



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 17:1-15

“Paul at Thessalonica, or Triumphs and Troubles of Ministry” TRANSCRIPT

We're turning to Acts chapter 17, verse 1 through verse 15, for our Scripture reading this morning. The Apostle is on his second missionary journey and he has crossed the Aegean Sea to Philippi; and now, he's going to make his way down from Philippi to Thessalonica, and ultimately to Athens. And, verse 1, of Acts chapter 17 reads:

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

You might wonder how the Apostle had the freedom to expound the Scriptures in the presence of the other Jewish men in the synagogue, in Thessalonica. And the reason that he freedom to do this was because such freedom was given to those who had spiritual gifts of utterance in the synagogues. And, in fact, this is carried over into the Christian church; and the Christian church met and had freedom of utterance for the gifted

men. That's expressed in passages like 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, where the Apostle exhorts the Thessalonian believers not to quench the spirit, nor to despise prophesying but rather prove all things and hold fast that which is good. The Early church in their meetings permitted freedom of utterance by men who had spiritual qualifications for it. And, it was evident, when the time came for freedom, that the Apostle was able to arise in the meetings and give exposition of the word of God. That is why Paul is able to arise at a particular point and expound the Scriptures.

Today, he would be squelched immediately, if he sought to rise in the meeting, by being reminded that it was the duty of the minister of the church to expound the Scriptures on Sunday morning – in his case the Sabbath day – and that no one else had freedom of utterance. So, we can give thanks to God for the fact that the early church recognized freedom of utterance in their meetings, derived from the freedom of the synagogue.

Continuing at the 4th verse:

“And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; (Incidentally, this word “believed” is not common word for believed and means something like, “to persuade.” And, if you have a New American Standard Bible or a modern version, probably, you have a rendering that represents that fact. So, we'll render it that way.)

“...And some of them were persuaded, and consorted with Paul and Silas and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. (Now, when we read “devout Greeks” Paul is in the synagogue, and so we are to understand this not of Greeks who were Gentiles, but of Hellenistic Jews. Now, they are called Greeks simply because they are Grecian Jews. So, Hellenistic Jews...) a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not,

moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, (That’s an old rendering of the authorized version that has often been popularized in common speech, applied to certain individuals. The men who translated the King James Version certainly had a gift with the phrases and this is one of them.) certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, (We still have them around.) and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, (Again, Hellenistic Jews) and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

May God add His blessing to the reading of this, His inspired word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for the ministry that the Apostle and Silas and Timothy and Luke and others carried on, as they sought to bring the gospel to the continent of Europe. And we thank Thee, too, Lord, especially when we remember that we are the recipients of the faithfulness and the courage of these men, convinced by the Holy Spirit that the word of God was true. And we thank Thee that in due time the gospel has come to the West, and has affected all of our institutions and particularly our lives. We give Thee thanks and praise. We worship the Triune God who so beautifully has planned the events of human history.

We thank Thee for the sovereignty of our God, and for the fact that the affairs of this universe are in the hands of one characterized by all of those magnificent attributes that mark Him out as Thee God of gods, and all of those relative attributes which mark Him out as a merciful, loving, kind, and just God in Heaven. How marvelous it is to know Thee, Lord. How marvelous it is to be able to worship Thee, to enter into the presence of God, and know that our words at this very moment are being heard. We worship Thee, we praise thee, we express to Thee that we adore the greatness and mercy and love and justice of our God.

And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt enable us to be fruitful and faithful in the conduct of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, committed to our hands. We pray, especially, Thy blessing upon this assembly of believers and professing believers. We pray for our elders and deacons, and for those who carry on the ministry here, we commit them all to Thee. We pray thy blessing upon such things as the daily Vacation Bible School, and other things that are outreaches of Believers Chapel. We are especially grateful Lord that Thou hast in grace allowed us to be entrusted in some measure with the word of God.

