

Acts 17:1-9

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[0 : 00] We're going to continue our study of Luke's second account of Jesus' ministry, the book of Acts. So if you have a copy of God's Word, I hope you do today. Please turn to Acts chapter 17.

You've heard me, if you've been here, call this Luke's second account, the Acts of the risen Jesus. Jesus has ascended and he has sent his spirit that now abides in the lives of the disciples.

And they are working out Jesus' purpose in the world by the power of that spirit. So we're going to look today at Acts chapter 17, verses 1 through 9.

And let me remind you before I read that this is God's Word to us. It was written for his glory and for our good. And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

I'll begin reading in verse 1. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, I hope I said this right, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

[1 : 14] And Paul went in as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, setting the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

And Jason has received them, and they're all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.

When they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Now this morning, we're going to structure our study of today's text around four points.

[2 : 28] And they alliterate. Praise God, I love it when this works out. Four points, and they are as follows. I'm going to give them to you quickly, and then we'll go back through them. Number one, gospel courage.

Number two, gospel clarity. Number three, gospel conversion. And number four, gospel conflict. Before we get into those, though, let's look a little bit at the geographic and anthropologic background. What's happening? Where have they gone? What is the significance of the city of Thessalonica?

You can see there in verse one that they pass through, and here we go again. I should practice these words before I get up here. Amphipolis, I think. And Apollonia, maybe.

They came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. The missionary band that we've been observing through chapter 16 is now traveling southwest along the Roman highway known as the Ignatian Way.

[3 : 32] And we see that the first city is about 30 miles from Philippi. The second, another 30 miles from the first.

And Thessalonica, just under 40 miles from the second. I'm avoiding saying those city names again. So what's likely is that Luke's record is suggesting to us that they made a three-day journey from Philippi to Thessalonica.

That's why he lists these cities off. Because nothing significant seems to happen there. And by the phrase, where there was a synagogue of the Jews in Thessalonica, that probably what's being implied is that there were not synagogues in either of the two first cities.

Additionally, some have suggested that the missionary band were traveling on horseback provided by the generosity of the Philippian church since they had recently been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.

If you look back in chapter 16, you can note that. Likely not very strong in frame to travel such a long distance. And certainly, 30 miles in a day, for those of you who are hikers, is a stout trek, even when you're in very good health.

[4 : 51] So it's likely that they're now traveling by the equine way to these cities. Note also, at this point, that Luke returns to the third person pronouns, they.

He's previously in chapter 16 been saying we, now he says they. And so probably, for unknown reasons, Luke did not accompany them to Thessalonica.

He probably stayed in Philippi. We're not sure why. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and had a population of roughly 200,000 people.

So it's a big city. And certainly, by ancient standards, a massive city. Think of the size of Birmingham, which is just a little over 200,000 people, or Chattanooga, which is just a little under 200,000 people.

And that was the city of Thessalonica. And it was significant as it was along the Ignatian Highway, as well as being a port city on the Aegean Sea.

[5 : 54] So lots of traffic is flowing through this place. And we'll see in some future time that it becomes a very significant place for the advance of the gospel in the known world.

Further, before we begin our first point, I want to draw our attention to a phrase in our text in verse 6. The phrase is this. In the accusation, these men who have turned the world upside down.

I love that phrase. These men who have turned the world upside down. I hope someday that I'm accused of the same, having turned the world upside down.

I don't think that their accusers really understood how accurate their accusation was. They meant these men are disrupting our Roman rule.

These men are seeking to set up a different king. But isn't it really true that the world as we know it, the world that we walk in, is already upside down?

[7 : 03] The worship of self and the worship of things rather than the worship of the creator God. So in many senses, this missionary band is really turning the world right side up.

Calling people back to the worship of God in Christ. So, with that in mind, turning the world upside down, let's look at our four points and let's start with gospel courage.

So you note that they travel from Philippi, where they had suffered beating and imprisonment at the hands of the Philippian people.

