

The second missionary journey of Paul had a divine revelation that led his team to Macedonia. Yet, once there, Paul and Silas were beaten and put in stocks. The Lord turned the whole situation around with an earthquake that resulted in the conversion of the jailer and his household. The church in Philippi now had two prominent members, their households, and a number of misfits. We find in the letter to the Philippians that this new church of Philippi helped support the next leg of Paul's journey (Philippians 4:16<sup>i</sup>).

*<sup>1</sup> Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.* Acts 17:1 The team travelled almost 100 miles southwest on the Via Egnatia along the Aegean coast. The pronoun switches to "they" so apparently Luke stayed behind in Philippi to help the new church become grounded. Paul sought out a synagogue because that is where you find people who can relate to your message and who have the background to become elders in a new church. In addition, there are God fearing Gentiles seeking faith in a single God Creator. Perhaps the missionary team did not stop in Amphipolis or Appollonia because there were no synagogues in these cities.

Thessalonica, the chief port of Macedonia, is an independent city with its own ruling officials. They were given the right to govern themselves in 42 B.C. after having supported Octavian. They minted their own coins, some of which had the image of the Caesar. There is archeological evidence that they had a temple to the emperor Augustus along with several lewd cult religions and several Egyptian temples. They were independent, but support of the emperor meant they received benefits and protection from Rome. This background helps us understand their reaction.

*<sup>2</sup> And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* Acts 17:2 Luke gives us specific details of the cities they passed through, the number of times Paul preached in the synagogue, and the correct political title of the rulers of an independent city, all of which shows us this is an historical account. That he preached for three Sabbaths does not mean they only stayed for three weeks. From the letter to the Thessalonians, we learn that this was one of the few places that Paul set up shop, probably with Silas and Justin, in the agora (marketplace) (1 Thessalonians 2:9<sup>ii</sup>). He was a tentmaker which included leather working.

Our text for today gives us some of the best insight into how Paul went about planting churches. He had a method that was right for that time and one from which we can take several pointers. First, he looked for a synagogue. That would be an audience that was open to discussions about the Scriptures and their interpretations. It was a common starting point for introducing Jesus as the Messiah. Jews understood sin and the need for the Messiah and were looking forward to His coming. The Gentiles that attended would be especially open to hearing that Jesus fulfilled the law for us and offers us salvation through His sacrifice for us (1 John 4:10<sup>iii</sup>).

Paul *reasoned* with them. It is a Greek word from which we get our word dialog. It was a discussion, a back and forth, about the meaning of Scripture. God used Paul's past training and intelligent nature (Acts 22:3<sup>iv</sup>). In other words, God designed Paul and took him through the experiences of life in such a way as to bring him to this place at this time to deliver the Good News of Jesus in a way that would reach the most people. That is amazing to consider. And isn't it the same for each of us? God took us through our experiences and gave us the personality we have because there are certain people in our lives that we can connect with in a way that no one else can (Acts 17:26-27<sup>v</sup>).

*<sup>3</sup> 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."* Acts 17:2 Paul reasoned with them by explaining the Scriptures. He was appealing to them as people of reason while relying on the Holy Spirit to help them accept the truth of his explanations and proofs. He was using a source they both agreed upon. Then he explained the Messianic predictions and how Jesus fulfilled them. It was simple logic. But logic only goes so far. Without the Holy Spirit moving on the heart, and the listeners willingness to consider what is said and accept the moving of the Holy Spirit, there is no receptivity (John 6:44<sup>vi</sup>).

We see this all the time in doctrinal and political discourse. One side will present facts and the other side just shake their heads as if to say the facts presented are not true when they both know the facts don't lie. It happens on both sides. People want the truth, or would rather go on believing what they want to be true in spite of the evidence. Even when caught in self-contradiction, there is often an unwillingness to consider the facts. We can be more stubborn than mules!

God has gifted most people with reasoning minds and sense of what is basically right and wrong. Paul took this for granted when he reasoned in the synagogues. He applied it methodically at the leading of the Holy Spirit. That is why the next verse uses the word "persuaded." Paul was not appealing to emotions or using fancy rhetoric. He was relying on the power of the Word presented alongside the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (1Corinthians 2:4-5<sup>vii</sup>). Can *you* take people to the Scriptures and show them the prophecies, tell them when they were written, and explain how they were fulfilled in the life of Jesus? Every believer should learn how to do this. What Paul was sharing with the synagogue was the first thing Jesus told the believers after His resurrection. He told the eleven all that was written about Him in the Law, the prophets, and the writings (Luke 24:44<sup>viii</sup>).

