

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 17 as we continue our study through the Scriptures and especially this book - our favorite book of the Bible, the book of Acts, on Wednesday nights.

We told you, and we have lots of times, and the reason I repeat is sometimes people are new, so it'll help them to get up to speed. For those of you that are here every week, it doesn't hurt to hear those things over and over because eventually you'll just know them, and there's something about repetition, as far as a teaching tool, that helps us.

But the book of Acts was written by Luke the doctor. He was led of the Holy Spirit to pen not only the book of Luke but this book as well. It is the single largest portion of the New Testament, those two books together. In retrospect, and looking at why and what the Lord was doing, Luke gives to us the first thirty years of church history; and it is written in narrative form, which is important to know because when we study doctrine, doctrine is passed along through words, and one word upon the next word. And that's the way that you learn doctrine - you have to analyze what is being said. Narrative, for the most part, is training through example. And so it's almost like someone is walking along and saying, "And then they turned left, and then they went here, and then God did this," and your lesson is in the presentation, if you will, of the work. So the lessons are hidden in the narratives themselves. So, we believe that at least the book of Acts, for us, should tell us how God wants the church to be because here's the first-generation church. And then what kind of people will God use? And what will He do with them? And what can we expect God to do with us if we follow the example set in the narrative? It becomes an example that you can kind of set alongside what you're doing, and pray that God might make you more like what you read in the Scriptures. So when you see the love for the lost that drives evangelism, despite the personal cost to the individual, that's a quality that we want to have in our own lives. When you see a passion for ministry that far exceeds any kind of worldly success, when missions becomes your primary focus, when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is what you rely upon - not upon your education or your contacts or even your giftings, but you trust God is going to build the church - then you begin to

learn from the book of Acts, through the narrative, exactly what the Lord would want you to learn. So, that's one thing.

The other thing that we've tried to do this time through the book of Acts is to set timeframes out for you as well as mileages traveled because I think that helps you to get a broader view of what Paul, in his missionary journeys, did, how much sacrifice went with it, how far they had to travel and even, for that matter, how many weeks and months passed without these miraculous works of God or the droves of people getting saved; that there were a lot of days that you just walked by faith. And so I think that's been helpful.

There were three missionary journeys of Paul. They all took place - if you look at the map behind me - in Antioch of Syria, which is over there to the right. Hopefully you have these maps. If not, we have 'em in the back. I can only tell you so often - they're in the back. Just go get 'em if you like. But Paul set out in 46 A.D., was gone for two years with Barnabas, went mostly through the Galatia area (which is kind of up and above there - you can see the word "Galatia"), planted a lot of churches and then came back - traveled about 1200 miles or so. The second missionary journey (which begins in chapter 15:36, runs to almost the end of chapter 18, which is where we are today - in that section) was a much longer time of Paul's roadwork, if you will. He left about 50 A.D., didn't come back until towards the end of 55 A.D. - six years. He went with Silas, who had replaced Barnabas over some disagreements of qualifications for ministry, and they traveled about 2700 miles. They had a larger team as they went. I think you will learn fairly quickly that traveling with Paul wasn't a picnic; wherever he preached, riots broke out, beatings took place, stonings, imprisonment. He got sunk in the water. He just seemed to have the world against him, and indeed he did. But with all of that suffering also came tremendous, miraculous conversions, healings and delivering by God's Spirit. The work of God was at once costly and extremely joyful. Everybody wants the joyful part, but there's a cost that comes with it.

So, like I said, we have the maps for you. Paul had left his church in Antioch of Syria, which became the center of world missions in the 1st century. The focus changes to Europe when Paul gets started ministering to the Gentiles and after Peter goes to the house of Cornelius and the picture changes from Jerusalem to Antioch, where literally everyone goes out. They retrace in their second trip the places where Paul had gone in the first trip, but he did it in reverse order. He was interested, as a pastor, in how the churches were doing. In between those two