Not the Philippian believers, but the Philippian people, the Philippians. And what do they do? They travel through these cities and they go back to the same place in a new city that caused all of the trouble in the last city that they were in.

The theme of Christian persecution should not be foreign to you as a student of the Bible. It also should not be foreign to you as a participant in our study of Acts.

[8 : 15] If you've been here on Sunday mornings with us, it shouldn't surprise you that once again we're going to see new conflict and new courage on behalf of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let me run into you in our study of Acts. We have seen the arrest and trial of Peter and John in chapters 3 and 4. The apostles' arrest and beating in chapter 5. Stephen's arrest and martyrdom is the first Christian martyr in chapters 6 and 7.

We get a break for a chapter. The plot to kill Paul in chapter 9. The murder of James and another arrest of Peter in chapter 12. Barnabas and Paul's opposition on Cyprus in chapter 13.

The attempted stoning of Barnabas and Paul in Iconium. And the successful stoning of Paul in Lystra in chapter 14. And Paul and Silas attacked, beaten with rods, and imprisoned in chapter 16. As students of the Gospels, this should not surprise us. Jesus states to the apostles in John chapter 15, verses 18 and 19, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

[9 : 38] Now the if there, if the world hates you, seems kind of hopeful, doesn't it? Like maybe the world won't hate us. Is it possible that it won't?

Jesus seems to say, you may not be hated, but if you are, know that I was hated first. But oh, we must read on to verse 19.

Jesus says in verse 18, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. Verse 19 says, If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. So the if of verse 18 is only conditioned on whether or not you are of the world or chosen out of the world.

So followers of Jesus Christ will meet opposition. Persecution is the norm for the devoted follower of Christ, not the exception.

[10:46] Of course, it will take various forms in various places and times. We are not likely to be stripped naked and beaten with rods and imprisoned in the U.S.

But persecution is still normative for the follower of Jesus. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3.12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

So what does it mean when the world doesn't push back at your faith? It's not a faith in Christ at all. Or it's a very weak faith.

It's not a godly life lived out because of that faith. In the face of normative persecution, Paul and his companions are courageous.

They repeat the same process in another town. They have not come up with a different strategy.

They haven't gotten together and Paul said, Guys, it's really not working out for us. This whole go to the town, go to the synagogue, preach the gospel thing.

[11:53] We keep getting in trouble for doing that. But they press on and they continue to do the same thing once again. Knowing full well that some will believe the gospel and some will reject it.

They're not being naive. They're being bold. Paul recounts in 1 Thessalonians 2.2. So a letter written to these believers that he's here visiting in our text.

Though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

So what is the source of such courage? What is it that builds us up that we would have that kind of courage? It's faith.

It's faith, an unshakable belief in God's providence and in God's goodness. In Deuteronomy 31, verse 6, Moses is addressing the Israelites.

[13:02] Joshua is about to take over and lead them into the promised land. And Moses says to the Israelites, Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you. A wonderful text that speaks of this is found in Romans chapter 8. And I would love for you to turn there with me. Keep your finger in Acts chapter 17. Romans chapter 8, beginning in verse 31. And I'm going to read through verse 39 because I can't help it.

This text is just too good. Paul has just talked about the fact at the beginning of chapter 8 that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So in the midst of our failing as Christians, we have great reason to press on into holiness. He talks in that chapter about the way in which that happens, setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, walking by the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

[14:24] He talks about the way in which we long for that better place where we're delivered from our flesh altogether. That one day, even the creation groans for that to happen as we walk in this very troubled world.

He says to us that all things work for good for those who know God and who are called according to His purpose. And he speaks of God's providential calling of His people together.

And then he says this. So those are these things he's referring to. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Jesus Christ is the one who died, more than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

[15:34] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. And what Paul is saying is that this is a thing that has come to pass and will continue to come to pass.

Will that separate us? No. Verse 37. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is faith in these promises, in this reality, that presses us to courage. By faith we can have an unshakable belief in God's providence, His good rule over the earth, His goodness towards us, which will lead us to boldness.