We pray for those who have special needs today. We commit them all to Thee. We know that Thou dost know them far better than we; we ask, Lord, that Thou wilt answer the cries of the human heart in accordance with Thy glory and in accordance with Thy grace. And we pray Thy blessing upon our time together this morning. May it be a fruitful experience for all of us, for those who may not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and for those of us who do. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning and the exposition of the word is “Paul at Thessalonica, or the Triumphs and Troubles of Ministry.” One of the impressive things about Acts chapter 17, is the fine picture that it gives us of apostolic ministry. And here, we have what no doubt characterized most of their ministry; a kind of routine of riot. One can almost imagine Paul, facing another day, with words to himself or to his friends, “Well, let’s see what’s on tap for us today. Will it be another riot?” Because that seemed to characterize them when they went about preaching the word of God.

Some years ago, I went to visit a young man who had been carrying on ministry in a Texas city, in a new church. He had been a friend of mine for a long time, and he asked me to come up and conduct a weekend conference. And after I arrived at the city, we were talking about the progress of the work in this city and he was very encouraged. The attendance was growing. They had been having a number of Bible classes and some people had been converted and others had been strengthened in the faith. And he was going on with the nice things that were happening in that little – not small – but a medium sized city.

And then, I asked him, had he been experiencing any opposition. And he hesitated. He looked at his wife and looked at me and said, “Well, yes. We have finally come to the attention of the pastor of the largest church in the city. And just recently, he has been speaking out against people attending Bible classes in homes and listening to the word of God in that somewhat unauthorized way.”

That is characteristic of ministry, unfortunately. And it's sad but nevertheless it's true; that when the gospel goes forth in the power of God, you can always expect opposition.

This section, incidentally, is particularly valuable if you are a reader of the Bible, because if you were to read 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, there would be some things that you might puzzle about if you didn't have this historical account of the ministry that Paul gave in that city. In fact, to put the two together is important; not simply for the Book of Acts, but also for 1 Thessalonians. And so, I encourage you as we are going through the Book of Acts, to read the Apostle's letters to the particular churches that are mentioned in the Acts.

Now, Paul's move from Philippi to Thessalonica may illustrate one of his principles of action and that was a preference for centers of population. Alexander McLaren in one of his works, perhaps in this one, says, “Conquer the cities and the villages will fall of themselves.” And so, it's possible that the Apostle thought of traveling from centers of population to centers of population, because he was at Philippi, a nice sized place at that time; then he went on to Thessalonica, a fairly large city for that time, of about seventy-five thousand people. It's a city today, known to us as Salonica, of perhaps three hundred thousand. And then, he moves on down, stopping briefly at Berea, to Athens, one of the great cities of the ancient world.

Now, one might think that that might be a good principle to follow and, so often, it is the case that we make out of the apostle's ministry certain principles that we are to follow and we are to follow them willy-nilly.

Well, one must be careful to not make that which is descriptive normative. And, we have to put together with this that the Book of Acts also records that Philip the Evangelist was preaching in Samaria and there was a remarkable response and many people were being converted and were coming to the knowledge of the Lord. And then

the Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Leave all of this Philip, I want you to go down into the desert,” and he went there and there he ministered the word of God to one man.

So, one must be careful in reading the word of God to refrain from making things that are descriptive normative principles.

So, we come, ultimately, to the great principle of the word of God and that is: All ministry is to be conducted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, if it should be that the Holy Spirit guides us to a center of population, or if He guides us to one individual or just a few, that is the thing for us to do.

Now, the mission to Thessalonica is described for us in the first ten verses of this passage that we have read for our Scripture reading. Paul was in Philippi and he passes through Amphipolis, which was about thirty-three miles on down the coast. And then, he comes to Apollonia and he passes through Apollonia, which was sixty-three miles away. And, finally, comes to Thessalonica, which was Salonica, which was one hundred miles from Philippi.