trips, there was a Jerusalem Council that talked about grace. How do you get saved? And the testimony of Peter and Paul and Barnabas and others was God had saved the Gentiles just by grace. They didn't become Jews first; it was just grace. And so they decided, in chapter 15, that that would be the stand of the church - God saves by grace. And Paul wanted to go back and tell all these churches that because there were men that followed him called Judaizers who came into these churches, saying, "Well, unless you become a Jew, you can never become a Christian." And that was a hanging-on, if you will, to, "God chose us, and you can't come to God without going through us." So, Paul leaves on this second journey, like I said, with Silas. Timothy joins them in Lystra-Derbe area. Timothy was a young man that got saved, it would seem, under Paul's ministry the first time Paul came to town. Luke joins them in Troas; Troas is on the coast, there on the Aegean, and it is there that Dr. Luke joins them. There're lots of guys that tell you why. There's a lot of speculation that Paul was sick. If he was sick, he didn't show it. He certainly went on for the next three and a half years without seeming to slow down. But it's entirely possible; we don't know that for sure. But Paul and the boys, after weeks of going from where they had gone before to where they didn't know where to go, finally end up in Troas; and it is there, running out of land on the Aegean, that Paul had a dream from the Lord where a man stood in Macedonia and said, "Come to Europe. We want you to come here." And so they traveled 70 miles to the island off the coast; traveled 70 more miles to Neapolis, which was two days' worth of sailing; went inland about 10 miles to their first stop, Philippi.

And we've covered all of that in Acts up to this point. It was a Roman colony; very few Jews lived there. It was ground zero for the ministry of God's Son in Europe. The first convert there was a very wealthy businesswoman named Lydia, or at least she was from Lydda. But that's what we call her. She went outside of the city to pray on Sabbath with some ladies. There were not enough men, not even ten, to have a synagogue. They heard Paul's testimony, if you will, a ministry that Paul undertook. This woman was a Gentile who had converted to Judaism, and now she finds herself hearing the words of the gospel, and God opens her heart. Over a period of time (we don't know how long), her family and her household come around to following Christ as well; so much so that she offers to Paul and the team, "Can you guys stay with us? Could we be the center in town here of ministry?" And she opens up her home, and the outreach begins from her home. That's where the church begins. The second convert, at least in our Bible narrative, was a young slave girl possessed of the devil who made her owners a lot of money through being able to tell the future, and they used her for their own benefit. Paul, after a

couple days of having her follow them around and call out who they were or what they were doing, sensed from the Lord that this was not ordinary, and he calls upon this demon to leave this woman alone in the name of Jesus. And she gets saved. But in getting saved she loses her capability to dabble in the occult. Jesus moves in, and her owners lose a lot of money, and they're angry. And so, there in Philippi, they gather a crowd together. They arrest Paul and Silas under false pretenses. They trump up charges against them that are political. They publicly flog them and then throw them into the hold, unceremoniously kind of tossed into the clink. These dedicated men - the cost of evangelism was not to them a problem at all. We talked about how do you handle when God leads you somewhere and it doesn't go the way you want? Paul and Silas, at midnight, sang worship songs. The whole jail heard it. And God intervened at some point during that late-night worship and brought a selective earthquake to bear; and it opened the prison doors, loosed the chains of the prisoners. But the building was left standing. The jailer, fearful he had lost his charge that would result in his death, was about to kill himself when Paul yelled out, "Don't hurt yourself. None of us have left." Another miracle of the Lord. And this man fell at the feet of Paul, asked what he could do to be saved, and Paul shared with him. And this third convert came to the Lord, took these guys home, dressed their wounds, fed them at home. He listened to them share with his family, who all just opened their hearts to the gospel. And by morning, they were back in prison and waiting to see what God was going to do next. And so we ended last week with the magistrates coming and telling them to get out of Dodge, "Leave town, I hope you've learned your lesson." To which Paul replied, "I hope you've learned yours. You just beat a Roman citizen." Against the law - you beat a Roman citizen, you get beat. And bad. They hadn't had a trial and all. They were very fearful; they asked them please to leave (verse 38 of the last chapter). They were deathly afraid to hear it. And Paul used that as kind of a measure of grace to buy some time for this young church - that they would be left alone, now, ministering in this town.

