

The Conflict with the Jews
Acts 17:1-9

If you know much about life, there's a truism that you never know quite what lies ahead. There's the twist and turns that life brings. If you weren't here for announcements, David Johnston, our youth minister for twenty-five years, passed away Thursday. It's just only thirteen months ago that for the first time he had a seizure, and we had no idea what that meant and what would lie ahead for him. And then, there's been other people in our fellowship that passed away suddenly as recently as Randy Lintemoot and Sylvia Salazar last year. There has been other people that suddenly are gone, and we don't expect that, and we're shocked, and it's saddening, and that's sort of life that we live, that we plan; we think; we believe we have something that's going to happen, and then it doesn't. It disappears, and we're left.

And in the story of the church, as we get to look at in the book of Acts, they experience the same life that we experience. What they expected to happen didn't happen. The difficulties that came about that they faced, they didn't plan for, and they had to struggle through. And as we read, as we're now in the middle of the second missionary journey, we're in Acts 17 this morning. As we look at this ministry that goes along, it can easily look like there's a plan, but the plan that they had so often didn't happen. It got changed. In other words, like Proverbs 16:9; "The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps." And God has a plan. The original plan for the second missionary journey was to revisit churches that were established in the first missionary journey (that would be in modern-day Turkey), but the Lord had another plan for them to go to Greece and revealed that to Paul. So, this second missionary journey wasn't intended to get to Europe. It was intended to stop with where they had already been, but the Lord had other plans.

And Acts 15:36-18:23, the second missionary journey, brings Paul to Greece, and now we're in Acts chapter 17, and we find Paul, Silas, and Timothy having fled persecution in Philippi and arriving in Thessalonica. This journey that brought them to Philippi had them abruptly leaving Philippi in Acts chapter 16 because of the persecution that was against Paul and Silas where they'd been, basically, attacked by a mob, thrown in prison, beaten, an earthquake hit which produced their release, but the people of the community, the leaders, the authorities, didn't want them there and begged

them to leave - sort of ran them out of town. So, they move from Philippi south, and we'll see them travel to Thessalonica and what happens in the city of Thessalonica. So, let's read together. We'll just be looking this morning at Acts 17:1-9, and we'll see what transpires in Thessalonica which wasn't where they planned to go. They fled to Thessalonica, and we'll start at verse 1. I'll be reading from the New American Standard Bible, and you can follow along with me in your Bible.

“Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’ They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.” This is what happens in Thessalonica, and as we see so often with Paul, we enter a synagogue when we get to there.

But before we get to Thessalonica, Paul moves through a couple of towns and simplest was the home town of Alexander the Great, and it was about 33 miles southwest of Philippi, and the next town was Apolonia which was another 27 miles. This is the Aegean Way. If you remember, when we kind of looked at the Aegean Way, it's like the interstate highway that moved from the Adriatic Sea on the west side of Greece all the way across Greece up to northern Turkey, Byzantium, and that was where people were able to travel, and it went along through Philippi and Thessalonica. This was a full three-day journey, and if you recall, Paul had just been with Silas in prison, had been beaten, had been wounded, and still managed to travel a long full-day trip to Amphiboles and another full-day trip to Apolonia and then

arriving at Thessalonica. If you can imagine, 33 or 27 miles isn't that easy to walk. Some people even imagine he must have taken a horse or something, but it was a journey, and they were fleeing, basically, the people, the people who they had left in Philippi and moved along to Thessalonica.

Now, as we've read about their arrival, "...they went into the synagogue of the Jews," This is what so often happens (It didn't happen in Philippi only because there wasn't enough Jewish people to have a synagogue), but they went to the Jewish people. They went and found Lydia, chapter 16:14, who became the first convert in Europe in Philippi. Here they also went to the Jewish people in a synagogue. There's enough people in Thessalonica - bigger city - to have a synagogue. In fact, Thessalonica was so large, it still exists today. You know, Philippi is, like, ruins today, but Thessaloniki, as it's known today, is a metropolis, like, upwards of a million people or so in the area and exists. This ministry at the Sabbath in verse 2 shows he spent three Sabbaths reasoning with them from the Scriptures, and when you read that, you can jump to the conclusion that the ministry in Thessalonica was three Sabbaths or three weeks long, but I think that's unlikely. I think it was longer. It was probably many weeks longer than the three Sabbath days he ministered in the synagogue.

There's reasons for this, and I'll list them out for you - why he probably spent months, maybe three months; this is probably around the end of 50 AD, the later fall into the winter of the beginning of 51 AD and maybe even lasting, possibly, even as long as the beginning of spring. Maybe not quite that long, but we have quite a number of weeks he was there. We know this because, one - there was multiple gifts that the Philippians gave to him while he was in Thessalonica. We reference this when we were teaching on Acts chapter 16 and the ministry of Philippi and how generous they were, and they did this several times, and one of the times they gave gifts was when Paul was at Thessalonica, and they did this more than once. So, there were multiple gifts. So, to do this more than once gives us the impression that he'd been there long enough to need another gift.