*<sup>4</sup> 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.* Acts 17:4 Some of the Jews were persuaded. The word in Greek means they believed, agreed, or yielded, all of which are applicable. They yielded to the logic Paul presented and believed the gospel. A great many of the devout Greeks and leading Greek women did as well. Devout probably means they were regular attenders at the synagogue. Jews were more

attached than Gentiles to the synagogue as their own community and would be more hesitant to accept anything their elders rejected.

*<sup>5</sup> But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.* Acts 17:5 I can imagine that if wealthy supporters of the synagogue and the regular adherents left to follow a new teaching, jealousy would only be natural. But even before that, these Jews rejected the logical presentation of Scripture and its amazing fulfillment in Jesus which was witnessed by so many. They were so attached to traditions that they rejected reason and the drawing of the Holy Spirit (John 12:32<sup>ix</sup>).

The word used for the men who were stirred up implies part time laborers. They weren't accepted into any guilds and must have felt they didn't quite fit into the society. They attacked the home of Paul's host, Jason, but were unable to find Paul and Silas.

*<sup>6</sup> 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,* Acts 17:6 There were five officials<sup>x</sup> who were in charge of justice in the city. Luke correctly understood the governmental order and status of the city and used the correct term for the authorities. The first charge is of them turning the world upside down. They assumed that Rome had the world right side up. It is a vague claim. The implication is that they were troublemakers who were stirring up trouble in many cities. It was the unreceptive Jews who had stirred up the trouble. Have you noticed the tendency of some to blame others of that which they are guilty?

*<sup>7</sup> and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."* Acts 17:7 Without the accused being present, they could only bring charges against Jason. These are more serious charges than the vague description of turning the world upside down. Since the city enjoys benefits from Rome, hosting a seditious movement may result in removal of those privileges. Thessalonians worshiped the Caesar as the son of god and savior who brought peace to the world. That sounds a lot like what Paul is preaching about Jesus. It was illegal in the Roman empire to predict the death or overthrow of the emperor<sup>xi</sup>. Paul's proclamation of Jesus as the King of kings and His coming to judge mankind and set up His eternal kingdom sounded like a violation of that law (1 Thessalonians 2:12<sup>xii</sup>; 1 Corinthians 15:24<sup>xiii</sup>). Paul preached that they should turn from idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9<sup>xiv</sup>). One of the main idols of the city was the statue of Augustus. This charge had some validity because Christians teach that Jesus will judge every emperor and set up His kingdom on earth. Therefore, the declaration of "Jesus is Lord" could result in the execution of a Christian. It was considered treasonous.

*<sup>8</sup> And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.* Acts 17:8 Now you understand why they would have been disturbed. These are very serious charges that could bring the wrath of Rome on the city.

*<sup>9</sup> And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.* Acts 17:9 Today we call it a bond. They secured a bond from Jason that was held to guarantee his promise not to cause trouble and perhaps even to preach against the Caesar. Christians don't preach against worldly governments (Romans 13:1-7<sup>xv</sup>). They realize God sets up whom He will for His own purposes (Daniel 2:21<sup>xvi</sup>). We simply say that all man's governments will in fact end one day when Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth during the Millennium (Daniel 2:44<sup>xvii</sup>). Paul wasn't preaching against Caesar, as much as it sounded like it. He was preaching against idolatry and proclaiming all rulers have a higher authority to which we will all answer (Romans 14:10<sup>xviii</sup>).

*<sup>10</sup> The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.* Acts 17:10 To avoid any more trouble, Paul and Silas were sent off at night when they wouldn't be noticed. Timothy was not mentioned. He will return after a short time to help this new church be established with correct doctrine and understanding of the Scriptures. They took a three-day trip over a small road inland to one of the former capitals of another division of Macedonia. As we saw earlier, Paul again seeks out a receptive audience in the synagogue. He used the same method we saw in the synagogue in Thessalonica, only the hearts of the Berean Jews were more open to listening and considering Paul's reasoning and interpretation of Scripture.

*<sup>11</sup> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* Acts 17:11 Luke calls this willingness to consider the dialog and search the Scriptures to see the validity of the claims a noble thing. It is noble of people to consider new things or a different explanation and then examine the Scriptures to decide whether to accept it. To refuse to consider claims that challenge those we have held is unprincipled. Often it is just stubbornness and pride. Continued study of the Scriptures is the path to discernment. We are told to study the Scriptures to be approved by God as good workers who won't be ashamed at His appearing (2 Timothy 2:15<sup>xix</sup>).