So, we come tonight to chapter 17, and Paul's moved to Thessalonica. I would say to you if Paul was sick in Troas, he must have been well by the time he left Philippi because they leave Dr. Luke behind in town, in Philippi, to do the work. In fact, he will be there until chapter 20:5. On the third trip Paul comes around, he'll pick Luke up. So Luke is going to stay here several years, watching over and pastoring and ministering in this church. You can tell that by the writing. Luke writes this. When he's with them, he writes "we" and "us" went there, and when he's not, he'll say "they" did, and he won't include himself. You'll see now the change from "we"

and "us" to "they" and "them." Tonight we're going to look at fifteen verses; we're going to stop in verse 15 before Paul moves on to Athens. But I think the main lesson of these fifteen verses is - what view do you have of the Bible that's in your hand? How powerful is it to you? How much do you know it? How well could you share it? How often do you pull it out to talk to others? And what kind of confidence do you have when you share it that it'll accomplish the work that God desires? What is your attitude towards God's Word? Because it is the focus, really, of what the narrative tells us Paul's life in Thessalonica and in Berea was, these two cities that he'll visit in these fifteen verses. So, I want you to just ask yourself - how do I handle this Book? I know you're in church on a Wednesday night, and God bless you. Good for you. You've done the right thing. You're makin' the right choices. Tell your friends. Go through the Bible. Learn it well. But that's Paul's confidence. So he's been run out of Philippi. They've left at least three salvations, two families and a pastor, and they are now moving to their next step in Europe.

Verse 1. See? We got there. "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews." From Philippi to Amphipolis is about 30 miles; from Amphipolis to Apollonia was about 35 more; from Apollonia to Thessalonica, 40 miles or so along the Roman road. So, a little over 100-mile journey, and Luke writes about it, though he's not with them, without comment at all. As a general rule when we look at the narrative, Paul's interest in going out to plant churches was to bypass the small towns, head for the big cities, see a church or a work established in the church in the big city, and then rely upon them to reach out in every direction (for a certain number of miles) to minister. So it's like, here's your Jerusalem; now get out and reach out. And rather than spending a lot of time in these little towns, you find Paul - he's telling you the route, but he doesn't tell you anything that happened. And that's certainly the case here. It was a wise strategy. I think it's always wise to maximize your influence and then be able to hand the responsibility to the door-to-door and street-to-street and city-to-city. If you can plant yourself where the government seat is, where the university is, where the commerce is, then the outlying areas can be reached by the church that is planted. Thessalonica was the largest city in this area. It was on the Via Egnatia, the main road of the Romans at the time - between east and west. It had been there for 300 years. It was built by a guy named Cassander, if you know anything about your ancient history. He built it and named it for his wife, who was the step-sister of Alexander the Great. In 42 B.C., or roughly 80 or 90 years later, it was named a free city by Rome. It

meant that you were a citizen of Rome if you were born there; it brought lots of benefits. So Paul leaves Philippi, travels 105 miles to Thessalonica, leaves Luke behind, still has Timothy with him and Silas.

And we read, in verse 2, "Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them," (these in the synagogue) "and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures." In spite of the suffering and insults that he had been subjected to in Philippi, Paul went to Thessalonica with high hopes. In fact, we have two letters - 1 and 2 Thessalonians - that Paul wrote to these folks. So, if you want to know how he felt or how this trip affected him, you can read those two letters. They're small. But he makes mention to his arrival. For example, in chapter 2:1 of 1 Thessalonians, he wrote this to them. "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated in Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men but God who tests our hearts." Paul said, "You know how we showed up there, how we suffered at the hands of the people in Philippi, and yet, when we got to you, we were bold, and we exhorted you, and we didn't rely upon making friends; we relied upon the preaching of the Word. We didn't go out to please men; we went to please God who knows our hearts." That's what he said about this arrival that you're reading about now. He came with words of hope and of the good news of Jesus that he had been entrusted with the gospel, and he was faithful to it. So God indeed was sustaining His very road-weary travelers along the way. And like we've mentioned to you before, when there is a synagogue to go to, Paul almost always went there first. I know he was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he was a Jew, and he loved his people, and he wasn't about to forget them because he had a calling that seemed to go in a little bit of a different direction. So Paul would usually go to the synagogue because they had a Bible to find common ground with. They hopefully had a knowledge of the Old Testament. They were in the synagogue, which would suggest that they were hungry for the things of God. And so, if they went regularly, that would be something that would have moved them. That's kind of what Paul's heart was all about. And it gave him a place that he could have some common stance. If you've ever gone to another country - if you go to Ethiopia, and yet you can find a Coptic church that loves the Lord, you can find yourself at home with the brethren because you hold a lot with them in common even if you don't know the language. But your hunger for the Lord might be the same as theirs. So then you can begin

