
Preparing for Listening

Acts 17:10-15

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Many Christians struggle to practically arrange their hearts and lives so that coming to church is not a chore but a joy. What does getting ready for church Sunday morning gathering look like in your home?

When do you go to bed on Saturday nights?

When do you get up on Sunday mornings?

Who owns Sundays in your home?

Is it primarily a family day interrupted by church?

Is it primarily a church day that includes family activities?

When family activities interfere with church or when church activities interfere with family (sic.) who wins?

On how many Sunday mornings do you and your spouse or kids fight before coming or on the way?

What is your attitude towards the praise and singing portion of our gathering?

Are you eager to lift praise to the Lord?

Do participate as best you can?

What do you think about during the singing?

- OR -

Do you have a critical spirit?

Do you not participate?

What is your attitude towards the preaching and teaching portion of our gatherings?

Are you eager to hear the Word?

Do you have a learner's heart?

Do you open your copy of the Bible and follow along?

Do you prayerfully examine your heart as you listen?

Do you evaluate what you are hearing by the Word?

- OR -

Is the preaching not important to you?

Are you quick to reject what is being said?

Do you choose not to come or not to listen when certain pastors are preaching?

Recognizing the Situation

(v.1-10)

We are in the middle of a story in this text. Paul and Silas have been sent out by the church at Antioch to take the good news of salvation to the world. They begin by going to larger cities on major trade routes or that were connected by free Roman roads.

A Ministry Strategy

(v. 1-3)

Luke, our author, tells us about Paul's normal ministry strategy/

¹ Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. ³ He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." [NLT]

It is a simple and wise strategy. He is going where Jewish people meet. It is called a synagogue. Since Paul has credentials as a Rabbi, he has the opportunity to teach. So he opens the Old Testament, focusing on the prophetic sections, and preaches the good news of the coming, death and resurrection of Jesus according to the Bible. Because he is preaching to Jews, part of saving faith is to acknowledge that Jesus is the One who was promised in the Old Testament.

A Wonderful Response

(v. 4)

Initially there is a wonderful response on the part of some.

⁴ Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women. [NLT]

Three groups of people are identified: Jews, God-fearing Greeks (Gentiles) and prominent women. This last group is interesting. It is likely that these are wives of the city leaders. These people were among the listeners, but were persuaded and publicly identified themselves as being a part of what Paul and Silas were teaching. Because of the reference to Jason's house in verse 5, it is reasonable to assume that these new believers were also gathering in his home so that it became the focus of the opposition.

An Evil Opposition

(v. 5-9)

So an evil opposition to the gospel believers and gathering arose.

⁵ But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some troublemakers from the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. ⁶ Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they shouted, "and now they are here disturbing our city, too." ⁷ And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus."

⁸ The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. ⁹ So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them. [NLT]

Notice the tactics these “holy” Jews employed:

They got a mob of criminals and unemployed and attacked Jason’s home. This home has been identified as the place where the missionaries are staying and possibly where the believers are gathering.

They took Jason and other believers to the police and courts. They used the riot they had caused along with true statements falsely used in an attempt to get the government officials to intervene.

They this created turmoil in the city. The government officials arrested Jason and some of the believers. They were released only upon posting a bond.

An Assisted Escape

(v. 10)

The lives of Paul and Silas are in grave danger. God has begun saving His people here. What would become a wonderful church has been established. Several years later, Paul would write two letters of Scripture to them.

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. [NLT]

The brothers are wise. Paul and Silas are sent on to Berea. They leave at night, presumably for their own safety.

Paul and Silas arrive in Berea. They immediately implement their strategy of first preaching in the synagogue. They did not see what happened in Thessalonica as a failure. They simply continued to go first to the Jews. They would faithfully preach. God would be responsible for the results.

Understanding their Commendation

(v.11-12)

We need that context in order to understand Luke’s commendation of the Jews in Berea.

¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. [ESV]

Their Character

These Jews are contrasted with those in Thessalonica. They are “more noble.” Originally this word referred to one’s birth; that is, one was noble born. But Luke is using it in the more common way of referring to their character. They were people of good character. We already saw the evil character and conduct of the Jews in the other city. Now we are prepared for their conduct to be different.