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It was a commercial city. It was a city on the Road to Rome, via the Ignatian Way. And so, the Apostle went into the synagogue here. It’s possible, of course, that there were no synagogues in Amphipolis and Apollonia; and the Apostle went on to Thessalonica because it had come to his knowledge that there was a synagogue there and he would have the opportunity for the ministry of the word as he had been taught by the Holy Spirit. And so, he enters into Thessalonica and as his custom was, so Luke says, he went into the synagogue, “And for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.”

It would be interesting to know precisely how Paul carried on his ministry, perhaps there is a bit of a hint in the word “reasoned.” It’s a word that originally referred to the Socratic method of communication, in which there was a responsiveness on the part of individuals. Questions thrown out, like Plato and Socrates did, and then the

answers were field and other questions were asked that were designed to cause individuals to think through the things that they were discussing.

Ultimately, the word came to refer simply to intellectual discourse in which there was some kind of interaction, not necessarily in personal questions and answers, but the kind of discourse in which questions were asked by the speaker – such as Paul does in Romans, for example, where a number of times he will make statements and then he will ask the question, What then shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? And then answers his own question.

So, Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures. Now, we also read that he opened and alleged certain things. That’s his method of reasoning; opening is a term that means to explain and from what we know of the preaching of these early men it was an explanation of the Old Testament prophecies. It was the taking of what we know as messianic promises and then putting along side of them the events of the life and ministry of both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, and showing that as you put these things side-by-side, we have in the New Testament the fulfillment of the things that Moses and the Prophets wrote.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of this was given by the Lord, when with the Emmaus disciples by His side, He reasoning from Moses and all the Prophets, sought to show in them how they all spoke of Him. So, Paul entered into the synagogue and he opened and alleged – that is, he explained the Old Testament prophecies, he put by the side of them the events of the Lord Jesus Christ and just as by the Holy Spirit on the Emmaus road, the hearts of some in the synagogue in Thessalonica were warmed by the things that they heard.

Remember what those men on the Emmaus Road said concerning our Lord’s preaching, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He opened to us the Scriptures along the way.” And so, the Apostle preached the word of God and there was a burning heart created by the Holy Spirit, as He brought testimony – the internal testimony of the Holy

Spirit – the *testimonium interim spiritus sancti* – to use the technical phrase. The Holy Spirit brought the conviction that this was the word of God. And that testimony to the majesty of Holy Scripture and to its truthfulness is something that God the Holy Spirit gives. It's the ultimate testimony.

In the final analysis, no testimony can compare with the testimony of God Himself, to His word. Sometimes we forget that the most objective of all testimonies to the word of God is the testimony of God Himself. That is that which accredits a revelation.

Now, sometimes, people say – unthinkingly – “But, that's subjective?” No, it's not subjective. It's internal but not subjective. It is the most objective thing that you could possibly have; the testimony of God the Holy Spirit Himself, to the heart, that this is the word of God and the things of which the word of God speak are true.

It's just as objective and just as convincing and just as unexplainable as the fact that the sun is shining out there now. I don't think that I would have to argue with you that today is day. That's something that is obvious. It's something that comes directly to you. Well, so the testimony of God to His word. It is the testimony to the majesty of Holy Scripture, given by God Himself, and those who have received that testimony do not have to be argued into the truth. That's what the Holy Spirit alone gives and can give.

And, if you are a believing Christian, you know precisely what is meant. If you are not a believing Christian, then, of course, you do not know and you cannot understand because it is something given by God to the people of God. Otherwise, Paul's word applies. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritual discerned.”

So, Paul opened the Scriptures; the Holy Spirit gave His attestation to some. We also read here that he opened, or explained, the Scriptures, and he made certain allegations. Now, that word in the original text is a word that connotes the idea of “setting along side of the Scriptures” the facts and the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Probably, you may remember if you have been here over the last few weeks, how Luke

describes what happened in the center, in the little prayer enclosure, in Philippi, when Paul was preaching to Lydia. There, you have the divine side of coming to the knowledge of the truth, for Luke says, concerning Lydia, “Whose heart the Lord opened,” that she attended to the things spoken by the Apostle Paul. That’s the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, about which we’ve just been speaking.