to minister there. If you go to Western Europe today, there is still a predominantly Catholic population. If you came out of the Catholic church, you might very well find yourself going to minister to Catholics because you're comfortable there; you know what they believe, you know what they've been taught, you know where they're coming from. It gives you a platform. And Paul found that to be very helpful as well. So Paul went there first. Though not specifically, like I said, called to the Jews, his strategy worked well to be a platform to reach the Gentiles because these were mostly Gentile towns with small synagogues in them; or larger ones, but predominantly Gentile. And, like I said, Paul loved his people. He said to the Romans (9:2), "My heart is continually heavy for them. I have sorrow in my heart. I would wish myself accursed for the sake of my brethren. I'll go to hell if they can go to heaven." That's what he said. Now I don't know if he meant that literally, but that pretty much expressed his love for them. He said in Romans 10:2, "The Jews have a great zeal for God, but they don't have the knowledge to really draw near to the Lord." Zeal can't overcome truth, you know. But that was Paul's heart. So, here in Thessalonica, he was given a chance to meet for three consecutive Saturdays/Sabbaths with the people. And notice the words "reasoned with them" - "*dialogizomai*." It means to dispute. It means to dialogue. That's where we get our word "dialogue" from, to argue, to give discourse.

And notice that he, from the Scriptures (verse 3), "explains and demonstrates that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'" He's the Messiah. So, for three weeks, Paul's goal, if you will, was to take the prophets of the Old Testament, take every verse that he knew from the Old Testament that God gave him - the types and all, and speaking with authority; like he said there in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "The gospel didn't come to you only in word," he would say to them. "It came to you in the power of God unto salvation for everyone that believes, first to the Jew, then to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). So Paul looks back over this time in preaching these three weeks, and he says, "I know that God was at work," and he was pulling together the Old Testament Scriptures and laying out for the people the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was the promised One according to the Scriptures. And I might say to you - if there was a Jewish person you were sharing with, could you do that? Could you go and find and understand the Scriptures in their context to be able to share with someone that Jesus is indeed the Messiah; that He had to suffer, that He had to die, that He was to rise on the third day. And Paul uses this Old-Testament-focused, prophetic picture of the Messiah and literally says to people (in a matter of weeks), "He's the only One, Jesus, that can fit the portrait."

He had great confidence in the Scriptures. From a Jewish standpoint, the Jews had tremendous difficulty reconciling the various portions of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. On the one hand, there are lots of verses that talk about the coming King who's going to conquer and rule, and He's going to rule from Jerusalem. And they read that and go, "Oh, that's the Messiah." But then you have all of those other verses which seem to be contradictory and almost bewildering, which speak about His suffering - Psalm 22, His crucifixion, in very specific language; Isaiah 52 and 53 as well; Zechariah 12:10, which talks about they will look upon Him whom they have pierced; or that argument in Daniel 9:26 that when the Messiah comes He would be cut off but not for Himself. And so they're in conflict. And Paul takes the Scriptures, now fully-realized by the Spirit, and he begins to present them with information. But it's gospel information, it's biblical, and he has great confidence in it. If you ask a Jew today (at least in Israel, for the most part, if they're Bible-studying folks) what they do with the conflict, they will literally allow the Scriptures that are dealing with the conquering Lord to stand literally; whereas when there come the Scriptures of the suffering Messiah, they spiritualize those away, even applying that to the nation, saying, "We've suffered so long as a people. Six million of us were killed during the Holocaust." And they'll lay out for you the suffering that they've had, waiting for the Messiah; and you'll get that even if you go to Israel today, as they describe Isaiah 52 and 53. It does illustrate the danger that you bring upon yourself when you come to the Scriptures with preconceived ideas. It doesn't allow you to let God's Word correct them. Rather than come with a clean slate and just going, "All right, here are the Scriptures, how do they go together? Lord, show me," and studying to show yourself approved, if you come with an idea already and then look for Scriptures to support your position, then you've put yourself in the position of God. You should never spiritualize the Scriptures unless the Bible specifically tells you to do so. And I'll use maybe the easiest example. If you go to the book of Revelation, you will constantly read words that speak about things "looked like" or "seemed to be as," and they are similes and metaphors that are used to describe spiritual things that you cannot see in ways that you can understand them. The comparison is always the physical with the spiritual so that you have a basis to understand. And I would go one step further and say most of the metaphors in the Bible are explained in other places so that it isn't just used in one place, where you're left to guess; it is used over and over and over again with the same meaning and with the same usage. So you're pretty much in a good place when you can go and look at the proper context. You can let the Bible interpret the Bible. Understand this going in - God is a God that wants you to know Him. If He didn't

want you to know Him, you're out of luck, you'll get nothin'. But God sets out what He wants you to know. What you have to do is go to the Bible with an open heart and with a willingness to let God speak.

