

Scripture Reading:

Acts 17:1 "Now when they had passed through Am-hip-o-lis and A-pollo-nia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." 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. 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, & 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. 6 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. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go."

"Turning the World Upside-down"

Paul and Silas have agreed to leave Philippi where Luke and perhaps Timothy will continue to strengthen the Saints in that young Church

- The first church in Europe which is the beginning of what we now call Christendom.

They journey to Thessalonica where we see them again going to the Jews first and then the Gentiles, a pattern established by Jesus as He commanded them to go forth as His witnesses. Later in this chapter we will see Paul minister in Athens where there was no synagogue so we should not assume that these other towns were passed over because they had no synagogue.

- Paul and Silas are following the Spirit's guidance just as we have seen throughout their journey.

Luke makes a point of saying that Paul reasoned with the Jews at the Synagogue for three weeks showing them from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. We want to consider the message that he brought to them once again, but also see lessons for us in the fact that he was patient and reasonable with these Jews. God greatly blesses their work here in Thessalonica with the conversion of some of the Jews and many Gentiles. We are not told how long Paul and Silas worked among the Gentiles after leaving the synagogue, but many came to Jesus and the work appears to have centered around the home of Jason.

- As we have seen during the first mission journey and more recently in Philippi, the Jews with hardened hearts become jealous and do their best to stir up trouble.

This response follows another pattern that we saw in Jerusalem where the Jewish leaders, who rejected the Messiah as He stood in their midst, then went to the Romans to have Him crucified. The hard-hearted Jews turn to various trouble makers in this city and stir up another mob to oppose Paul & Silas.

- As we saw in Philippi they work up a large crowd and go after Paul and Silas accusing them of turning the world upside-down and of not being loyal to Caesar.

Now there is some truth in the charge that as faithful Christians we are turning the world upside-down from their perspective...

When Paul & Silas come with the Good News that the penalty for our sins has been paid and that they are now free to love Jesus & keep His commandments, that really does turn things around...

- The Spirit of God is putting things back the way they should be: Bringing forth the New Creation!

Those with hardened hearts not only reject God's Good News, but go out of their way to disrupt the work of Paul & Silas to prevent others from hearing it as well. As Jesus said to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."

- However, as the Gospel is preached, we also see some of the fulfillment of the promise that Peter proclaimed in his great sermon at Pentecost: "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

In Philippi Paul and Silas were completely overtaken by the mob action: Beaten and thrown in prison. Here in Thessalonica, the Spirit protects them from the mob and even Jason is only required to post a large bail to prevent further trouble.

- This distinction demonstrates again, that the Spirit works as the Spirit chooses!

At times we must endure persecution and hardship and at other times it is appropriate to flee. Next week we will see Paul & Silas journey on to Berea where they will find many faithful Jews and we know from his later letters that the Church here in Thessalonica would grow and prosper as well. Paul & Silas & Luke & Timothy will continue to turn the world upside-down...

- And I want to focus this morning on a couple of lessons which can Lord-willing help us do the same in our day!

First, as I mentioned Luke makes a point out of how Paul and Silas were patient with the Jews in this city, reasoning with them for three weeks at the synagogue.

- I want us to consider what their message was and how they argued for its truth.

Luke tells us that they "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." I want us to see that BOTH the message and the method will bring a strong reaction from those who reject God's truth today here in America!

- First the message: These proud Jewish leaders had no need of a suffering Messiah!

They were proud of their heritage as Jews, proud of their knowledge of the Scriptures and proud that they were not like those publicans and sinners. They expected the Messiah to come as their conquering King who would affirm these truths and stand in awe of how faithful they had been to Him.

The humanists of our day are really no different:

- They are proud of their enlightenment heritage, they are proud of all their knowledge of science and philosophy and they are thankful they are not like those religious fundamentalists who trust in their guns and their religion!

Paul and Silas go to great lengths to show these proud Jews that the Scriptures declared that the Messiah had to suffer: He had to pay the penalty for their sin! This is not something demonstrated by a few isolated passages like Isaiah 53, but is in the warp and woof of the entire Old Testament. From the animals that had to be sacrificed to cloth Adam and Eve in the garden, down through the entire system of animal sacrifices... We are shown how a great price must be paid for the atonement of sin.