Now, there is another side; the human side – that’s the divine side – the human side is the principle of human interpretation. And that is expressed here when we read that Paul opened the Scriptures, he explained them, he made certain allegations by setting aside – side-by-side – the Scriptures with the fulfillment in our Lord’s life and ministry. And, specifically, Luke tells us what he taught.

We read here that he opened and alleged that, “Christ must needs have suffered.” Well, that was something that was very difficult for Jewish men to respond to, because, unfortunately, they had not been given very much ministry concerning the sufferings of the Messiah to come. It’s evident in the life of our Lord that when His apostles went about with Him, from place to place, they really didn’t understand that our Lord must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die, and be raised again on the third day. That’s why He had to say to them, on the Emmaus Road, “O Fools and slow of heart to believe, ought not the Messiah to have suffered these things and then to enter into His glory?”

So, the sufferings of the Messiah had been neglected. They thought of the coming of the Messiah as simply a time when the nation would be restored to its preeminence; that’s true – but that would be the story of the future – and they had failed to understand the sufferings.

Paul spoke about the sufferings. He spoke, also, about the Messiah rising again from the dead, and then he made his third point, that this “Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ.”

Now, isn’t it a very illuminating thing that when the Apostle went into that synagogue, he preached to them the great truths of the word of God.

Philips Brooks, one of the great preachers of a few generations back, has written some lectures on preaching. They were well received, have been read by many, many people. And he has a chapter in it called, “The Idea of the Sermon.” And in it he expresses a truth that is so important for us today because Evangelicals have neglected it. He says, “The truth is, no preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life that doesn’t put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold the conscience. Preach doctrine! Preach all the doctrine that you know! And learn forever more and more. But preach it always not that men may believe it but that men may be saved by believing it.”

About thirty-five or forty years ago, Dr. John Newton Thomas was installed as Professor of Systematic Theology in one of our Presbyterian seminaries. And his subject for his inaugural address was “The Sovereignty of God.” Now that would have bode well for that church, to have a minister and a professor who would be teaching the sovereignty of God. Unfortunately, that promise has not been born out. But, Dr. Thomas in the midst of his inaugural address made some very good points.

He said, “Let us suppose that there was a visitor from Mars, who come to our society and spoke with one of our ministers. And he spoke to the minister and he said, ‘What is the great principle of your faith? How would you describe it? What would you say is the cardinal belief of your theology?’”

And, he said, “The minister replied, ‘The sovereignty of God.’” And then, the Martian visitor, in order to test this, went out and visited the churches for six months. Sunday after Sunday, he went into the Presbyterian churches and he listened to the ministers. And, finally, he came back to the minister to whom he had first appeared and he said he was sorry that he had to report that he had visited Southern Presbyterian churches for six months, and he had yet to hear a sermon on the sovereignty of God.

And they discussed it and finally, the minister said, “But that is our cardinal principle.” And with that, he turned around and pulled out a little book, blew the dust off of it, opened it up to the proper place. It was entitled, “The Confession of Faith” and handed it to him and said, “See, this is the cardinal principle of our people.”

And the Martian took it, looked at it for a moment, and then made the telling and, really, crushing reply. He said, “Yes, here it is. But, in my judgment, Sir, if I may be permitted to say so, the convictions which are vital, the doctrines which are real, are the truths that your prophets proclaim in the pulpit and your pastors whisper at the bedside of the sick and dying. But I care nothing for a doctrine which reposes cadaverously in your confession, however beautifully embalmed, or perfect its state of preservation. I’m interested in the dead – not in the dead – but in the living.”

Well, Dr. Thomas went on to say, “Here is a fresh approach to a living doctrine, but unfortunately, that’s not been carried out.”