So the rabbis of Paul's day had fallen into the trap of spiritualizing a lot of the text and doing so to fit their expectations or their understanding. And so they didn't teach a first and second coming of the Messiah, which clearly the Bible teaches. Unfortunately, because they didn't, the nation is still waiting for the Messiah the first time. And because of that, that's going to be the tipping point when the Antichrist comes, and they're going to believe this must be the One. Because when Jesus does come, then they'll look upon Him whom they've pierced, and they'll realize their mistake, and they'll turn to Him. But that's the case even that Paul was facing here. So Paul extensively used the Scriptures to convince those that Jesus fits the timeframe, the promises, the miracles, the predictions, the birthplace, the power, the ability to open the eyes of the blind and make the lame to walk and even raise the dead - He's the One! In fact, Daniel 9 gives us an exact timeframe for His appearance so that if it isn't Jesus, it's nobody; because that time has come and gone. That's what Paul does here for three weeks. Notice he explains, and he seeks to demonstrate the sufferings of Christ, the resurrection, and the fact that Jesus is the long-awaited, promised Messiah.

Now, Jesus used the same approach with the boys and Peter at Caesarea Philippi (in Luke 9:22) where He sat down, and He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day." And then He went, and He explained it to them. He used the same approach with that couple that was leaving Jerusalem on the day of the resurrection as they were walking home to Emmaus, there in Luke 24:25. He said, " 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets," it says "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." That's what Paul did as well. He had great confidence in the Scriptures. God's Word saves. I know we like to, "Well, let me just put it into words you can understand." No. Just share God's Word. There's great power in God's Word.

So, Paul was there for three weeks. God gave him favor. He brought these treasures out of the Scriptures. He pointed out that Jesus was the Messiah. How important is the Word of God to you? When Peter later wrote 2 Peter, he said to

his audience, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (chapter 1:16). Or, if you will, "I was there. I want to tell you about the resurrection. I was there." Verse 17, "For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" And then Peter says, after he says, "I was there, I heard it," he said, "But we have an even surer word of prophecy." And the "surer word" was "a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." Peter goes on to say, "I was there. You should believe me. I was an eyewitness. However, there's something even more powerful than my witness - God's Word. So even though I'll die for my witness, I was there. If you're really deciding which one to believe, believe the Bible because the Bible is not open to interpretation of individuals; it is God's revelation of Himself to man. It's consistent. Hang on to that." And Peter learned it, and Paul does so here as well. It's a "surer word" than even seeing it yourself, which is why it is important, as a church, that we teach you the entire Bible. There are some guys, very well known - unfortunately, this last year, who have come out and said publicly the Old Testament is not for today. Well that erases 39 books of the 66 that you have. And it fascinates me that anyone would even go back to his church the next week, but they go by the tens of thousands. So, the prophecies fulfilled are great. Maybe one of the greatest arguments for Jesus and believing in Him - what He said, He did, and He fulfilled. He wasn't a fraud. He was the real deal.

Three weeks Paul was there - 105 miles away from Philippi. The result, in verse 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." So some Jews, hearing the gospel, turned to Jesus. They joined Paul and Silas. There was a great number of Gentiles who converted to Judaism who now were converting to Christianity, who came to the Lord. And a lot of "leading women" - the word "leading" there is the word "*protos*" - it just means in rank, to go first. It's a reference to their material wealth or their influential status in the Scriptures. In fact, you will find in a lot of these places that Paul stops that the women seem to come first; and that's because, I think, women tend to be naturally more spiritual than men. I think that's true here. I wish it wasn't so, but it is. Paul wrote (in 1 Thessalonians 2:13), "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

He refers to this verse. Folks came and believed. In fact, Paul will write to the Thessalonians (in chapter 1:9 of 1 Thessalonians), "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." So he was writing to these believers, and this is how he saw them - these men and women that we read about here. There will be two men - Aristarchus and a guy named Secundus - who will join Paul in the third missionary journey (you can read about them in chapter 20), who were saved in this town and joined the crusade, if you will, with Paul and became a part of the ministry team.

