

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #245

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER 17

Thessalonica: "Turned the World Upside Down"

1. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, 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, and 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.

Paul tells, especially in 1st Thessalonians 2:1-19, of his leaving Philippi, where he says he and his assistants *suffered* and *were shamefully treated*, to come to Thessalonica to boldly share the truth of God. This trip from Philippi to Thessalonica was one hundred miles. First, as was his custom, he goes first to the Jews and teaches in the synagogue that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah whom the Jews so earnestly sought. He does this using the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Some of the Jews and many of the

Gentiles and leading women believed. But the religious crowd was jealous that Paul had won over these people, and they falsely accused Paul and the followers of Jesus and said they had come to cause trouble and were *those who have turned the world upside down*. They were accusing Paul and his company of political rebellion. Thus, they incited a mob which attacked the house of Jason. Jason was a believer in Thessalonica who had shown hospitality to Paul and Silas, perhaps taking them in his home. In Romans 16:21 Paul sends greetings to a Jason whom he calls his “kinsman,” that is a fellow Hebrew Christian, and many think that these two Jasons are one and the same.

Berea: Many Receive the Word

10. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.
11. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.
12. Therefore many of them believed and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.
13. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.
14. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.
15. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens, and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

The believers in Thessalonica sneaked Paul and Silas out of the city by night, and they went to Berea. Berea was 60 miles from Thessalonica. The believers in Berea were much more mature and gracious than those in Thessalonica. They received Paul’s teachings and searched the Word to see if what he taught lined up with the Word of God. They were not closed and prejudiced against Paul’s teaching, but they were not gullible either. They knew that the test of the correctness of Paul’s teaching was the Scriptures, and they found that Scripture lined up with what Paul said, and many believed. Unfortunately the Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea to stir up the crowds and to run Paul out of town. Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, he had left Thessalonica under cover of night because the mob wanted to attack him, and he had to flee Berea. Most men would have given

up, but Paul boldly pressed on. Leaving Silas and Timothy behind, Paul was taken to Athens.

Athens: Paul's Sermon on Mars' Hill

16. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.
17. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.
18. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.
19. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"
20. "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."
21. For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.
22. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;
23. "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:
24. "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.
25. "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.
26. "And He has made from one blood every nation of man to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,
27. "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;
28. "for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'
29. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

30. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

31. "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

33. So Paul departed from among them.

34. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Athens was the center of culture and wisdom in the Old World. It was said that Athens had more gods than all the rest of Greece combined, and it was said that it was easier to meet a god in Athens than another person. Athens was like a university town, and everyone met in the town square to talk and to debate philosophy and the issues of the day.

Paul was confronted by the Epicureans and the Stoics who took him to the Aeropagus or Mars Hill. This was the site of a court of about 30 of the town elders who met on this hill to decide cases of murder and cases dealing with public morals.

According to Barclay, the Epicureans believed that everything happens by chance, death is the end of everything, the gods were remote from the world and did not care about the happenings of men, and the chief purpose in life is pleasure. The highest pleasure was that which involved no pain. Kevin Conner tells us that the Epicureans were atheistic and materialistic and worshipped the God of Pleasure.

The Stoics, on the other hand, believed that everything was God. The life in human beings was a spark of God, and that spark returned to God when the person died. They believed everything that happened was the will of God and should be accepted without resentment. They believed that every so often the world disintegrated and was burned up and started all over again.

The people of Athens charged Paul with setting forth some new and strange gods because he preached Jesus and the Resurrection. These people were not hungry for real truth but were intellectual curiosity seekers. With the Jews Paul always starts from the Scriptures. With the non-Jews Paul always starts with Creation. Kevin Conner gives us the outline of Paul's address:

Verse 22: The Athenians were too superstitious.

Verse 23: Their final confession was that God could not be known. Of course this is true, except for knowing Jesus Christ who revealed the True God.

Verse 24: God is greater than his creation.

Verse 25: God does not need anything from man.

Verse 26: All mankind was created by God.

Verse 27: God is everywhere present or omnipresent.

Verse 28: God, as a Spirit, cannot be represented by and in material things.

Verse 30: Ignorance is spiritual darkness. When ignorance is enlightened, mankind must repent.

Verse 31: Only when men believe in the True God will they be able to come to God through His Son. There is a) the Appointed Judge, the Appointed Day(Judgment Day), the Appointed Standard (the Divine Standard of Righteousness), d)the Appointed proof (Jesus who has been raised from the dead.)

Paul saw three categories of people in Athens: those who mocked; those who procrastinated; and finally, those who believed. He must have had these Athenians in mind when he wrote 1st Corinthians 1. In verse 18-25, he writes: *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Gentiles foolishness; But unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

FOLLOW ME

Ira Stanphill

1953

I traveled down a lonely road, and no one seemed to care.
The burden on my weary back had bowed me to despair.

I oft complained to Jesus how folks were treating me.

And then I heard Him say so tenderly,

“My feet were also weary upon the Calv’ry road.

The cross became so heavy, I fell beneath the load.

Be faithful weary pilgrim, the morning I can see.

Just lift your cross and follow close to me.”

“I work so hard for Jesus,” I often boast and say.

“I’ve sacrificed a lot of things to walk the narrow way.

I gave up fame and fortune; I’m worth a lot to Thee.”

And then I hear Him gently say to me,

“I left the throne of glory, and counted it but loss.

My hands were nailed in anger upon a cruel cross.

But now we’ll make the journey with your hand safe in mine.

So lift your cross and follow close to me.”

Oh, Jesus if I die upon a foreign field some day,

‘Twould be no more than love demands, no less could I repay.

“No greater love hath mortal man than for a friend to die.”

These are the words He gently spoke to me,

“If just a cup of water I place within your hand,

Then just a cup of water is all that I demand.”

But if by death to living they can Thy glory see,

I’ll take my cross and follow close to thee.