

Thessalonica & Berea

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[0 : 00] Hello, my name is Margo. Our reading is from Psalm 67. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us.

May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God. May all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

May the peoples praise you, O God. May all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest and God, our God, will bless us.

God will bless us and all the ends of the earth will fear him. Hi, my name is Hannah and the New Testament reading is from Acts chapter 17, verses 1 to 15.

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

[1 : 13] This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ, he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

But the Jews were jealous, so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas, in order to bring them out to the crowd.

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials shouting, These men have caused trouble all over the world and have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house.

They are all defying Caesar's decree, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus. When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

[2 : 22] Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. Then the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea.

They went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. I love some of the amazing resources that are available today to make Jesus known. There's things like the Alpha Course or Christianity Explored or the word 1-2-1.

These are great tools that help introduce Jesus. And could I say, if you don't know him, if you're listening into this and you don't know him, then please get in touch with this church.

They'd love to help you and maybe take you through one of these particular courses. But actually, the greatest resource for making Jesus known is largely untapped and underused.

[3 : 33] It's Christians. It's the members of the church. It's those who've been born again. It's those who've had their lives turned around and filled with peace and forgiveness and purpose.

And many of you Christians are listening in, but you feel uncomfortable about this because you think evangelism is the work of specialists, of professionals, of evangelists.

And whilst it's true that God does give the church people with particular gifts of evangelising, it's also true that sharing the gospel should be as natural to any Christian as drawing breath.

So as we turn our attention back to Paul, to his second missionary journey, and particularly his visit to Thessalonica and Berea that we're looking at today, that's outlined there in Acts 17 verses 1 to 15, we'll discover some vital lessons as to how we can make Jesus better known.

Now, at first glance, what's recorded for us in these verses seems very familiar to anyone who's been working through the book of Acts.

[4 : 59] It seems like a replay of previous scenarios of things that we've ever read in Luke's account. It seems to be just like the other cities that Paul ventured into.

And certainly there are a number of similarities with what goes on here in Acts 17 and what went on in other cities that he visited. For example, Paul and his companions continue to target significant centres of population and influence.

In fact, that's why they make a hundred-mile journey along the main road, what was known as the Via Ignatia, passing quickly through Amphipolis and Apollonia so that they can reach the capital city of that province, Thessalonica.

And by the way, that's why the ministry here in Edinburgh is so vital and significant. It is a key city. It is a strategic city where we need to make the word of God known.

The gospel of Jesus needs to be declared. And then they once again target the Jewish synagogue. The only difference being that they only spend three Sabbaths there out of a stay that probably lasted several months.

[6 : 23] And once again, as we've seen in other episodes, they're the victims of violent persecution. This time, the only difference being that the violence didn't come directly from the Jewish leadership, but from a group of jobs that they'd recruited.

We see this in verse 5 of chapter 17. They rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city.

And so, Paul and Silas were again, once again, ejected from a city. This time, the only difference being that the city magistrates, we're told in verse 9, put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

Which probably means that the new church leaders there at Thessalonica gave an undertaking that Paul and Silas would leave town and would never return. Which actually would explain why Paul was unable to visit them on later occasions.

So, with all these similarities here in the account we're looking at, all these repetitions, we have to ask ourselves, what is it that Luke wants to add to his history?

[7 : 44] What new information is he adding? What new lessons does he want to teach us? Why is this episode recorded for us? Well, I want to suggest to you that what's new here is the way that Luke explains how Paul and Silas went about their business of making Christ known.

In this passage, he gives us insight into their methods and their means of evangelism. We find this encapsulated in verses 2 to 4.

Let me read it to you. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ, he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

Look, for convenience sake, let's divide it up into three simple ways. How they went about making Christ known. First of all, they proved. Secondly, they proclaimed.

[9 : 08] Thirdly, they practised. So firstly, they proved. Luke here uses three Greek words, special Greek words, to describe what Paul and Silas did.

Verse 2, he says they reasoned. Verse 3, he said they explained. And then also in verse 3, we find that they proved. Now together, they show that part of Paul's gospel strategy was to address the mind, to provide evidence, to convince, to deal with objections.

Just let's have a quick look at each of these words in turn and we'll get some idea of the impact of what they were doing. So first of all, we're told they reasoned.

The Greek word for that is dialigetto. No, it's actually related to the word that we get the word dialogue from. And this is the first time that Luke uses this word.

But he actually then goes on to use it nine times more to describe this way of communicating the gospel. It's also translated elsewhere as arguing or discussing.

[10 : 25] It has the sense of putting forward a proposal and then dealing with objections. You see, there's a two-way flow to this particular communication.

So they reasoned. But then secondly, we're told that they explained. They explained. The Greek word there is dionogon. This literally means opening up.