Verse 5, "But the Jews who were not persuaded," (some did not come) "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." So, as right as Paul was, not everybody listened. And the influence, at least the anger about most in the synagogue, was envy. Envy means they wanted something you had. And it would seem that Paul had a following - he had influence, people were listening. They were seeing their influence slip through their fingers. Rather than turning themselves to the Lord, they were angry. They couldn't deny the Word of God that Paul was preaching. They didn't know their Bibles as Paul did. So the conflict became personal. Attack the messenger. They can't really say much about the message. And having heard the gospel and seen the effect on the lives of others, they turned to unsavory guys that they hired downtown, and they turned it into a mob violence; and wounded egos and flesh, hiding under what they called civic duty, they turned on them publicly and without mercy. And they raided the place apparently where Paul was staying - Jason's house. They tried to take him forcibly from there, but they weren't there. Those of you that want a home Bible study, take note. They know where you live. And who knows how far it's going to go south before the Lord straightens it all out. But in any event, that didn't stop these guys.

Verse 6 tells us, "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. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.' And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things." Now, the charge was treason. Not preaching. Treason. Which carried, in the Roman law, a death sentence. The accusation real clear, in one verse. "Yeah,

these guys are preaching another king. Not Caesar, but Jesus. King Jesus." In a spiritual sense, that's absolutely true. In a civic sense, absolutely untrue. Jesus never taught civil disobedience as a method of ministry. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mark 12:17). You want to be a good Christian in our society? Then, unless you're being asked to break the law of God, submit to the rulers over you. I know the laws are ridiculous sometimes, and you just shake your head at how unevenly they're applied. God doesn't allow you to do that. He just said, "Obey those. Be a witness, man. Be a good citizen." The charges there were absolutely a lie. Right? But what happens when the power of God and the power of the gospel can't be opposed? They turn to lies and distortions. I think there are a lot of groups today, unfortunately, who are guilty of this very thing that they're accusing Paul of. They call themselves believers, but they've turned from the gospel - which, by the way, this Book, right? has great power - and they've turned to the powerlessness of political rhetoric, trying to veil it in some kind of a spiritual tone. Remember (verse 5) their motivation was envy. History will record that the early church (in the first 100 years) lost almost six million believers - killed by Rome for failing to bow to Caesar. They're not new charges. If you go back to Luke 23:2, it says that they accused Jesus. "We caught this man perverting the nation, forbidding tribute to Caesar, calling Himself Christ the King." Same thing. Right? And I think that if the Christian church in America begins to truly suffer, it'll be because we're not in their political right place. They'll never call you out for loving Jesus; they'll call you out for the position that you take because you love Him. Just as they did here. I love verse 6, and I hope that they can say this about you and me. "These people have turned the world upside down." That should be the greatest tribute that your enemy can ever give you when it comes to serving the Lord. That's exactly what happened. Souls were being saved for eternity. People were being asked to take sides. Feelings were being stirred. Hearts were being revealed. Beliefs were being changed. Decisions were being made. And lines were being drawn. The church, you and I, should make a difference in this world. We should be stirring things up. We should be turning it upside down because it's already upside down. So, we right-side-up stuff, don't we? You got saved. Didn't you come, "Oh, there I am. I was kind of confused, but look at me now!" What happens around your life when you walk with Jesus? That's the question. How effective is your walk with God. Remember they accused Peter back in Acts 5:28, where the leaders in the Jewish synagogue said, "Look, didn't we command you that you don't preach any more in this name? But, look, you've filled Jerusalem with His doctrine, and now you want to bring His blood upon us!" That was the accusation against Peter in Jerusalem. Here's the accusation of the

missionaries, if you will, in Europe with Paul. The world needs to be straightened out.

So, they come to Jason's house. He, along with a bunch of other guys, is arrested. They are charged with being accessories, accomplices, harboring a fugitive, insurrectionists. The news troubled the local officials because, again, in the Roman government, you were to keep peace. If you didn't keep peace, they came lookin' for you. So it behooved them to keep their dissidents quiet and keep peace.

