

Sermon No. 406

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

The book of Acts

CHAPTER 17

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Dean Carter

2-14-2016

ACTS 17: PAUL'S MISSIONARY GROUP TRAVEL SOUTHERN GREECE

17:1-4 Paul Preaches Christ at Thessalonica

NKJV ¹ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

- 100km . . . no travel guide . . . no grizzly details

² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ (Messiah)."

- He reasoned = he opened the OT . . . where all the necessary evidence was

⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas

- Encouraging . . . but you cannot please everyone!

17:5-10 Assault on Jason's House

NKJV ⁵ But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." ⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

NLT ⁸ They were thrown into turmoil

⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go

- They forced Jason to pay a bond!

¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea . . .

- Mob violence not new
- The root cause . . . ENVY
- The complaint . . . “our world has been turned upside down!”

Is that such a bad thing?

Don't you wish that could be said of us! Jesus was constantly turning the thinking, the power structures of this world upside down!

- Ironical . . . GOD is trying to turn the world *right side-up* again

Lesson: If you leave out the envious Jewish leaders . . . in general people do fear the message . . . fear instability

- We know the GOSPEL makes a Christian a *better* citizen . . . they don't know that!

17:10-15 Paul Ministers at Berea

¹⁰ . . . When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews

- Hold on Paul! Every time you arrive . . . you enter a synagogue!

¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

What beautiful lessons the Bereans give us

1. Be ready to listen carefully to what the preacher has to say!
2. Be ready to search the Scriptures too! Be sure he is telling the truth!

3. Be gracious

[1] Paul isn't offended by their need to check him out

[2] Despite their obvious knowledge . . . *they never became critical*

¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there

- This the fifth city Paul has been run out of by an angry mob!

¹⁵ So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

17:16-21 Paul Preaches to the Philosophers at Athens

- Tough assignment . . . Athens is the 'intellectual capital' of the ancient world

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus (Greek Council), saying, "May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

- This is a different type of open-mindedness!
- The type that people have today . . . share anything but Jesus Christ!

17:22-31 Paul's Address before the Areopagus

- This is the classic presentation of the truth . . . same message as Thessalonica

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

- Paul isn't trying to win their favor . . . being religious can lead people away from GOD!

²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

- Radical approach . . . Paul doesn't put them . . . he doesn't mock the 'unknown god'

²⁴ "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

- The 'unknown' god is the One who created us . . . and since He created us we should:
 - a. Seek Him
 - b. Get right with Him
 - c. Try to understand Him
 - d. Worship Him

- Paul had more to say . . . but mention of the resurrection bit them!

³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them

Evaluate the ministry of Paul

Some suggest Paul was very disillusioned

- He is 2,000km from home . . . he has been beaten . . . arrested . . . imprisoned . . . run out of town . . . as far as the results go . . . it has been relatively slim . . .
 - a. At Philippi . . . Lydia and the jailer
 - b. At Thessalonica
 NLT ⁴ Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women
 - c. At Berea
 NLT ¹² As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men
 - d. At Athens
 NLT ³⁴ but some joined him and became believers
- Overall it wasn't huge

Some even criticize Paul's sermon in Athens because he doesn't reference the Cross or quote from the OT

Some think he compromised his message for an intellectual audience . . . *that is why there were very few conversions*

- Those who argue this say when he went to Corinth he did preach the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5) . . . and because this he saw much better results

The Heart of the Matter: The greatest joy in life for Paul was found in passionately pursuing the mission of Jesus . . . no matter how dangerous

For that reason, it is dangerous to judge the content of the message *by the magnitude of the response*

Numbers never featured in Paul's thinking

Paul only ever desired to preach the Good News . . . as a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ . . . and then to encourage those who believed . . . to see them grow

- This is what we see in the epistles . . . the letters to the churches
- Paul is thankful for the spiritual growth . . . not numerical growth

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (this was his first letter written to a congregation)
Philippians 1:1-8

Numbers should never be the primary focus of any ministry

Q. Are each of us to have ministry?

- Yes, we are mandated to communicate the Good News about Christ
- We are to have the same concern Paul had for lost souls
- If that were so . . . we would want to fulfil the Great Commission

What has Paul taught us about being an effective witness?

1. It isn't about numbers

2. It isn't about us

- See that fellow up there, he is one of my converts . . . whose convert!?
- Everything is about Christ . . . dependent on the Spirit of God to open the heart

John MacArthur . . . You know, somebody said to me one time years ago, "Do you get distressed when people don't respond to the gospel? When they don't come to receive Jesus Christ?" And I say, "Well there's a sense in which my heart is sad, but God never called me to save people, He only called me to preach the gospel to them. The saving is his business. So I don't have a lot of anxiety about that. If I've been faithful to clearly discharge the presentation of the gospel, that's all I can do. I'm not going to manipulate them to do something that isn't genuine. And I'm not going to assume that I'm the guy that gets people saved

3. Our witness of Christ is linked with that of the Holy Spirit

John 15:26

KJV 26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me

- Like an attorney . . . the Holy Spirit will point to the truth about Christ

John 15:27

KJV 27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning

- Like a witness called to the stand . . . we bear witness because we know Him
- You may think . . . I wasn't actually there with Him

In court the prosecuting attorney will ask a witness three things . . . tell us what you saw, what you heard and what you felt

- We have seen how Jesus changes people
- We have heard so much about Him
- We feel blessed . . . privileged . . . loved . . . purpose

That makes us a very credible witness!

4. How can we be a more effective witnesses?

- Tell it plainly . . . [Lupe] Start where that person is
- Start with your personal testimony . . . explain how Jesus came into your life
- GOD created us . . . He desires to have a relationship with us . . . but we have been separated from Him by sin
- The Good News . . . is that GOD loved us so much that He was willing to send His Son, to die on the Cross for our sin

Romans 10:9-10

NLT ⁹ If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved

Closing Prayer

Thank You Father, for the great privilege of being ambassadors for Jesus Christ and being given the task of calling men to Him, giving testimony to Him. Father, we can't understand why You would want to have us be Your witnesses who are so frail and failing and yet we know that by the power of the Spirit of God You can use us. We thank You for that privilege. For the glory of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.