

Acts 17:1-15

“Reasoning, Researching, Responding”

Paul & his team have been pioneering the gospel throughout Europe. & Though they’ve enjoyed a certain amount of success, it hasn’t exactly been the “welcome wagon” one might hope for. They’ve really only been in one major city since crossing the Aegean Sea (Philippi) & already Paul & Silas have been falsely accused, brutally beaten & placed in prison.

Things we don’t typically gravitate toward when we consider what it looks like to be in the “will of God”. We have this way of somehow (many times) deceiving ourselves into believing that if we’re in the will of God there will never be a problem, there will only be prosperity, there’s no pain or lack of creature comfort in God’s perfect will for our lives... Listen; that *sounds* good, it *sells* well, but it’s *unsupported* in scripture.

Jesus said things like, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”¹ He said, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”² Why are we exhorted to “Remember”? Because our tendency is to forget!

Paul said, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”³ & Of course Peter kept us in check when he said, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;”⁴ Hardship, trials, afflictions & the like are simply no stranger to the child of God. This world is against you, Satan & his cohorts are against you, your own flesh drives against you... Where then do we get this idea that God’s will is only good times & great experiences?

Of course I’d never seek to imply that God’s will is *only* hard times. That’s not fair & balanced either. We serve a God of grace/mercy who many times will bless us in ways above & beyond anything we could ask or think. I’m simply trying to encourage you to recognize that God doesn’t demonstrate His love for us through creature comfort or what we deem to be pleasant circumstances. But His love toward us is demonstrated through the sacrificial death/resurrection of J.C. on our behalf, paying the penalty of our sin. His love transcends the temporal, the circumstantial, it is eternal...

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 7:13-14]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 15:20]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Ti 3:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Pe 4:12-13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So Paul & Silas, being released from prison, encouraged the fledgling church there in Philippi & then they left. Luke however, evidently stayed behind. But then we read in Ch 17.

Vs 1

(Map) I love how Luke makes it sound like they just sorta hopped, skipped & jumped on down to Thessalonica real fast. There was a solid 30-35 miles between each of these cities mentioned here. A good 3-day walk is in view & it's probable that they stayed the night in the 2 cities mentioned along the way. **But ultimately they were making their way (as was Paul's custom) into the major city (a Sea port city) of Thessalonica because he liked to hit highly populated areas knowing that the church plant would spill out into the surrounding areas from there.**

He might make his way to Joplin, trusting that once something was established here it would trickle down into Neosho, or over to Carthage, Carl-Junction, you get the idea. Plus we read that there was a synagogue in Thessalonica & Paul's typical M.O. was to share in the local synagogue & seed a church plant from the response. **(That way you've already got a base of men who are seasoned in scripture & can be disciplined quickly & in turn disciple others who are turning to Christ). Btw, Thessalonica (now called Salonica) is still a thriving city today w/a population of over 300,000 people.**

Vs 2-4

So, some of the Jews & a "great multitude" of Greeks were persuaded coming to believe that Jesus is in fact the Christ.

But what we want to take note of here is the approach that Paul used in presenting to them the facts about Jesus. There were basically 3 angles that he would hit it from. First of all; we read that he "reasoned" w/them from the Scriptures. This word "reasoned" is the word from which we get our word "dialogue". He simply conversed w/them, discussed back & forth, question & answer kind of environment.

& He had a very strong footing from which he could engage them because the message of the gospel is very reasonable. Once you understand the heart of God, the purpose & place of the cross, where we are (being dead in our sin) Vs the new life & righteousness before God that we're given in Christ, it makes sense to believe on the Lord J.C. It's a reasonable response. *"Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.'"*⁵

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 1:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God is saying, “This is what you’re bringing to Me; sin, shame, uncleanness. This is what I will do for you; make you clean, restore your dignity, wash you white like snow.” A little later on in Isaiah, in speaking of the work of the Messiah, God said that He would send Him, *“To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;”*⁶ God is saying, “Hey, let’s sit down & talk this through. I’ll take all your sadness, your heaviness, the charred remains of a life that you’ve burned to the ground & in exchange I’ll work something in you that’s beautiful, that’s joyful, that leaves you longing to give your God praise for all that He has done...” Ladies & Gentlemen; that’s beyond “reasonable”! But this is the offer of new life that God extends to you in Christ...

What’s absolutely staggering to me is how many people will hear that & say, “You know, thanks but no thanks...” What!?! Friends, that’s about as *unreasonable* as you can get. But this is what Paul would do. He would reason w/people from the Scriptures.

& Allow me to take this one step farther. Not only should we reason evangelistically from the scriptures, we should also disciple our families practically in the same way. Listen parents; let’s not just all the time tell our kids what to do, but let’s take the time to share w/them & show to them why from the scriptures. God’s word makes sense. I’m not suggesting that you use it to “beat” your family into submission, but through it you “feed” your family so that they understand the “why” behind the “what” through scripture.