In fact, Luke uses this word in a variety of ways. In Luke 2 verse 23, he talks about the firstborn who opens the womb. Luke 24 verse 31, their eyes were opened.

Luke 24 verse 32, the scriptures were opened. Luke 24 verse 45, their minds were opened. Acts 16 verse 14, Lydia's heart was opened.

So this word has the sense of revealing something for the first time. And in this context, explaining that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, you can get the idea that these Jews were shown for the first time the evidence from scripture concerning a suffering Messiah.

[11 : 43] So they reasoned. They explained. Thirdly, they proved. The Greek word here is paratathemenos. This literally means to place alongside.

Sometimes in the scriptures, it's used of food being set before people. At other times of people being set before the Lord.

And here it has the idea of truth being set before inquiring minds. Maybe at its simplest level. Think of the washing adverts.

The washing powder adverts. They used to be where, you know, they took a shirt that was washed in a particular powder. And then they put it alongside another shirt that was washed in another powder.

And the brightness of the shirt washed in the first powder proves the case. They put them alongside. They put them alongside to make the case. And here it is with truth placed alongside misconceptions and prejudices.

[12 : 47] Prophecies placed alongside fulfilments. They proved. So what we have here is Paul and Silas addressing the minds of those they meet.

They face up to their questions. They answer their objections. They present their evidence. And could I say, I think that's something that every believer is called upon to be ready to do.

To be ready and able to dialogue. To explain. To prove. For example, we read this in 1 Peter 3 verse 15.

But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you.

To give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. Or Colossians chapter 4 verse 6.

[13 : 53] Let your conversation be always full of grace. Seasoned with salt. So that you may know how to answer.

Everyone. So look, we must be ready to help unbelievers in the area of their questions. We must know our stuff. We must prepare our minds.

There's no excuse for mental laziness here. We must do all we can to understand the faith. And could I say, if you're listening in to this online broadcast.

And you're someone who's just curious about the Christian faith. Let me tell you. Could I say, please engage your mind. Engage your brain. And explore. Please investigate the truth claims of the Christian faith.

Don't close your eyes. Think about it. Call a friend. Ask Google. Read the Bible for yourself.

[15 : 04] So first of all, they proved. Secondly, they proclaimed. We read this in verse 3. This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ, he said.

And I want to suggest that this is another category of evangelism. Now, to explain myself, we need to have another little look at the Greek expression. Forgive me for all of this.

But it helps. You see, in Luke's day, the word was used in a government sense. If a government official went around to make known official reports.

And it was used in a social sense to announce special games or festivals. So this word carries with it the sense of an authoritative proclamation.

Letting you know some important information. And this is how Luke uses it to describe the proclamation that the apostles engaged in as they declared the good news about Jesus.

[16 : 12] You see, what Jesus did was not really a subject that was up for debate. It was up for declaration. He really lived. He really died. He really rose again.

And that must be announced. The fact that God has entered into our world in grace to be our redeemer and deliverer must be made known.

And the proclamation that Christians have always been involved in and are called upon to continue is the full news of who Jesus is, what he has done, and the implications for each one of us.

You see, we don't have the right to replace the certainties of Scripture with sort of vague maybes. He says, oh yeah, yeah, maybe it will happen. No, no, no, no. We speak with authority because of the authority of the word itself.

The apostle Paul had to face up to this. There in 1 Corinthians 1 verses 22 to 24. He said, Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

[17 : 27] A stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

You see, here's a message we can declare with confidence and with certainty and with passion that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners.

So they proved, they proclaimed, and finally, I just want us to notice that they practiced. You see, we've seen the verbal means that Paul and Silas used to communicate the gospel.

But any consideration of what it takes to make Christ known would be incomplete without considering how they backed up what they said with how they lived.

See, Acts 17, the passage we're looking at, only gives us a summary of the main dramatic events that took place in Thessalonica. It's only actually when we go to the letter that Paul wrote to that church that we get an insight into the way that they conducted themselves.

[18 : 44] Now, it's a fairly large chunk I'm going to read to you, but forgive me because it gives a real picture of how they carried on when they were in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, the first 12 verses, it goes like this.

Paul writes,

You see, what backed up their gospel proclamation was their gospel living.

There was honesty and openness. There was passion and involvement. There was blameless and holy living.

There was hard work and commitment. In fact, this passage that we've just read requires a whole message in itself. So let me just draw your attention to one description that Paul uses.

[21 : 15] He says this in verse 7, But we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children. And the word that Paul uses there for mother is not the usual word, but rather he uses a word to describe a nursing mother, one who is breastfeeding her children.

Indeed, it's such a tender and a precious thing, isn't it?

The way that a mother nurses her children. Her love, her involvement, her gentleness, her care. Now you're beginning to see something of what should characterize the lives of believers.

Do you see how we should cherish those God is calling to himself? Do you grasp something of the patience and commitment that is required?

