

Reading: Acts 17:1-15

17 When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,' he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.^[a] ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

In Berea

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Sermon:

I wonder have you ever sat down to think about why you live where you live, or why you work where you work? Is it because it's a nice peaceful area you live in. Is it because the job gives you a comfortable standard of living. Or is it maybe that you've never actually thought about it before.

In light of that I want to go a stage further. Because have you ever considered that God has a mission in mind for you where you are today. I'd love some of us to be able to plan to go to support our CMSi link Antony Njoroge in Nairobi Kenya once the Pandemic is under control, but really you don't need to go halfway across the world for what God has planned for you. It's not the missionaries in foreign countries that are the only ones that change the world for Christ.

The world can be changed for Christ by you in your own street. The world can be changed for Christ by teenagers going off to University or school each day. The world can be

changed for Christ by business men, women, teachers, office staff, nurses or whatever you do. You see making a difference for Christ is not about where you live, but actually about how you live. If we grasp that concept today, we can go into our everyday lives with the movement and purpose of a Missionary right where we are, and as Paul says to the Church in Colossae knowing that 'Christ is in us'.

In Acts 17 we are going to see a blueprint of what it means to make an impact for Jesus wherever we are. If you grasp this today it will be incredible what a difference you can make in your own context for the Gospel, especially in these rather bleak days. These men turned the world upside down, but so can you. Sadly enough there are many Christians who live daily lives, surrounded by people who have no connection with church, and they really don't make an impact for what they believe. So ask yourselves this question today; If you were to leave your street tomorrow, I wonder would your neighbours notice the presence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has left the street. You see the way we are going to make a difference for Jesus, is to follow the blueprint you will find today. Nothing's complex with our reading today, and I hope it really helps. And it's all about this :

1. It's all about sharing the Gospel where you are
2. But it's also about showing the Gospel through what you do
3. And finally it's about trusting what God can do next

So let's read Acts 17 now

So we know last week that there was a call on these men's lives to go into Macedonia. And in Philippi they are ministering the Gospel, where Lydia and her family are converted. Next, a Philippian jailer is converted and baptised and a Church is born. Now after a 100 mile walk between a couple of towns they find themselves in Acts 17 in Thessalonica.

Think back to where Paul has been before this in chapter 16. Here is a man of God who has just come out of Philippi beaten and whipped, but nothing will stop him from sharing the Gospel. Can I ask you how far would you be willing to go for the Gospel? Is the sharing of the Gospel a priority for you today, and if not why? What is it that gets in the way of sharing the gospel with others in your street or in your workplace? These guys had a passion for the Gospel wherever they went even if they have just come from a place where they have been deeply opposed for what they are saying. They are not going to let this deter them because their motivation came from what Christ had done in each of their lives. So what motivates you to share the Gospel, or are you actually motivated to share it?

We see in verse 2 that Paul had a pattern. He went to the synagogue and he knew he would find Jews there that he would preach to them first, but when he would get rejection he would move on to the Gentiles. Now the question is this – those that want to make a difference for sharing the gospel, do you have a pattern of getting into people's lives, building relationships with them, and sharing Jesus with them? Paul had a pattern. Folks let's be honest, people today don't just walk in through the doors of our churches and ask us to tell them about Jesus, no, we have got to have a plan, not just as a church, but every day before we go to work or wherever we are going to, to pray to God that he will give us those opportunities to share. We plan many things in life, our pensions, our holidays, our shopping lists. So why do we not plan how we are going to spread the message of Jesus? Why for me will I spend more time frankly making sure I get my Saturday morning golf slot

sorted than I do talking to my brother and sister-in-law about the difference that Jesus makes in my life.

When we share the Gospel, like Paul, when here Paul reasons with the Jews, it has to be a conversation, not a presentation or lecture. We can't just spew everything that we know on people, like some literary or intellectual explosion. We have got to let them ask questions. They've got to be given time to talk through their doubts. When did you last sit and chat with someone about this? What is it that worries you about it? Do we not think we know enough about the Gospel? If so why not? Be encouraged that if we are in Christ we are equipped through his Holy Spirit so that as 1 Peter 3:15 says, we might be able to give an account for the hope that is in us. Remember sharing the gospel is a conversation about what's already in you. And for Paul it's always backed up by scripture. It doesn't come from intellectual clever words. It comes from our knowledge of the scriptures. And in conversation, we share the hope that comes from every page that we read about Jesus. Are you sharing the Gospel where you are? Who in this week ahead can you do that with? Do you like Paul have a plan this week to build a relationship and tell someone how much they need Jesus? I'd love to hear the stories of what comes out of your conversations with people.