When Paul preached, you can see, his message gathered around these great truths: Christ suffered, Christ rose from the dead, and furthermore, He is the promised Messiah – this Jesus - of whom Paul was preaching.

To give you an illustration or two of this, back about five weeks ago, in Chicago on Wednesday night, I preached in a little church. It’s a very small church but, at one time, it was a fairly large church. And, I gave an exposition I – for the life of me – cannot remember the passage that I used, but it was not a very strongly doctrinal passage, like I usually do. But it did contain some doctrine. How can you preach if you don’t preach doctrine? So, when I finished, one of the elders came up to me and he said, “Dr. Johnson, I want you to know I don’t like doctrinal preaching.” He said, “I prefer something relevant to my daily life.” And we had a nice little conversation for awhile. That man, by the way, was a graduate of Wheaton College.

Now, what kind of little church would you imagine they would have, when the elders of the church believe they don’t like doctrinal preaching, but they want something

to the life? Well, it's possible to have a church that will flourish like a sparkler on Christmas, but, ultimately that church will die as a testimony to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and that church is a dying church. They had already met the elders, and had talked about the dissolution of the church, although they owe no money, they have a fairly nice piece of property – all paid for – they had, actually, sold off some property in Chicago, and had a considerable amount of money in the bank. No financial needs whatsoever – but they are dying, because the preaching of the word of God has come to be totally neglected.

Now, I want to give you another illustration. This one's very personal. Last Wednesday afternoon, I finished – I fly to Chicago, I teach at 1 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon and then teach again at 2 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon and at 3 o'clock I was walking from the classroom back to the office. And I was walking along and there was a young girl, who was talking – a very pretty young girl – she's in one of the classes that I teach called, “God, Man and Christ.” And in this class, by the way, we discuss the attributes of God, and we discuss the decrees and then we discuss the providence of God and things like this. Great stress on the sovereignty of God – not cadaverously residing in one of the confessions of faith; but, an attempt is made to make it a living, vital truth.

Well, as I walked by, she was talking to a very handsome young man, and I know that it took a little bit for her to say, “Wait a minute, I want to talk to Dr. Johnson.” So, she came up to me and she said, “I need to say something to you.”

And, sometimes, I have people say, “I need to say something to you,” and then they proceed to say, “I don't like what you're teaching.” [Laughter] and so, I would brace myself and she said, “I just want you to know what your teaching in “God, Man and Christ,” has meant to me. When I came here,” she said, “I knew nothing about this. And I've been listening and paying attention, and we have studied the decrees, how God works all things according to the council of His own will, and how these decrees are sovereignly given by God, and things transpire in accordance with His will. And then, we

talked about the providence of God and how God controls all the affairs of our lives. And we also talked about the mercy and the grace of God, and the justice of God, also. All of the things that characterize what I would call biblical systematic theology.

And she said, “I want you to know, that had it not been for what I have learned the past few weeks, I would not be able to cope with what happened five days ago.”

That was after I left Chicago. Evidently, the same day I had left. She said, “My best friend, a Christian young lady, committed suicide.” And with that, the tears began to flow down her face and she said, “I would not have been able to cope with that, had I not come to understand the sovereignty of God and the control that He has over the affairs of our lives. And I just wanted you to know how much sitting in that class has meant to me.”

Now, to my mind, that is the practical application of biblical doctrine. And, as that Martian visitor put it so well, “It’s what you are able to say by the bedside of a dying person that really counts,” and these great doctrines of the word of God are the things that really count in the exigencies of human existence.

Paul preached and he preached biblical doctrine. He preached the Christ must suffer, he preached that the Messiah should rise from the dead, and then, he made the personal application – he said that this Jesus is that Messiah.

