in order to know truth.

- Critical thinkers. They were committed to *personally* checking and comparing Paul's teachings to the truth of Scripture. They "examined the Scriptures" daily.

Because of their devotion to truth, the text tells us that many of them believed and came to faith in Christ, as did many Greek men and women of high standing (v. 12).

- God makes it clear so many times in His Word that those who are genuinely seeking truth will find it (Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Psalm 27:8).
- God will honor those who search after His heart and His will, but are we willing to search?

Even though the Berean church was experiencing amazing things, the problems from Thessalonica followed Paul and Silas (v. 13).

- The troublemaking group heard what was happening, came up to Berea, and began to agitate and stir up the crowds until the church had to send Paul away from the town.
- The plan was to get Paul away safely until Silas and Timothy could rejoin him later (v. 15).

ATHENS (ACTS 17:16–21)

IN THE FIRST CENTURY, ATHENS WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE NEW YORK CITY, PARIS, ROME, OR LOS ANGELES.

It was the center for influence all across the known world—both intellectually and culturally.

- Apparently, it was also a center for idolatry.
- Paul was deeply distressed when he saw the paganism and idolatry in the city (v. 16).
- When God's Spirit is inside of us, influencing our spirit, this is a fairly common occurrence.

INSTEAD OF WAITING ON HIS TEAM, PAUL BEGAN GOING TO THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE MARKETPLACE AND SPREAD THE NEWS OF JESUS.

During his ministry, Paul encountered a group of "Epicurean and Stoic" philosophers (v. 18) who conversed with him and wanted to hear more of what he had to say.

- The Christian worldview stands in stark contrast to the predominant philosophies of our world. The Epicureans believed that the highest good was a tranquil life free from pain, fear, anxiety, and superstition. They believed the gods existed but did not intervene in human affairs.
- The Stoics believed that the universe was governed by the *Divine Logos* or "world soul."
- Stoics stressed living in harmony with nature, pursuing virtue through reason, self-control, and accepting one's circumstances.

PHILOSOPHIES OF OUR DAY AND AGE?

Some people pursue comfort, entertainment, and personal happiness. *If there's a God, we can't possibly know Him/Her/It personally, and God just wants us to be happy* (Epicurean).

- To the Epicureans, the gospel says that God is not distant but personal and actively rules, calls us to repentance, and will judge the world.
- Life is about more than having a good time.

Some people pursue discipline, grit, resilience, emotional control, success, achievement, and mastery. Whether God exists is irrelevant; what matters is living wisely and virtuously (Stoics).

- To the Stoics, the gospel says that salvation is not achieved through self-mastery but through the risen Jesus Christ.
- Human reason, success, and virtue are not enough; people need reconciliation with God through Christ.

BOTH OF THESE PHILOSOPHIES, AS DIFFERENT AS THEY ARE, DEMONSTRATE THAT HUMANITY IS SEARCHING FOR MEANING AMID LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS.

As these philosophers engaged in dialogue with Paul, they called him a "babbler"—basically stating that he was eclectic, that he didn't belong in any of their categories and had picked up bits and pieces of philosophy (v. 18).

- Paul's ideas were intriguing though.

The idea of a resurrection intrigued them so much that they invited Paul to the Areopagus to explain this "new teaching" to the council of philosophers who would meet there to discuss new ideas (vs. 19–20).

- As intellectually superior and refined as they may have seemed, the text says that the Athenians spent all their time "telling or hearing something new" (v. 21).

THE AREOPAGUS (ACTS 17:22–34)

HUMANITY'S SEARCH FOR GOD (VS. 22–23)

Paul began where the Athenians were. They were deeply spiritual, but the "unknown god" was the One they were truly seeking.

- Even if people aren't religious, we're all spiritual.
- Every heart worships something—success, family, comfort/pleasure, politics, self, or God.
- What are we actually searching for in the worship of our lesser gods? Meaning? Security? Love?

THE GOD WHO CREATED EVERYTHING (VS. 24–25)

The one true God can't be contained in temples, shrines, or crystals—He's the Creator, He's the giver of life, breath, and everything else, and He doesn't need anything from us.

- We often choose our beliefs about God based on our own preferences, not on the reality of who God truly is. God is who He is regardless of what we prefer Him to be.

THE GOD WHO IS NEAR (VS. 26–29)

God is intensely personal. He created every nation/ethnic group. He sovereignly directs history, and He placed you in your distinct location in time, space, and history so you would seek Him (and He is not far from you).

- Your life is not an accident—God has placed you where you are today for His purpose and plans to draw you to Himself.

THE GOD WHO CALLS US TO REPENTANCE (V. 30)

Before Christ, God patiently tolerated humanity's spiritual ignorance, but now that Jesus has been revealed, He calls every person everywhere to repent.

- Jesus is not just offering us life advice on how to be better; He's calling for total surrender from self-rule to God's rule.
- Jesus is offering to turn your world upside down.

THE RISEN JUDGE (V. 31)

There is a coming day of judgment, Jesus is the appointed Judge, and His resurrection is God's proof that Jesus is Lord of all.

- Did Jesus truly rise from the dead or not? If He didn't, you must explain what happened. But if He did, what demands does that now make on your life?
- All history is moving towards ultimate accountability.

CURIOSITY, SKEPTICISM, OR FAITH? (VS. 32–34)

- What do you want out of life? Where are you searching to find meaning, purpose, security, acceptance, and love?
- What if the things of this world that are failing to satisfy the deepest longings of your soul are simply counterfeit and false gods?
- There's another King besides you: Jesus. Has Jesus turned your world upside down?