Do you believe that God is in control of all things? If you lack gospel boldness, you must ask yourself why.

[16:57] Why? Why? Why do I lack gospel boldness? What causes you to shrink back when you should press forward?

Your timidity, your fear to press on, your lack of courage, your lack of boldness is rooted in your lack of faith. And that's where you need to go.

And that's where you need to confess and then turn from that sin. So we see gospel courage that we can all learn from. Secondly, gospel clarity.

Gospel clarity. So they've come to a synagogue in Thessalonica. And Paul goes in as was his custom.

He had made a practice of doing this. Paul began at the synagogue where he could find Jews and what's often referred to as God-fearing Gentiles.

[18:01] Whether these are Gentile people, non-Jewish people that had converted to Judaism, or they were simply people who were there seeking out God and His ways and trying to understand how they could live appropriately in relationship with Him.

And Paul does this, I think, for two reasons. Number one, his commitment to his people. You can read about that in Romans 9, the very beginning of chapter 9. Paul, even as the apostle to the Gentiles, as he calls himself, so had a heart for his people, still wanted them to turn to Christ.

And secondly, I believe it was a practical starting point, as these were people who were familiar with the Scriptures. It was a great place to begin gospel advance with people who were already familiar with what we call our Old Testament, their Scriptures.

And as he's there with them on three Sabbath days, so three weeks, could have been longer. The book of 1 Thessalonians makes us think that he was actually there for a much longer time, but at least these three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them.

And the word that is here translated reasoned is the Greek word *dialogomai*, from which we get the English word dialogue.

[19:19] So he had a conversation with them, and there's a good and proper place for that. This isn't it, but there's a good time to sit and discuss and to reason with people.

So he taught and he fielded questions. He allowed people to ask him questions about what he was thinking. Do not think that when you are given the opportunity to share your faith that you have to go on blast mode.

Rarely is that the way to approach it. Being able to settle into a conversation and meet objections with kindness is an important aspect of faithful gospel witness.

Slow your roll and talk with people. Get to know them. Two axioms for sharing your faith. We're all different. Try to meet people where they are.

Every one of us is different. We have a different background, a different story. Second, and more importantly, we are all the same. We're all living in this greater meta-narrative of God's redemptive work.

[20:31] Meet people where they are and draw them up into that larger story and do that with a conversation. Don't blah and run away.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 3.15, In your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy or sanctify Christ in your hearts.

Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. And just in case your mind goes to defense, you think of being defensive.

Peter says, Yet, do it with gentleness and respect. No one's attacking you personally when they object to the Gospel.

Right? They're attacking the Gospel. Calm down. Address their complaints. You'll also note that He reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

[21 : 30] He reasoned with them from the Scriptures. It is much better in those conversations rather than saying, I think or I believe to say, the Bible says.

Appeal to God's authority. Right? Speak with authority as you speak the Bible to people. It's God's Word. Let people have a problem with God's Word.

I have been approached many times in the past eight years by people who do not like what I say. This is their perspective. And I simply say to them, but did I say that or did the Lord say it?

And when they admit that it's in the Bible, I go, your problem is not with me. Your problem is with God. Repent and believe. Right? Paul employed the Bible.

Right? He employed the Bible. It's what we call our Old Testament. And he clarified their misconceptions about the Christ. That's what's happening here as he's reasoning with them. The common understanding of the day was that the Messiah would come as a conquering political figure.

[22 : 34] That he would restore Israel to its former glory. Right? That the blessings of the Messiah were temporal blessings. That he was coming to earth to set all things right. Pre-Babylonian captivity.

The idea that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead would have been far removed from their thinking. Entirely out of their framework.

Now Luke does not share with us Paul's apologetic process. But he likely spoke of the types of the sacrificial system and referred to texts like Psalm 22, Psalm 16, and Isaiah 53 to prove this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

He put Jesus Christ in the proper context and showed that he had to. He had to suffer and die and be raised again. Paul said this of his time in Thessalonica and of his current ministry in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 3 and 4.