Reviewing, however, the past, little evidence was shown of what these men were being accused of. And we read, in verse 9, something interesting. It says, "So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go." So apparently they got ahold of these men. But Jason made some kind of a deal with the government. Maybe, "I'll be sure they leave town. They're not gonna be doin' that. We'll just move along." And whatever Jason told them, Paul was supposed to leave quietly. So, it was a tough time. We read, in chapter 2:14 of 1 Thessalonians, these words. "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us." His view of his quickly being pushed out of Dodge was it was a spiritual battle. "You're suffering like we suffered in Judea as well. The suffering for the believer is the same everywhere. So, I've tried to come back to see you." Paul will get back there eventually, but for now it's a three-week visit, and that's about it before he is kind of driven out of town. So we don't know really what deal we read in verse 9 - the security that Jason offered to the arresting government.

But we read, in verse 10, "Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews." So, Jason had given his word. Paul, it seems, left quietly. He doesn't usually do that. They would leave the area. The work God had begun, though, would continue. They would face great tribulation. Paul would write, in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, "And

you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." So by the time Paul wrote to them from Corinth and from Athens, there is already a growing faith that's coming out of this little church that Paul just barely got started in and then was asked to leave. Verse 10 tells us that under cover at night, they packed up Paul and his little group, and they traveled 50 miles southwest to the city of Berea; which really wasn't a big city - it was a hamlet along the road. Now I wouldn't blame these guys when they showed up to just go, "Maybe we should take a break." But all I read is they arrived in town, and they immediately went back to the synagogue where it seems they always ran into lots of trouble.

Verse 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." So, 50 miles away from Thessalonica where he had argued and presented his case, Paul comes to this little town, and everything seems to have a refreshingly different response. There is a fair-mindedness. There is an openness to be taught. There's a teachability. They were quick to hear, they were quick to seek out, they were eager to learn, they were slow to believe. They needed plenty of information. But if they got it, it didn't matter who was telling them what, they were willing to respond. So I think Paul must have loved this. This sounds like the kind of hangout Paul would like to be - biblical, intelligent, sound, reasonable scrutiny of questions, diligent study. And Paul must have thought, "Finally I found a bunch of people that are interested." Quick to hear and then slow to respond but eventually they would hear. Paul would say in the Thessalonian letter (about Berea) that they would "test all things; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). And so Paul was thrilled to be there. Paul was happy to see these men and women in this place receiving God's Word to them. It's kind of like Paul wrote to Timothy about, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). That's what they were teaching, the word of truth. So, they formed their opinions, their positions and their beliefs based solely on the Bible. And again, we said when we started, these are verses about what is your attitude towards the Bible? Here's a church, or what will be a church, of people who are going to develop their worldview from a biblical standpoint. They're going to look to the world through the eyes of the Scriptures. And it doesn't matter

what they've heard or read or thought about, they consult the Scriptures to see whether those things were so. Hosea 4:6 said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." You shouldn't have that. We don't need that. You should have a biblical position on things that matter in the society. You should be able to go, "That's not what the Bible teaches. Here's where I stand. This is what I believe." And so he ran into those who were in this little town who seemed to just be those kinds of folks. You've gotta love these Bereans because no matter how dynamic the speaker or how forceful the argument - and I see Paul as doing both, dynamic and forceful - they were not going to be dissuaded until they could go to the final authority, which was the Bible. And that should be you as well. Regardless to what I say up here, you go read your Bible. Don't run around saying, "This is what Pastor Jack says." You can say that, and if I said it, I'll agree. But base your hope on that which God has said.

Verse 12 says, "Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men." There's the women again. Right? Many believed. Not all believed, but many believed. And, again, the women are mentioned over and over again by God's Spirit as being more sensitive to the work of God's Spirit. It must have been an awesome place - to sit around the plaza, the marketplace, the synagogue and listen to people speaking together.