This is something that was rejected by these proud Jews because it would have meant being honest about their sin, something only the publican was able to do in that time of prayer

- It is a critical message that is also rejected by the proud modern men that we have with us today.
- The humanist manifesto declares that no god will save us, we must save ourselves

The famous atheist, Christopher Hitchens adamantly rejects any concept of the atonement: He considers the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to propitiate or satisfy the wrath of God against sin to be nothing less than child abuse, IF it were true.

- **Whether it is those proud Jews in Thessalonica or the proud humanists of our day, the battle is the same as what we saw just outside the garden with Cain and Abel:**

-- **Cain brought the works of his hands and made a pretty setting on the altar, expecting God to be impressed.**

-- **Abel followed the instructions that I am sure he received from his father to bring a lamb that had to be slain on the altar with all the blood and mess that this sacrifice would involve.**

Why was God pleased with Abel's sacrifice and not with Cain?

- **Because only Abel demonstrated the severity of the curse and the need for salvation.**
- **Because only Abel pointed forward to the great sacrifice that God's own Son would make to pay for the penalty for sin.**

Cain on the other hand demonstrated the modern attitude that things are not so bad and that if we just do our best God will be pleased with what we have to offer to Him. God gave a warning to Cain, "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

- **The ONLY way to rule over sin is to turn in faith to the Savior who delivers us from both the penalty and the power of sin.**
- **Those who harden their hearts against God's Good News will share Cain's fate in hell.**

On the other hand, those who repent of their sins and turn to Jesus as their Savior, continue to proclaim the great truth that put Abel in the Hebrews Hall of Faith: " 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."

Cain & Abel's battle over works righteousness v. salvation by Grace truly does continue down to our day: What the Bible proclaims as the greatest of love, the world declares to be unjust or child abuse.

- **However, we are called to preach the Good News: Our Savior suffered & died, was buried, & raised again on the third day!**
- **So this was the message that Paul and Silas brought and it will bring salvation and conflict today, just as it did there in Thessalonica.**

The other thing that I want us to consider as we face our modern world is the method that Paul & Silas used: They reasoned with them from the Scriptures:

- **They understood the authority of the Bible and reasoned from that authority.**

Now if you think Mr. Hitchens and his skeptic friends get upset about us presenting a suffering Messiah, they really respond poorly to both authority and Christians claiming to be reasonable! We talked about authority at some length last week and I trust that we all understand that this book is the ultimate authority because it is God's revealed Word. The owner's manual if you will. Those who reject God obviously reject this, but here is one of their major problems:

- **They insist that there are no absolutes to appeal too, but then live as if there are universal truths...**
- **Think about it this way: Most moderns will insist that there are absolutely NO absolutes!**

Now that seems pretty unreasonable to us and if we point it out, most will say this is not what they are really saying...

Sort of like these Jews who rejected the Messiah who was revealed in the Old Testament they studied, while claiming to believe in the Messiah of the Old Testament who was promised. This is why Luke says that Paul and Silas reasoned with them, doing all they could to show them the truth that was right before their eyes. We face much the same today, with people who might believe some of the “nice” parts of the Bible, but reject the truth that is revealed. They might discuss how Jesus said to love our enemies but they would recoil with talk of hell-fire and damnation. Of course you will find more talk of hell in the Gospels in the teaching of Jesus than anywhere else in the Bible. So our task today is much the same:

- We are to reason with those who God puts in our path proving to them from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah!

Now if Mr. Hitchens or Stephen Hawkins or any of the other famous skeptics of our day were listening to this message they would be pulling their hair out and screaming at me at this point because I keep talking about reason or reasoning...

- And you need to understand that they insist that you just can't do that with spiritual matters!

Because the Church has fallen down so badly in this area, and because their point of view has become so prominent today, we are in danger of being like those fish who don't really think about being wet... Just the way things are!

- I want to spend a few moments making the case that it is very reasonable for Christians to use reason and how UNREASONABLE modern thinking really is!
- I will do so with some simple math lessons [*present blocks and mention Linda*]

Before I use these blocks to make my point about reason, I want to address the big problem that has developed. It is what Dr. Schaeffer called the line of despair. The proud humanists in the enlightenment thought they could figure everything out with science and philosophy without God. When they got frustrated by the big questions, like what is love or the problem of sin, they created what he called an upper and lower story in life. [*use blocks to demonstrate.*]

Now on the surface this all sounds reasonable and it has become the water that surrounds everything, including much of the Church.