And when I say current ministry I don't mean today. I mean when he wrote it to the Thessalonians. For our appeal does not spring from error or purity or impurity or any attempt to deceive.

[23 : 55] But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak not to please man but to please God who tests our hearts.

So what does this mean for us? What do we do with that? I don't know about you but I don't often encounter strict adherence of Judaism.

So if you encounter someone who is aware of the law of God and their transgression of it you can think of the Jews and the God fearing Gentiles in that framework right?

They're aware of the law of God and they're aware of their transgression of it preach Jesus Christ to them speak to them of the grace that's found in Christ. If you encounter someone who is not aware of the law of God they have no biblical framework at all and their transgression of it they need that first they need to feel the weight of their sinfulness they need to know that they need a savior this is why we preach sin in this church you need to know that you need a deliverer you find those people preach the law of God and the grace of God which is found in Jesus as the Christ and beloved you need to know your bible to do so the old testament spoke of the promised Christ we have in addition to that and the old testament is still a very useful tool to this end but we have in addition to that the new testament the fulfillment of that promise use both use it richly and well in preaching to you week in and week out it is my earnest hope that you are becoming fluent in the gospel that you are growing in your knowledge of the bible that you can speak with greater clarity concerning Jesus Christ this is sometimes not every time sometimes why I walk you through hermeneutic principles how do I study the bible how do I arrive at the view that I hold I want you you need to come in here and you need to be actively seeking you need to want to grow in those ways now sermons are necessary and they are important but they are also not enough you need to be a student of the bible outside of Sunday morning sermon consumption beware the instagram bible it is not sufficient for you to scroll a feed and look at a bit of a verse out of its context with a pretty background those things can be encouraging to your soul but it's not enough beware of your only consumption of God's word being in devotion form 100 words on half a page is not enough to feed your soul it can augment that they're not bad but you need to be feasting!

[27 : 03] and feasting heavily on the word of God when you do listen to sermons you come here on Sunday mornings and you listen to sermons prepare yourself for that come prepared you can get up early on Sundays just like other days of the week pray bring a notepad put a pin in your hand do not look in my preaching for tweetable moments the Southern Baptist leader recently who tweeted an article suggesting that you encourage your people to tweet parts of your sermons in order to

promote your church do not do that invite your friends and your family saved and lost to come and hear preaching we record sermons if you miss a week and you want to go back and try to catch up and stay where we are in the text don't look for little snippets in the things that

I'm saying or anybody here preaches right listen actively right catch the thrust of where we're going one of my greatest frustrations as pastor is the person who comes to me and complains about something I said and entirely misses the context in which I said it will say I don't think it was right for you to say that and I'll go well I said right after that the statement that completely clarified the thing that they got hung up on so listen pay attention to what's going on I have found that I find the most valuable form of rhetoric for me is I like to make big bold statements that make you go what and then explain it I like to lay out premises for you and then explain it I think some of you want it the other way around where I like gently and slowly back into an idea and then drop it at the end and maybe I should try that from what

I mean don't look for the tweetable moments be an active listener take notes if you were coming here on Sunday morning it is a very rare Sunday that we don't preach the full gospel of Jesus Christ within the sermon and I try to do these quick summaries for you that you can pick up and you can take and use as well so pay attention to that kind of thing happening further the gathering of the church right what we're doing here on Sunday mornings is primarily for the believer that is not to say that a lost person cannot come here we are glad to have unsaved people here to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ but it is not primarily for that lost person it's primarily for the believer to be equipped for every good work to be equipped for every good work so the gathering of the church is for the believer the going of the church is for the unbeliever we take what we learn here and we're enriched by here we are minded to fight together we sing gospel songs and we go out of this place to take it by storm and to turn it upside down so gospel clarity thirdly gospel conversion in verse 4 we see that some of them this is referring to the

Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas as did a great many of the devout that be that kind of God fearing Greek Gentile and not a few of the leading women where the gospel is preached with courage and with clarity and blessed by the working of the Holy Spirit it will yield conversion the spiritually dead are made spiritually alive the Puritan pastor Thomas Watson wrote this and this is driving this kind of added idea of blessed by the working of the Holy Spirit we're not being pragmatic right be bold and speak with clarity and people will come to Christ but and also blessed by the working of the Holy Spirit he wrote this the word is the instrumental cause of our conversion the spirit is the officiant the ministers of

God are only the pipes and organs it is the spirit blowing in them that effectually changes the heart it is not the farmer's industry in plowing and sowing that will make the ground fruitful without the early and latter rain so it is not the seed of the word that will effectually convert unless the spirit puts forth his sweet influence and drops as rain upon the heart therefore the aid of God's spirit is to be implored prayed for plead with God that he would work in our gospel proclamation that he would put forth his powerful voice and awaken us out of the grave of unbelief if a man knocked at a gate of brass it will not open but if he comes with a key in his hand it will open so when God who has the key comes he opens the heart though it be ever so fast locked against him a

[33 : 02] I'm neither encouraged or discouraged by the lack of turning pages. First of all, this is chapter 1, verses 2-10.

Paul's writing to the Thessalonians. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers, loved by God, that He has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

You know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia, which is region south of Macedonia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, likely known world, so that we need not say anything.

[34 : 19] For they themselves, believers in the world, report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to

come.

And so you see the Thessalonian believers, right, in the midst of great conflict. And we get some hint of that with Jason who was hosting this missionary band being put on trial. We don't know where the missionary band has gone to.

They couldn't be found. Where exactly they are, we don't know. Put on trial and released with some bond. So they received the word of God and much conflict, much affliction.

1 Thessalonians 1.6 says, And the gospel was going forth. So the disciples of Jesus Christ, made courageous by faith, speaking the gospel with clarity, empowered by the Holy Spirit, makes converts.

Let us consider today the example of Paul and the example of the Thessalonian converts. We are to be about the work of conversion.

[35 : 38] And as we consider that, let us also remember that not everyone will respond faithfully to the gospel message. And that's our fourth point, gospel conflict. Gospel conflict.

See in verse 5 that the Jews become jealous. People are turning from Judaism. Both Jews and those God-fearing Gentiles are turning from Judaism to worship Christ.

They're no longer listening to them any longer. And in order to counteract that, they go to the rabble. They go to the common folk of the street and find wicked men.

They go seek out men that they know will cause an uprising. It's very ironic that they accuse the apostles of turning the world upside down and they go find the most wicked of men to cause a stir in the city.

And because of these accusations brought against them, they're going to raise up another king, this Jesus. These men thinking still in temporal ways are disturbed when they hear these things.

[36 : 49] It is a good desire to want everyone to whom the gospel is preached to respond in faith to the gospel message. It's good. It's good when we preach the gospel to want people, to desire people to respond in faith.

to rightly see people in their distress, which they most often don't see themselves. You're in a desperate place if you're not in Christ. Your end is destruction.

The people of God see that. And to see that and to offer them the relief that they so desperately need, only to have it refused, can bring much discouragement to the soul.

I've been there. working with a person, pressing them to repentance and faith, and they just at every turn reject the good news of the gospel of Christ.

So how do we hold up? How do we bear up when people reject the gospel? We hold tightly to the providence of God.

[37 : 55] We pick up that faith, believing in God's good, sovereign control. We trust that He is in control of all things at all times, and we press on.

We keep preaching and living the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel, courageously proclaimed with clarity, empowered by the Spirit, will yield conversion, which causes conflict.

Not everyone wants to hear the gospel message. It's offensive in the best possible way. I read to you a number of references that speak to this in the very first point for this morning, so I don't want to go back and belabor that.

But let me read to you one more, and I'm going to finish with this text. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2, verses 14 through 17. Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

[39 : 22] Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many peddlers of God's Word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.

Let's pray together.