Now, it’s striking to me and so true to life, one reads this and you can just see how this is absolutely true to human experience. Those people in that synagogue listened to him and when he said, “The Messiah must suffer,” I can just imagine they said, “Why, that’s a new thought. ‘The Messiah must suffer.’ We’ve thought of the Messiah as a great king who’s going to come, establish his kingdom upon the earth and the Jews will be elevated to superiority over the nations again, and we’ll have our supremacy among the nations. And so, they reflected upon the fact that the Messiah must suffer. As you well know, in Jewish thought, in order to combine these two things, finally, someone thought up the idea of two messiahs; a messiah Ben-David and a messiah Ben-Joseph.

And one would suffer, and one would be a great conqueror. In that way, it was hoped they would be able to harmonize these passages. They are harmonized in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they – I can just see what might have gone on in their minds – they could abide that as long as it was a theory.

And, then he said that the Messiah must rise from the dead and they said, “Ah, that’s a new thought, too.” And they reflected on that. But then, when Paul made his third point, that “this Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Messiah,” then their patience came to an end. And the rioting began.

Now, some, of course, believed. Some were persuaded and they consorted with Paul and Silas, “and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.” Among those who were converted was a man by the name of Aristarkus, another was a man by the name of Secundus, these are men who are later mentioned in the Book of Acts as being from Thessalonica and being believers. And these men were persuaded. And they were assigned by lot – that’s the literal force of that verb – I don’t want to press it, because that’s not a valid kind of hermeneutical thing to do – but it’s so fitting here. That they began to “consort” with Paul and Silas. So, the Holy Spirit had worked in prevenient grace and some who are in the people of God were brought through the preaching of the word to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. That’s the encouragement of gospel preaching; that there will be some who will respond. We don’t expect to have everybody converted. We gather the saints on Sunday morning and maybe most of you are converted; but, in the preaching of the gospel, the great mass of people turn away from the gospel, but some continue to respond. That’s the task of the preacher; to keep preaching with the confidence that God the Holy Spirit is still working.

But that’s not popular, with those who are opposed to it. And so, some high adventure occurred in Thessalonica that day because the Jews who believed not moved with envy, “took unto them certain lewd fellow of the baser sort...” These are the hoods

and the Teddy-boys and the Yippies; they're in every place. And so, they decide they're going to have a little demonstration that day.

When, about fifteen years ago, we used to talk about individuals who – who smoked marijuana – as those who played around in “Aunt Maudie’s fun garden” a reference to the fact that a number of people grew marijuana in their back yard, in their garden. So, here are some individuals who have been playing around in Aunt Maudie’s fun garden, and they are gathered together in order to have a little riot and demonstration. And so, that’s what happened.

They set the city on an uproar. They assaulted the house of Jason, where the apostles and others were supposed to be staying; and they sought to bring them out to the people. But, when they couldn’t find them, they took Jason and they brought him to the magistrates of the city and they said, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also...” What a testimony if it is true!

Now, the church, today, it couldn’t upset a teacup. I always think of that preacher who asked some kids to recite the books of the Bible; and one little kid began at Genesis and he went all the way through to “Revolutions.” [Laughter] Well, that’s really what happens when we preach the word of God. There are revolutions; and there was a revolution there in Thessalonica on this day.

And, will you notice the irrational way the world behaves. When they got Jason before the magistrates, what do they say? They don’t say, “These people are preaching that the messiah must suffer and that he must be raised from the dead, and that Jesus is the messiah.” No, what they say is, “These fellows are doing things that are contrary to the decrees of Caesar.”

Now, think of that for just a moment. What nation of people has always regarded itself as a nation set apart from the nations? Well, it’s the Jewish people.

What nation of people, according to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, says, We are a special people and we have one king who is the Lord God? What nation has always

been a problem for Rome? And for governments like that? Because of those biblical views? It has been the nation Israel.

They never have affirmed or should affirm that they have any other king but the Lord God, or Yahweh, in heaven. But here the people, who acknowledge only one king, accuse them of doing contrary to the decrees of Caesar, as if they are law abiding nations who always serve the kings of the earth.