Are you living a life which commends the gospel of Jesus in every way? Are you using the needs and opportunities of these lockdown days to show the reality of Christ?

[22 : 30] Are you concerned for your neighbour and your street and your apartment? Are you helping out with the shopping for others? Are you keeping in touch with the lonely and isolated?

Look, is Jesus seen in you? And then when opportunity arises, will you be ready to reason, to explain, to prove, to proclaim the saving, wonderful message about such a wonderful saviour?

A brief, simple but expressive eulogy was pronounced by Martin Luther upon a pastor at Zwickau in 1522 named Nicholas Hausmann.

Luther said this, What we preach, he lived. Well, let's pray that that will be the testimony to our lives.

Well, thank you so much, Andy, for taking us through that passage and for bringing out its challenge. And I do hope that as you've watched, that you've been stimulated to think upon the claims of the Christian faith and what it means to share the news of Jesus with our neighbours and our friends and our families.

[23 : 53] And it takes us so nicely to what we're going to hear in just a few moments' time. So one of the things that we started doing last Sunday, and one of the things we're going to be doing over the next number of weeks, is hear from people in our church family and to listen to them tell us their stories about how they came to know Jesus for themselves.

You see, the thing about the Church of Jesus Christ is it's made up of many different people from many different parts of the world, with different backgrounds, doing lots of different things, and with lots of different stories to tell.

But all those stories testify to the one truth that we've all come to know and to love the one same Saviour. And so here is our good friend Florence.

Him and his family are part of our church family. And Florence is going to tell us his story about how he came to know Jesus as his King. And then once Florence is finished, we'll have our final song.

Hello, everybody. My name is Florence, and I come from a small nation in Southeastern Europe, Albania. Until 1991, for 50 years, Albania had been a communist state with atheism in its constitution.

[25 : 15] The word God could not even be mouthed by anyone. Otherwise, you'd go to prison or worse. So I'd never heard about God, but I had this inner yearning for something bigger than me.

One day I was walking home as a young teenager, and I saw right on that dirt path, I saw this book lying down, and I picked it up, and it was a New Testament.

I took it home and read it, and I found out about the person of Jesus. But I had so many questions that nobody could answer, as there was no church at that point in my hometown.

So a friend of mine who was a Muslim took me to the mosque, and he took me to his Muslim imam, who for hours on end instructed me about Islam and told me that Christianity is wrong and that Christ is a well-respected prophetic figure in Islam, but that's it.

We do not need anyone to stand between us and God, he said. You don't need any mediator. You just go to God by praying, and then you can trust Him that He will forgive you because He is merciful, He is compassionate.

[26 : 26] So I became a Muslim from that point on for a number of years, and in fact, after some time, I decided to go into full-time studies because I had this great zeal to explain to people that Christianity is wrong.

Whatever that was, it's not the path to life, and that Islam was the true way to God. And I started reading the Quran and the hadiths and everything else that has to do with Muhammad as a prophet.

And I thought I knew all the answers. But I had this one question that kept nagging me from time to time. How can God, who is holy, who is righteous, accept sinful people into His presence?

How can He say, you go to paradise even though you're a sinner? How can He do that while remaining a holy God without compromising His justice?

Islam has no real answer for that, and I did not want to admit that to myself. But one day after some time, I met this Christian missionary who was aptly called Emmanuel.

[27 : 39] He was from Brazil, a very mild-mannered man with limited knowledge of Albanian. But He sat with me for about a month, and I asked Him a hundred or more questions about life, spirituality, salvation, and I said, I want all the answers to come from the Bible.

And that's what He gave to me, very faithfully. And after some time, I realized that there was a perfect answer to my question. How can God save sinners while remaining just and righteous Himself?

He did that by becoming man. Jesus was not a man who became God. He was God who stooped down to the level of sinful humankind by taking on our plight, dying on the cross, fulfilling God's justice and righteousness, and also His love.

And one day, three days later, He was resurrected and He opened the path to life to anyone who wants to accept Him. And I accepted Him at that point.

After months and months of searching, I now came face to face with Jesus who I really knew. And I believed in Him. And from that point on, I basically went back to my Muslim school for one more year to evangelize my friends, which I did cautiously.

[29 : 05] But then I was found out and kicked out and was forced to finish my high school education elsewhere. It was the happiest year of my life, however, as I could tell people now that I did have the truth I had always craved for.

And that's why now at the University of Edinburgh, I'm writing a PhD dissertation on the transmission of the New Testament, particularly port letters, from the first century to the 10th, because I really want people to get to know the earliest documents of Christianity and to show that the Bible has been faithfully transmitted ever since the beginning.

May God bless you, everybody, and thanks so much for listening to my testimony. And I hope it's been of some encouragement to all of you. God's blessings. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

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