But remember it's not just about telling people; we have also got to show this Gospel hope in our everyday lives.

Verse 4 'Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. ⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here'

What a description of these disciples of Jesus. Can you imagine if you were the city mayor and you hear that Paul and Silas have just arrived into your city. It's not going to be a quiet entrance. They have literally turned the world they are living in upside down, all because of how they live. They don't think like society thinks, they don't act like the society around them acts. They are different. They were not willing to conform and they are saying, "Look, we are governed by another Kingdom". These men were noticeably aligned to Jesus, even over Government.

These men were not Jerusalem first or Rome first, they were Jesus first, and so it was noticeable to the culture that they interacted with. So what does that look like for us today? Well it means that we have to live a life worthy of the Kingdom. It can't be about some parade to Church on a Sunday, and then the Gospel remains silent the rest of the week. Jesus says in Matthew 5, 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may **see your good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven'.

It is shown in how we live the gospel. So when we make a step to go beyond our tribal divides, when we reach beyond the walls of this building and show love in practical ways, people out there see that and they see something different about Jesus. When our young people look at the world and see how it has totally lost its way about sex and sexuality, and they choose to honour God with their body and reserve sex for within the context of

marriage, then the world around sees that there's something about Jesus in them. When something unfair happens to you, and you respond not with revenge but with grace and love, the world around sees the difference that only comes from Jesus. How in this week ahead are you showing the gospel, how are you showing what is in these pages through your life?

So here's the third thing. We have got to trust God with the results.

In Thessalonica there's wasn't a great reception to Paul's approach of teaching and living out the Gospel. It was hostile stirring up a riot. They have to creep away during the night and move on to Berea. And Paul and his men get right back into sharing the Gospel again, and the results are incredible. It says the Bereans receive the Word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily. These are the results that we really hope for when we share the Gospel. That's what I always hope for when I run Alpha. The Bereans had a hunger to lean into what they were being taught, unlike the Jews in Thessalonica.

Sometimes it feels like we are around Bereans and then other days we feel the hostility of Thessalonica. You see the Word of God is going to turn our world upside down. In verse 11 it says that the Bereans 'examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true'. These Bereans were not content to just come into the synagogue once a week and sit listen to Paul, enjoy the service and go home until next week. They examined what he had said to them in their own time throughout the week. A lot of us do this. We come to church once a week and the only time we hear from God is in the preaching slot. Can I say boldly that that is not enough. Get into a habit of getting into God's Word and figure out what God has to say to **you**. Lives around us are falling apart, and people have no answer for these things, because they are not searching the scriptures. For the Bereans their search of the scriptures led them to faith. What a difference after being chased out of one place and now being overwhelmed with the acceptance in the other.

So here's the thing. Paul and his team followed the same blueprint for mission wherever they went but it was received in different ways. And this is what it comes down to. We have got to trust God in what happens next. We don't have the power to change someone's heart and mind and get them to accept what it is that we know. We have got to leave this with God. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2 verse 15 'For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are **being saved** and **those who are perishing**.¹⁶ To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life'. And then he says this, 'who is equal to such a task?'. The answer is no one. That's the work of the Holy Spirit that does this, not us. We have to be faithful to share the message of the Gospel, but bare in mind that if we share this faithfully it will offend many people. You see whenever you are faithful and tell people that their lives, however good they are, are not sufficient without surrendering to Jesus, and even though they may think they are good enough, that's actually a reflection of their self centredness which is a sin – that is going to offend folks. So some people will be offended but some like the Bereans are going to be drawn to it. And our job is to share the message and not worry about how they receive it but simply lift up the name of Jesus. If we share the Gospel, if we show the Gospel in our lives, and if we trust God with what happens to that message, we can be sure that people will be impacted by this, one way or the other. We will make a difference whether in the office, or in the home or in the neighbourhood.

If we will simply point people to Jesus, if we will allow people to see God's grace, if we will allow people to see that in these times Jesus is the hope for the troubles we face, that he is a light in our darkness, he will draw people to himself. Let's go into our everyday lives this week with this blueprint, God by his Spirit will make an impact on those around you.

So back to the question I asked at the very beginning – why do you live where you live? Or why do you work where you work? Well it's to share the gospel, to show the gospel, and to trust God in what he will do as you are faithful to him. Let's like James this week be doers of the Word and not just hearers of it (James 1:22). Amen.