So; Paul reasoned w/*them*, but then he also *explained* the passages *to them* pertaining to the death & resurrection of the Messiah. The word “explaining” literally speaks of “opening” the scriptures. *He was doing then what we’re doing right now. Explaining/opening the scriptures so that all could plainly see. The scriptures were very clear how that Messiah would suffer. I have no doubt he spoke to them out of Isaiah 53. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*⁷ The entire passage points to the suffering Servant of God. He spoke to them out of Ps 22. Passages that pointed to His death... But also out of Ps 16 & passages that pointed to His resurrection, *“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*⁸

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 61:3]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 53:5-6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 16:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There are passages that prophesy of the birth of Christ, the life of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the everlasting reign of Christ upon the throne of David...

Paul reasoned w/them, he explained these things for them. & Then finally he “demonstrated” or “proved” these things to them. The idea is that He pointed out for them how all of these things were fulfilled in Jesus. Where He was born, the life He lived, the fact that He’d been crucified but God raised Him from the dead thereby proving that He is in fact the Christ.

You see; they were familiar w/the passages that pointed to a suffering Messiah. But they were also familiar w/the fact that scripture speaks of a Messiah that will rule & reign, who will usher in His eternal kingdom & dash the heads of His enemies like a potter’s vessel. & This is where it would get sticky for them because they couldn’t reconcile the 2... How can you suffer in humility, yet reign over your enemies victoriously eternally?

So what many had done was conclude there must be 2 Messiahs; one who would suffer shame, the other who would rule & reign. They called the reigning Messiah, “Messiah Ben David” after their greatest king. The suffering Messiah they called, “Messiah Ben Joseph” after the Patriarch Joseph who suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers. What Paul did was come along & say, “No, there won’t be 2 Messiahs, but 2 comings of the 1 Messiah.” He came the 1st time to suffer, to be shamed, to pay the penalty of death (as the Lamb of God) that’s due our sins. When He comes again it will be to reign in glory. Not as a Lamb, but as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

This is what he did in the synagogue for 3 Saturdays. Reason w/people, explain & open the scriptures for them, demonstrate the necessity of the death & resurrection of the Messiah & demonstrate how it was all fulfilled in Jesus... The result?

Vs 4-8

Allow me to exhort you; beware of the sin of *envy*... That burning, malicious kind of desire for what someone else has that causes you to resent, become bitter & filled w/hatred toward them. You might be envious of their popularity, of their money, of their position of power/influence or something else that they have or do that yields a particular result for them... Ultimately; it was envy put Jesus on the cross. Yes; He died for the sins of the world, but the catalyst that subjected Him to the mock trial & execution was *envy*. Matt 27:18, “For he (that is Pilate) knew that they had handed Him over because of *envy*.”⁹

⁹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Mt 27:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Envy makes murderers out of people. Here; the Jews who weren't persuaded by the things Paul presented, became *envious*. Why? Because of the incredible results he was obtaining w/everyone else. People were evacuating the synagogue & establishing a church. They weren't looking to the law for righteousness, but trusted that by grace alone, through faith alone (in Jesus) they would be made right in the sight of God.

Here they had been working all these yrs to establish the synagogue & in just a few weeks Paul had the makings of a megachurch or something... So they sought to disrupt it; to destroy it. They found some guys who could be paid to lie & falsely testify & hired them to create a riot! They went to Jason's house (because they knew Paul was staying w/him) & tried to drag him down to the rulers of the city to have him arrested.

But Paul & Silas weren't there so they grabbed Jason; dragged *him* downtown & accused him of aiding & abetting these men who are "turning the world upside down"... What a wonderful crime to be accused of 😊. They don't even know it, they're complimenting the effectiveness of the ministry of Paul & Silas. **They're saying, "These guys are making a radical impact on our city, everything is changing because of what they're doing!"** To which I say, "Praise God!" Would to God we could be accused of the same, turning this town upside down (which in reality is right side up), turning things around through the proclamation of the message & mission of Jesus.

The truth is that this world *is* upside down. When God created man, things were right side up. We were created spirit, mind & body. Adam communed w/God, connected w/God in spirit. The mind being subject to the spirit was seeking to please the spirit & the impulses of the flesh lie dormant... **When Adam sinned everything flipped upside down. A relationship w/God was no longer the central focus. Now the flesh was at the top, the mind seeking to please the drives, desires & impulses of the flesh & the spirit lies dormant...** When you believe on J.C. the order flips once again going right side up, not upside down. This is what was happening. People's lives were changing; they didn't want to party anymore, weren't buying the idols or going to the pagan temples anymore; they were loving Jesus & it was disrupting these people's way of life.

Believe me when I tell you that your convictions as a Christian gets on the nerves (generally speaking) of the unbeliever. You're a real problem for those who want to spread a twisted, perverted or otherwise ungodly agenda & they'd just as soon get rid of you. Just like they were doing w/Paul & Silas.

They accused them of acting contrary to Caesar, saying there's another king- Jesus.

Basically, they accused them of treason. This was not a small thing that they're accusing them of. Now I have no doubt that they were teaching that Jesus is a King. The King of kings (to be precise) & He has every right to rule over His people. But context is always key. His kingdom isn't of this world.

Believe me when I tell you that your submission to Jesus will make you a much *better* citizen. You'll be subject to your authority, pay your taxes, pray for your leaders & the like... But this isn't how things were being handled. Instead, they were being charged w/insurrection, rebellion again Caesar.