- What we really know about nature is from science and evolution.
 - What we dream about is found in the beautiful poetry of Genesis one.
- What we really know about sexual relationships is taught in the classroom
 - What we dream about is found here in the Song of Solomon.
- We measure children in EVERYTHING
 - But there is NO wrong or right way to instill wisdom

We need to grasp that this is pounded in on us from the earliest age in all corners of our lives: Radio, TV, the Internet, most of our friends, certainly the schools...

- And it is so pervasive that by the time we enter adulthood we often accept it without thinking about it.

It is SO easy to fall for Satan's deception:

- The lie that says the truth we can know about math or physics is very different from the truth that we can know about love or salvation or even God.

With math or physics you have reason & universals but with love or God or salvation we each have our own feelings and deeply held convictions!

Again on the surface it sounds very plausible & here is where math can be helpful, for OUR side: To their surprise! *[show addition and multiplication with the blocks]*

- Those are simply universal truths and this is what reason should deal with the skeptic will insist.

When we talk about the Trinity or the doctrine of sin, you cannot insist on truth in the same way.... Right? Their ultimate trick is to simply say, well if God exists show Him to me!

Now of course Paul tells us that we can point to God's creation as evidence of His existence and to the conscience that God has placed within each person and God's revelation as the final proof...

- But they suppress these truths in unrighteousness.

So why do I need to worry about being reasonable or using reason: Why not just present the simple Gospel and pray that God open their heart?

- Well, the main reason is that Luke shows us how Paul reasoned with these hard-hearted Jews in telling them the truth about Jesus.

In fact God Himself declares through the Prophet Isaiah, "18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says Jehovah, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken."

So how could these simple blocks help us reason with a modern skeptic? We can use something very familiar to them to break down the wall of separation they have placed between secular and spiritual truth, just as Paul & Silas used the familiar passages from the Old Testament to break through the wall of separation they had erected between themselves and the Messiah. *[show what can and can't be known about math: Mysteries and universals]* So we do have a responsibility to reason with those who are rejecting the faith, while always remembering that we cannot argue anyone into the Kingdom any more than the Apostle Paul could have done so with those Jews who rejected the Messiah.

We are to be the beautiful feet who bring the tidings of Good News, in all of its truth and beauty...

- And God is the one who must turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh who can truly hear & believe.

As we do so, we are allowed, no commanded to use all of the intellectual skills and knowledge that God has provided for us... ALL of the logic & reason at our disposal in His Creation!

My prayer is that we would take more seriously the lessons of this morning about being patient and reasonable as we share the Good News!

- The Good News that Jesus has come as the suffering Messiah who takes away the sin of the world and now reigns as King seated at the Father's Right Hand.
- As we do, we too will be accused of turning the world upside down and unbelievers have never meant that as a compliment!

The early enemies of the Church also intended the term Christian to be a derogatory label, and yet today, we are more than happy to accept that title.

In the same manner these enemies of Jesus tried to cause much harm to the early disciples by accusing them of turning the world upside-down.

So we also accept this mission, understanding what it really means is that we are putting the world right side up as the Spirit of God fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

It was Adam who fell into sin and actually turned the perfect creation of God upside-down.

Jesus comes as the new Adam with the new heavens and the new earth... The new creation, one that is once again right side up!

- **We are called upon to faithfully and patiently reason with those who have rejected this great truth.**

This is the task that we will be commissioned to continue as we leave the service this morning:

- **May we faithfully accept this mission and serve well until we gather again next week!**

Communion Meditation:

Psalm 111: “ 1 Praise Jehovah! I will praise Jehovah with my whole heart, In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. 2 The works of Jehovah are great, Studied by all who have pleasure in them. 3 His work is honorable and glorious, And His righteousness endures forever. 4 He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; Jehovah is gracious & full of compassion. 5 He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. 6 He has declared to His people the power of His works, In giving them the heritage of the nations. 7 The works of His hands are verity and justice; All His precepts are sure. 8 They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. 9 He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name. 10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.