It's just as if a communist should gather around and complain of conspiracies. So, these individuals say, they are not doing according to the decrees of Caesar. Well, what they're doing when they do that, of course, is to deny their own theocratic nation; just like those individuals in the days of our Lord who at the key moment said, “We have no king but Caesar.” And, in denying themselves, they denied the Old Testament, they denied their doctrine, and lost their position as the nation of God.

Well, it was fitting and proper for the brethren to see that Paul and Silas were going to have difficult, and so, they were sent away to Berea by night, and there, when Paul got to Berea – which was about forty miles to the west – he went again into the synagogue there.

Levy, the Latin author, calls Berea a noble town. And there were honorable women there. In fact, the people who were the aristocrats lived in Berea, noisy democracy existed in Thessalonica.

In my own unprejudiced way, I would say, that Berea was the Charleston of Greece. [Laughter] So, but, at any rate, Berea was a town that was noted for its aristocracy, nice people were there and they were noble people. But they were particularly noble, Luke says in not simply that way, but primarily in their attitude to the word of God.

Now, they are not gullible people; they are not people who are like the father or mother who says to the little infant, “Open your mouth, shut your eyes,” and then something is put in the mouth, like some medicine, and “Swallow.” Not like that. The

Lord Jesus doesn't really expect us to be taught that way. He wants us to think through the things that we are hearing. And so, these in Berea were more honorable because they searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether those things were so.

Searched the Scriptures daily? That's interesting, isn't it? You know what that means? That means when you read the Bible, you should keep on reading it. You should keep on pondering it. First impressions should be followed by second impressions; and, further research.

Like the professor of psychology, who was lecturing his class on the subject of perception. And he said, “Now, you have to be careful to reinterpret your first impressions after further observation.” And he said, “Just to give you a simple illustration, this morning I saw Mary Kane coming down the hall. She appeared to be wearing a plain green dress. But, as I got closer, I noticed that it had a figure in it.”

Now, look at that audience! [Laughter] Are there any men in this audience? I mean, real men? It is very important for us to reinterpret first impressions. And the saints in Thessalonica, were Christians like that. They searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so.

Sometimes, whole churches tell us that we should not interpret the Bible for ourselves; that private interpretation is wrong. Well, if you're looking for some scriptural justification for the duty of private interpretation; here it is, in Berea. The Luke, the historian, commenting on the fact that they were individuals who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Now, there is – there follows in verse 12, the most rational response to this that you could possibly find. Will you notice the conjunction that begins verse 12?

“Therefore...” Therefore many of them believed. Therefore? That's the necessary inference from searching the Scriptures daily. If a person searched the Scriptures daily, you can be sure that God the Holy Spirit will give His objective yet internal testimony that

the Scriptures are true and that the gospel is true, and that one may have salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, Luke says, “many of them believed; also, of the honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

I think it’s rather interesting that we’ve had reference in both of these places to the response among the women. This is one of the little implicit evidences of the legitimacy of these accounts because we know from history that the women of Thessalonica and Salonica or Philippi and Berea and Athens had a bit more freedom than others on the other side of the Aegean. And so, it’s not surprising to read that reference is made here to their responsiveness to the preaching of the Apostle.

Well, our time is about up and so, I’d like to close with just a few comments that I think are very important. First of all, one notices that in the ministry of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, there are triumphs – marvelous triumphs – but, nevertheless, triumph and troubles and travails go together in the Lord’s work. We can be sure that when we are preaching the word of God, it’s not very popular with the demons and with their leader and therefore we are expecting trouble whenever we preach the word of God.

And, if we preach the word of God as it is written, we shall have the same response that our Lord and the Apostles had. The idea that we can preach the word of God in its purity and in its plainness and in its saving capacity, and not have any difficulty by being sweet and nice is a thoroughly unscriptural idea. The Lord Jesus said, they persecuted you, “Me, they will persecute you. They hated Me, they will hate you.” And the evidence of that response in the preaching of the word is found in the conclusion of the life of John the Baptist and the conclusion to the life of our Lord; and, in the traditional conclusion to the lives of most of the apostles.