Many believers never open their Bible except on Sunday. Sometimes they don't even open it then. What happened to our culture? I remember when people knew how to find Obadiah and Jude. Now most people must look in the index if they even open the Bible. How will you know that what I preach is true if you don't look at the text? Don't trust me! Trust the Scriptures. Read them daily. Study the books of the Bible. Memorize Scripture (Psalm 119:11<sup>xx</sup>). Meditate on Scripture (Joshua 1:8<sup>xxi</sup>). It is your life! (Deuteronomy 32:46-47<sup>xxii</sup>) Neglecting the Scriptures is to starve your soul. We have some helpful tools today like the YouBible app that will even read the Bible to you. How we need to make the Word a priority in our daily lives!

*<sup>12</sup> Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.* Acts 17:12 This time many of the Jews believed because they searched the Scriptures to see if it was true. Along with the Jews were Greek women of high standing and men too. These influential and wealthy women helped the church gain

respect and influence. They also would be able to aid the financially poor believers who needed assistance (Acts 9:36<sup>xxiii</sup>).

*13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.* Acts 17:13 Those jealous Jews of Thessalonica found out that the Jews of Berea were accepting Paul's message, so they came and stirred up the crowds there, probably with the same claims that had worked in their home town. One must wonder if they felt they were guarding the true faith just as Paul had once done (1 Timothy 1:13<sup>xxiv</sup>), or if they were so spiteful they just wanted to try to stop Paul.

*14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15a Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens,* Acts 17:14-15a Paul is ushered out of another town, escorted to the coast and then over to Athens. This is the third town in a row that he has been driven out of. He is the one the Jews saw as the main "trouble maker" because he was the one who had the command of Scripture to convince people that the Messiah had come. Silas and Timothy were able to remain and strengthen the church for a short time.

*and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.* Acts 17:15b Paul wanted them to come and assist him. He saw the huge need in Athens and knew that two are better than one for they have a better reward for their labor, and a three-fold cord is not easily broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12<sup>xxv</sup>).

There are a couple of points that we should remember and apply. One is the use of reason when we share with unbelievers. Ravi Zacharias has been so instrumental in restoring the use of reason in the Christian witness. You can learn so much from his podcasts at RZIM.org We should all learn how to show people how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 9, 53, Psalm 22, 110 etc. And the last point is that we need the nobility of the Bereans. We need to be open, but with that openness to search the Scriptures and decide from Scripture if an idea or doctrine has any validity. Listen with eagerness, but search the Scriptures. Feed your spirit daily with the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2<sup>xxvi</sup>). It is your very life!

## Questions

- 1 Why does Paul go to synagogues first?
- 2 How can we apply his methods?
- 3 Consider how God has prepared and placed you.
- 4 How did Paul go about witnessing Jesus?
- 5 Can you do the same?
- 6 What fruit came of it?
- 7 What was the main accusation and how did it stick?
- 8 How were the Berean Jews different from those in Thessalonica.
- 9 How can we be more like them?
- 10 Why do you think the Jews of Thessalonica came to Berea?

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<sup>i</sup> **Philippians 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

<sup>ii</sup> **1 Thessalonians 2:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

<sup>iii</sup> **1 John 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

<sup>iv</sup> **Acts 22:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

<sup>v</sup> **Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

<sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

<sup>vi</sup> **John 6:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

<sup>vii</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

<sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

<sup>viii</sup> **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

<sup>ix</sup> **John 12:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

<sup>x</sup> Politarchs – their rulings are valid as long as they hold the office.

<sup>xi</sup> see 2 Thessalonians 2 and cf. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 56.25.5f.; 57.15.8.

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<sup>xii</sup> **1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

<sup>xiv</sup> **1 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> For they themselves 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,

<sup>xv</sup> **Romans 13:1-7 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,

<sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the

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wrongdoer.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

<sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Daniel 2:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

<sup>xvii</sup> **Daniel 2:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

<sup>xviii</sup> **Romans 14:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

<sup>xix</sup> **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

<sup>xx</sup> **Psalms 119:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Joshua 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:46-47 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> he said to them, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.

<sup>47</sup> For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Acts 9:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **1 Timothy 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

<sup>xxv</sup> **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

<sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

<sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

<sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—