Their Attitude

They were poised to receive the Word. They were leaning forward in their seats listening with open attention to what Paul and Silas were teaching. They were “eager” to hear.

Now, listen to me. Sometimes these people are portrayed as being nobler because they made even Paul prove his point. They were Biblically skeptical of this new teaching. They were took the stuff home and went over it because they had an attitude that we all need. They put forward as a pattern of careful, questioning listening that is not going to be deceived. And so, believers are to be like this, so it is said.

This is a gross misrepresentation of this text. It is just the opposite of what the text actually says. They “received the word with all eagerness.” They readily received Paul’s teaching and regarded it as true. And it is hard for us to conceive how radical this teaching would have been. The Old Testament was being opened and taught in an entirely new way. They were being shown new and amazing truths in their beloved Scriptures. The fulfillment of God’s promises and their hopes has come in the person of this, Jesus.

Their Action

Notice then what they did. They went home with the teaching they had received and opened the Scriptures they loved. Every day they dug into the Bible to see if what they were being taught was true. They recognized that the Scriptures were the touchstone. They dug into the Bible because they were hoping that what they heard was so. But they wanted to be sure. Believing this teaching was going to transform their lives. But it would also mean a radical break with the past. They, after all, were godly Jews. This meant the end of the Old and the beginning of the New. This meant no more temple, no more priests, no more sacrifices, no more Law, no more Jewish rabbis who rejected the good news and brought persecution. But it also meant the beginning of hope, of new life, of the glory of the Messiah to all the nations. This was not just a Jewish gospel; this was the gospel to all the nations.

Their Belief

Notice the “therefore.” Their leaning towards the Word, their listening to the preaching, their learning of the truth all wrought faith in their hearts. They believed. Many of them. It is worth noting, not all of them. Many of them believed. Many who believed were Greek women and some men.

Stirring up the Opposition

(v.13)

These Berean believers also experienced the opposition that had been stirred up in Thessalonica.

¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. [ESV]

Their Identity

Who is causing this trouble? The Jews who had created all the trouble in Thessalonica now make the trip to Berea. They were not content to stir up trouble in their own city. They felt it was necessary to undermine the work of God through the apostles in Berea.

Their Actions

So they came to Berea. They used the same tactics as was used in their own city. They stirred up crowds to oppose the believers. They created the same mess.

Protecting the Mission

(v.14-15)

It is easy to read these two verses and not hear the drama involved.

¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. [ESV]

Notice once again the “brothers”. I love it. God’s people are being saved. God’s church is being formed. They move together to deal with persecution. They see the threat to the great gospel mission and move to keep the mission going. They send off Paul accompanied by a team, presumably from Berea. They leave Timothy (hey, when did he join the band?) and Silas to continue the teaching.

Once Paul arrives in Athens, he sends the team back to order Timothy and Silas to join him there. Athens is a very different sort of place than either Thessalonica or Berea. The mission is now going to shift in a significant way. He begins to move more into the marketplace. The gospel is starting to be more intentionally and initially brought to the Gentiles.

Principles and Application

So, how does all this impact our preparation for worship?

Thinking about our attitudes...

Toward the preachers of the Word.

Do you respect and trust those who preach to you?

Do you hold those who preach to you to a high standard?

Toward the preaching of the Word.

Are you eager to hear preaching or is it an optional part of your relationship to God?

Do you do all you can to be ready and attentive to the preaching?

Do you encourage others to be eager to hear the Word?

Toward the message of the Word.

Are you listening to *what* is being taught with an attitude to learn?

Do you evaluate the truths in the light of the Scriptures?

Do you talk with others about what you are learning or the questions you may have?

Toward the opposition to the Word.

Do you join in with criticism of the ministry of the Word?

Do you correct or challenge those who misrepresent what is taught?

Thinking about our actions...

Praying...

Do you pray for those who are preaching? Generally? Specifically?

Do you pray for yourself that you will be a wise, eager learner of God's Word?

What keeps you from prayer?

Preparing...

Do you do the best you can to be ready for gathering for worship?

Do you, when it hasn't gone well, take some time to frame your heart and focus in?

What keeps you from being prepared?

Attention...

How are you training your children to listen and not be a distraction?

What distracts you from listening? What do you do about it?