And even the Apostle John, the last one, who may have died a natural death, died a natural death in exile on a little island in the Aegean Sea. And, oh, the value of an open mind and a cautious mind, as is illustrated by the Bereans.

Have you ever wondered why Paul wrote letters to certain places and why he didn't write letters to other places? We have no letter to the church at Berea. Why did Paul write no letter to Berea? I don't really know. No one really knows. I only suggest to you one possibility. When a church is busily studying the word of God, and searching the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so, psychiatrists will move to other towns. Psychologists with biblical backgrounds will go to other parts of the city; for they will not be able to support themselves by those who come from that particular congregation. I'm not saying anything against the validity of psychiatry and the validity of psychology; for there is some validity to this. But, I'd like to suggest to you this: That when a church is pondering the word of God – truly pondering it – not attending, simply attending a church where the Bible is preached, what a difference there is between that and reading and studying and pondering the word of God for yourself.

But, when a church is doing that, there is no need – generally speaking – for apostolic letters. They are doing precisely what they should do and they are experiencing the blessedness of Christian salvation; not only for eternity but also in their day-by-day experience. And I recommend that to you, with all my heart.

The Scriptures are sufficient for us, for our salvation, and for our Christian life. May God help us to realize that and to do what those Bereans did.

Now, we've talked about the Greeks today, of course, these Hellenistic Jews; and we've talked about those who were persuaded and consorted with Paul and Silas. But, have we been persuaded? Have you been persuaded? Do you know what the testimony of the Holy Spirit to your heart that the Scriptures are true, that Christ is the Savior, and that in the giving of yourself to Him, you have experienced the salvation of God. Is that your experience?

Do you know that God is sovereign? And, have you by the grace of God come to experience the benefits of that understanding in your daily life?

The women and men of grace found no salvation in Athena, in Zeus, in Plato or Aristotle. They were weary in mind and heart and they turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no salvation in philosophy. Philosophy will clip an angel's wings, someone has said, and unweave a rainbow.

Nor is there any salvation in science; there is no salvation in psychology; and, above all, there is no salvation in religion. Paul's and Peter's solution is still the only one.

“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.”

May God help us to respond to the message of the word of God and respond to the truths concerning the Messiah who suffered, who rose from the dead, the Messiah who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are here this morning, you have never believed in Him, we invite you to come to the Lord Jesus, and put your trust, by the grace of God, in Him. May God give you a conviction of your sin, of your lost condition, of your need of what Christ has provided in the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross, and may you respond to the universal invitation that God gives. Come to Christ! Believe in Him! Receive everlasting life!

Let's stand for the Benediction. It's possible that there are some in this audience today, who have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. You may believe in Him at any time, not simply in a meeting like this. A meeting like this, perhaps, serves only one purpose; it calls to our attention our need of what Christ has provided and what may be possible for you. So, I – in the fact that I am going to close with a Benediction – do not mean to suggest by that that this is the end of your opportunity to be saved. This is something that stands before all of us, and is a constant opportunity; but, at the same time, carries a most dreadful responsibility when we refuse to come. The more we put off response to the gospel, the more difficult it becomes to respond.

The Scriptures say that when we reject the appeals of the word of God, a hardening process ensues. O, may God, in His wonderful grace move you to respond.

The Holy Spirit gives testimony to Christ. My prayer is that He will give testimony to your heart, and that by His grace you will come to Him, receiving as a free gift, not from religion, philosophy, science, attending a church, listening to a sermon, praying through, doing good works, being educated – anything else – but simply, through the appeal of the Holy Spirit acknowledging your lost condition, receive the free gift.

Let's close with a Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous accounts. They impress upon our minds so indelibly the fact that the Lord Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that the forgiveness of sins comes through the blood that was shed. O God, move in the hearts of all who are here, who do not the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, whether children or adults, O, at this very moment, may they come to Thee. May grace and mercy go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.