"But when," verse 13, "the Jews from Thessalonica" (50 miles away) "learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea," (notice what the offense was - the word of God being preached) "they came there" (50 miles away) "also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 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." Satan doesn't rest. Right? The battle that you and I fight for the souls of men will never go away until we are done with our life here. Paul is 50 miles away. He couldn't be happier. I have to believe every morning he got up with a real smile on his face. "It's gonna be a great day." Except for one day, when these clowns - driven by religious hatred - brought a contingency from Thessalonica, traveled 50 miles to a fairly small town, to chase the believers out of town. They just wanted to move Paul along. By the way, that's what Paul used to do to Christians before he was saved. Paul arrived here knowing no one. He fell in love with the people, faithfully taught them. Because he was the target, notice that we read (here in verse 14) that the believers there did the smart thing. They accompanied him to the sea; that's about 20 miles from here to the coast.

They put him on a boat to Athens (that's on your map) about 250 miles all the way along the coast, by himself, to go away from this trouble. Whoever went with him on the boat, when they left Paul in Athens, Paul said, "Tell the boys to come as soon as you can." And so the boys stayed behind, helping establish, if you will, the Berean ministry. It would probably be one of the groups of people that would be involved with the Thessalonians in their ministry. But Paul would wait it out in Athens for these boys to arrive. He actually doesn't last. He finally just goes to Corinth on his own, but that's another chapter and a half, so we won't get too far ahead. What he did do in Athens, as he waited, was write 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians - from Athens. So now you have a background for those two books. Right? So hopefully the Bible is getting smaller in your head. So you could, if you have time (and why wouldn't you) before you go to bed, read 1 and 2 Thessalonians based upon what we just studied tonight.

But next week, we're going to end up in Athens - the intellectual capital of the world. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. Oh, yeah. Paul with the Bible. Let's see who has the greatest influence. But I want you to notice, as we stop tonight, the various attitudes that you find in the hearts of men hearing the Word of God. For three weeks Thessalonica, a church was born in just three weeks as Paul gave it his all. He didn't preach. He argued, he debated, he answered questions that were contrary and accusatory just to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Some of them listened. Many of them received Christ. Others were angry enough to try to chase him out of town based on false charges. They weren't interested in the truth, they weren't open to the Scriptures, they were jealous. And even though they came to synagogue every week there, it didn't move them. In Berea, the people were cautious. They weren't quick to respond. They were open-minded. They would search and allow the Word of God to be taught. But they would look to the Scriptures as the final arbiter of their belief system, which is a good thing to know. We've had people that have sat here in church for six months and then got saved. And I always said, "Why did you wait so long?" "Well, I was just thinkin' it through." It's hard to argue with that. At least they were Bereans, right? They were workin' it out, and God met them; He blessed them as a result. So, even there some would not relent. And then notice in every place, those who hated God's Word were driven to go far and wide to oppose it and to shut it down. You're getting that in the culture today, as a Christian. You preach the Word, people hate your guts. They don't hate you, they hate who you are in Christ. The attack is still the same; it still comes from the devil. It still is attacking God's Word. So leave tonight with this question - how do you view God's Word? How do you approach it?

What do you do with it? And do you share it with a sense of conviction and, man, God will use this? Do you live your life guided by it? Or do you just kind of, "Well, it's one opinion"? No. It's the only opinion that matters! It's life to those who would hear it. Paul got in a lot of trouble, suffered a lot for preaching it. He's probably the most successful evangelist in history though. And isn't that what you'd want to be if you could? Be the most successful minister of the gospel in our culture.

Next week, chapter 17:16, and we'll go forward. I don't know how far we'll go, maybe to verse 34. But we'll go with Paul to Athens. And poor Paul, man. He is discouraged. By the time he gets to Corinth, he's all by himself. He's been like that for months, and he stops preaching. He just kind of scratches around the edges because he doesn't want to get hurt anymore, he doesn't want to get beat anymore. He's had it. His boys haven't shown up. He's all by himself in the two filthiest towns around. Corinth was the worst. To "Corinthianize" meant to have sex outside of your marriage; it meant fornication. It was a term after the city; that's where you were waitin' around, "Yeah, we're at the shipyards, and they're not comin'." And he just finally quits. The Lord finally has to come and say to Paul (Acts 18:9), "Nobody's gonna hurt you here. You've got a lot of people in this town. Go preach, man." And he needed God's personal visit to get back on the rails. That's how hard this thing had been for him as he was going. So, read ahead, and we will pick up the story next week. May the Lord use these stories to encourage you to be more of a witness for Him.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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