

“Of a Nobler Sort”
Acts 17:1-15
(Preached at Trinity, March 28, 2007)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 16** Paul, with Silas, Timothy, and Luke preached at Philippi and were blessed with some converts. They suffered greatly while they were there, however. Paul would later recount his treatment in his first letter to the church of Thessalonica. **1 Thessalonians 2:1-2** – “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: ² But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”
2. As move into **Chapter 17** we find Paul and his companions leaving Philippi and proceeding through Amphipolis and Appolonia on their way to Thessalonica. Notice the pronouns have switched back to third person. Luke apparently did not accompany Paul to Thessalonica.
3. Thessalonica was the chief city of Macedonia. It was a port city and most of the produce of Macedonia passed through Thessalonica. Like most prosperous cities it also had a secular mindset.
4. There was a sizable Jewish community in Thessalonica with its synagogue and Paul followed his custom of going to the synagogue to teach. He did this first in a city because the Jews had already heard of Jehovah God. They already knew of God's covenant with Abraham. Most important, they had the Scriptures. Paul would preach the Gospel from the Scriptures: **Acts 17:2-3** – “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³ 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.”
5. There were often Gentiles also attending the synagogue. Converts won here would then be used to spread the word to the rest of the city. One of these was a man by the name of Jason. He was one of the first converts in Thessalonica who demonstrated the heart of a believer in showing hospitality to Paul.
6. There were many others as well – Gentiles who embraced Christ.
 - A. Among these also were wives of leading citizens. **Acts 17:4** – “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”
 - B. Some were saved out of outright paganism **1 Thessalonians 1:9** – “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;”
 - C. These Gentiles formed the nucleus of the church in Thessalonica.

7. This first part of **Chapter 17** demonstrates clearly the evil nature of the world in which we live. It paints a picture of the great contrast between those who are lost and those God mercifully saves. Tonight I want to see clearly the difference between the two groups. The only difference is the grace of God. We will also see that God also gives grace in restraining the wickedness of men.
- I. I want to first call your attention to opposition God's people face when we challenge the evil of this world – We run against the grain of this world.
- A. Paul had come to preach the Gospel of Christ but immediately faced opposition
1. The people of this world do not like to be challenged or confronted. Even religious people do not like their beliefs challenged
 2. After three Sabbath days the synagogue officials decided that they had had enough of these missionaries and their teaching about Christ.
 - a. It was easy for them to find allies to their cause
 - b. They quickly enlisted a mob
Acts 17:5 – “But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar”
 - c. Luke aptly describes their nature
“certain lewd fellows of the baser sort”
The word translated “baser sort” **ἀγοραῖος** can refer to a market place which is how the NAS translates it. But it can also point to the hucksters and dishonest people associated with the market place. Here it points to men in the worst of their sinful condition.
- B. Those who challenge the comfort of sinners have always been hated
1. People love their sin and love those who share in their sin
Romans 1:32 – “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”
 2. It isn't popular to upset the status quo – this has always been the case. God's people are condemned for upsetting the peace.
 - a. Elijah confronted Ahab in his wickedness and prophesied that a drought would come upon Israel. Ahab accused him as a disturber of the peace.
1 Kings 18:17 – “And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel?”
 - b. Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would fall to the forces of the Babylonians.
Jeremiah 38:2-3 Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. ³
Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.”
He was dragged before the king accused of treason.

Jeremiah 38:4 – “Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.”

3. Paul was upsetting the comfort of the Jews and they would not stand for it.
- C. Have you experienced this?
1. Jesus promised that we would face opposition
Matthew 10:34-36 – “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. ³⁶ And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household.”
 2. Our very presence is an irritation
- II. Second, I want to call attention to God’s grace in the hearts of lost people
- A. Those of the “baser sort” in **Verse 5** implies there were many who were not
1. There are many degrees to which sin manifests itself upon the earth
 - a. God’s restraining grace is evident everywhere
 - b. We know many decent people who are lost
 - c. This is all evidence of God’s grace
 2. The Jews sought out those who were most inclined against the Gospel
- B. Most of the city, however, was simply indifferent
1. The Jews sought out wicked men
 2. This doesn’t mean that the whole town turned against Paul
 3. I’ve shared before that there are two reasons we don’t see more persecution in our own country.
 - a. Because of our thoroughly secular and corrupted Christianity. Most who call themselves Christian live no differently than unbelievers. Their faith has little impact in how they think and how they live.
 - b. I’m convinced that God’s grace in the hearts of men is another reason we don’t face more persecution in our country. God has been merciful to restrain evil in the hearts of people.
 - c. We are seeing this change more and more
For example, I saw a news segment that shows an increase in the number of beatings upon the homeless – even in our city.
- C. Look at the contrast of the Bereans
Acts 17:11 – “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.”
1. These were unbelievers!
 2. These Jews were more noble – the word is **εὐγενής** which means well bred. There were many in Berea who had been brought up to be polite. To examine the facts before jumping to conclusion
This is another example of grace – they were willing to listen.

3. God blessed them with salvation
Acts 17:12 – “Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”
4. There were also wicked men in Berea
Acts 17:13 – “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.”

III. Finally, I want us to look at God’s transforming grace in the lives of the redeemed

- A. In three short weeks many had come to faith in Christ
 1. **Verse 4** speaks of the magnitude of the number
Acts 17:4 – “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”
 2. God’s accompanied the preaching of His word with great power
1 Thessalonians 1:5 – “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. . .”
 3. Many also believed in Berea
- B. Look at the great evidence of God’s transforming power
 1. They endured in spite of suffering
 - a. Unable to lay their hands on Paul they seized Jason and others and dragged them before the magistrates.
 - b. This would be just the beginning of the suffering these new converts would experience, yet they continued to demonstrate their great faith.
1 Thessalonians 1:5-7 – “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: ⁷ So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.”
 2. They sacrificed themselves for the brethren
 - a. At great personal risk Jason gave shelter to Paul and his companions
 - b. Notice what care they had for Paul even though they had known him for only a short while
Acts 17:10 – “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea”
Acts 17:14 – “And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea:”
 - c. Paul would later write to the Thessalonians:
1 Thessalonians 4:9 – “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”

- d. We've seen this over and over in Acts
- We've seen their sharing spirit (I've seen it with many of the Trinity folk willing to give of themselves for the brethren at Lakeshore)
Acts 2:45 – “And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.”
Acts 4:32 – “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of *them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”
 - When Peter and James were in prison the church gathered together to pray
Acts 12:12 – “And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”
 - We've seen the church's care for Paul over and over
Acts 9:23-25 – “And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: ²⁴ But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket.”
 - In **Chapter 16** we saw Lydia care for Paul and his companions and then the Philippian Jailer's care of him. This is what Christians do!
3. They had a hunger for the Word.
- a. Every true believer has a high view of God's Word.
Listen to the testimony of the Church of Thessalonica
1 Thessalonians 2:13 – “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”
 - b. God's people must be like the Bereans. We must hear the Word and search the Scriptures to see of the things we have heard are true.
 - c. Notice it became a daily work
Acts 17:11 – “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Conclusion:

1. We find many types of people upon this earth.
Some are of a baser sort. Some are of a nobler sort. We owe the Gospel to them all.
2. Remember this. No matter what type people we find we are to bring the pure Gospel them. It is offensive to confront people in their sin but we must not try to make it more likeable by softening the message.
3. We must remember no matter what type people we find we are dependent upon God to change their hearts. God is able to change the heart of a noble or a base person.