Vs 9-10

When you read that they took security from Jason, what that means is that he paid a heavy fine so as to ensure this wasn't going to happen again. Typically, Roman officials didn't really care what people believed so long as things didn't get out of hand. When riots started erupting they dealt w/it swiftly & severely. So; even though Jason didn't *start* the riot, he was the one who paid for it.

Then, so as not to jeopardize Jason any further, Paul & Silas left (Map) that night traveling another 50 miles or so to Berea. & As was the custom, when Paul arrived he went into the synagogue to reason w/those who were there. (BTW, if you'd like more insight on the things Paul said & what he taught while in Thessalonica, you could read 1st & 2nd Thessalonians this week. Might want to read Philippians while you're at it to get a snapshot of his ministry in Philippi).

Vs 11-12

We get the impression that more than seeing synagogue as a "religious duty" that the greatest majority of these people (both Jew & Gentile) had a genuine desire to want to know & be found pleasing to God.

We find here that they were "more fair-minded" than those in Thessalonica in that they (notice) "received the word w/all readiness". That is; there was a zeal, an eagerness to want to know both the *word* of God & the *God* of the word. They were as we should be... They couldn't wait to open their bibles, they were taking notes as Paul was sharing w/them so they could verify later in scripture what he was teaching them. But listen, it wasn't out of a skeptical kind of disposition. They were excited to hear about what God had for them. Yet simultaneously, they weren't just going to believe it because some guy sounded sure of himself, they wanted to verify it for themselves! I can't stress forcibly enough that you & me, we should be the same way!

Don't believe it, just because I say it! It's true that I will never intentionally mislead you. However, is it possible that there may be a point or a principle that I've misunderstood along the way? Sure it is! Go back, check up on what I'm telling you, find your assurance from scripture. Investigate for yourself!

Think of these guys; one of the foremost leading apostles teaching them, he would pen at least 13 NT letters, risked his life on a regular basis for the propulsion of the gospel & they were all, "What you're saying sounds fantastic! But we're gonna go ahead & double check if you don't mind..." How much more should we verify the things we're taught as principles/precepts of the word of God? & Listen, they weren't concerned w/how funny he was, how captivating & engaging of a speaker he could be... They wanted to know if he was teaching truth...

They "searched the scriptures *daily* to find out whether these things were so". They didn't just open their scrolls on Saturday at synagogue! They were searching it out every day; give us this "day" our daily bread. As the psalmist said, "*How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.*"¹⁰ Do you want to be able to recognize a lie? Than get to know the truth. These folks were hungry for truth. What did Jesus say? "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.*"¹¹ Your bible isn't a book of philosophy, or pretty poetry, it's truth, truth you can know. Search it, study it.

Now; because they were receptive to the word, because they searched it out to see if what he was saying was so; what was the net effect? (Vs 12) "*Therefore many of them believed...*" If they were genuinely seeking after God, desiring truth, they became believers.

Listen, I'm not against therapy, or having someone to speak to, to help line you out emotionally. But so many problems would be solved & questions would be answered if people would just take the time to study scripture daily. The Word of God strengthens faith, changes hearts & renews minds...

Vs 13-15

This is how much Satan hates the simple preaching/teaching of the word of God. You are in a place that loves God's word, under a ministry that teaches the word & Satan would love nothing more than to disrupt & destroy both the *work* & the *workers*.

That's exactly what happened then, it's what happens now.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Ps 119:103-104]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Mt 5:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Fearing for Paul's life, the brethren sent him away by way of the sea & sent him to Athens... However; Paul encouraged Silas & Timothy to stay there for a bit longer so as to help establish the disciples.

Paul in no way thought he was the only man qualified for the job. Silas & Timothy were well able to teach & strengthen believers just the same. So he had them stay & do just that... It's what we're called to do; make disciples. I'm not the only one who's able to do that *around here*. There are several mature, qualified Christians right here in our midst. & It's our heart to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

Last thing & we're done. When you follow the flow of the 1st ½ of this Ch we kinda get the picture of the pastor/parishioner, the teacher & the taught. The Pastor is to reason w/people, to explain scripture & demonstrate how that Jesus is in fact that Christ (as Paul did in Thessalonica). **The people are to receive the word w/all readiness, to search out in scripture what's said from the pulpit to verify whether or not what's said is so. Having researched it, we're to *respond* appropriately to it, giving God His way in our lives...**

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the clarity of Your word. That it's Your heart not to bind it up in a shroud of mystery; but to open it up so that we can see clearly & respond appropriately to the things You teach us by Your Spirit. May we do that even now. Ignite our hearts w/a hunger for Your word, renew our 1st love relationship w/You that we might honor You w/the whole of our lives. Be glorified in us.

I'd be remiss if having shared the truth of Jesus, (that He is the Christ, the Lamb of God who's shed His blood upon the cross, taking away the sins of the world, rising again the 3rd day that we might stand faultless before His throne through faith in Him) I didn't give *you* an opportunity respond to the reasonable offer of salvation by grace through faith in Him. Believe in Him today & He'll give *you* new life.