Next, there's the statement from Paul himself in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3 about his working. He says in 1 Thessalonians; "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." So, he's laboring so he's not a burden to them financially. Well, if he was just

there for three weeks, then this burden wouldn't be so great, nor would he need it with the gifts coming from the Philippians. So, it's quite likely that he's spending longer. Also, and finally, most of the converts in the Thessalonian church were not Jewish people, they were Gentile people. We see in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 about them; "...how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God..." And the people that were serving idols are the Greeks. When we get to Athens soon (the next story, the next travel after Beria, we'll get to Athens), and we'll see the Greeks are filled with idols. The Jews abhorred idols. They were not the people worshipping at idols. They were the people that needed the Messiah, but they weren't worshipping idols. The idol worshippers were the Greeks, and many of them turned from idols. Well, they just needed time to move from the synagogue to the community to bring the gospel to the Greeks, to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.

So, with this ministry in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, Paul was reasoning with them from the Scriptures. So, let's look at verse 3 and 4 and see what that reasoning was of him giving evidence of Jesus being the Savior; "...explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded..." So, his ministry, his message, was centered on the Scripture. He was reasoning from the Scripture. This wasn't a philosophy; this was a teaching of the Old Testament. He was teaching the Jews who were well familiar with the Old Testament about the person and the work of Jesus Christ (who Jesus was); "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." So, he's proving to them from the Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah. Using so many of the prophecies in the Old testament, I'm sure he must have included Isaiah 53 of the Messiah coming and suffering, and that's what we saw with Jesus. And there's also the work of Christ, the suffering and rising again from the dead, conquering death, overcoming death by His resurrection so that the sins of the people who believed would not rest on them; that He conquered death, and His death forgave their sin. So, the suffering and the rising from the dead was fundamental to Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

This was done in two parts. There's this proclamation ministry that did two things. The first thing it did was a presenting, the using of Scripture to show its authority in the matter of who Jesus was. So, this teaching of the Old Testament was central to his ministry about the Scripture's authority

speaking of Jesus, but it didn't stop there. It wasn't just addressing the Scripture, but it was actually explaining the Scripture. It wasn't just telling them about it. It was proving - that's this next part. Proving, the provision of evidence in support of the correct understanding of Scripture in the matter of who Jesus was. These people he was teaching, they knew the Old Testament, but they didn't have the correct understanding of the Old Testament. They knew what it said: he had to prove to them that what it was saying applied to Jesus. There was the need to recognize the Old Testament is speaking not just about a Messiah, but about the specific Messiah, Jesus Christ, who suffered and rose again; "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." And this needed to be communicated by proving the Old Testament was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. This is described in verse 2 as the reasoning "...with them from the Scriptures..."

All this explaining and giving evidence isn't just an information transfer. This is more than a simple lecture. It actually includes a reasoning with, not a talking to, not a speaking at, a reasoning with. You know, it's been said so often by people who say the most significant thing that happens in the church is happening on Sunday morning with the message, the sermon, and you know, I like this, and I hope you do. I hope you're learning, and it's significant, but let's face it, I can only communicate so much here. I get so much time; I get forty minutes, and look at who I'm communicating with - a wide diversity of people. Some people I know well and have known for thirty-five years, and some people know the Scripture well, other people, not so well. Other people, I don't know you at all. So, to try to communicate to you... wouldn't it be much easier, much better, if I communicated to you more personally, if we had a conversation? But we can't do this on Sunday morning with all of you. If you were a smaller group, we might be able to do this, but we can't. The ability to converse enhances communication of the truth. What he was doing wasn't just talking to them, he was reasoning with them, and that enhances the ability to understand the truth and accept it; you know more about who you're talking to. We see as we go along here, the communication of the truth gets down according to who the people are who are being talked to. We'll get that big time when we get to Athens, and we see in the ministry of Paul there, and how he adjusts what he's saying according to the knowledge of the hearers and what they know.

So, while I'm glad for you to be here and listen to me explain Acts chapter 17 (and I think that's very important), this isn't the be all and end all of

church. We can explain, and when I say we, I don't just mean myself. I mean there's many people in our church who can do this, who can teach the Scripture and do that and do that well, and it happens during the week, not just on Sunday mornings. So, if you're just kind of here warming up a seat and enjoying the singing and enjoying the message and that's it, well, I think there's something more to help you to understand, and that's the relationships with people, and that's the ability to engage the Scripture; like what we see is happening here where people are being able to be reasoned with and understand better, more personally. And the context of this communication explains why we see the people that are being persuaded, that they being reasoned with in their understanding, and then they're persuaded. In verse 4, what do those people do? "...some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks..." That's not the proselytes that have converted to Judaism, but they are viewing God favorably, and are interested in but not full converts, and then, "...a number of the leading women."

So, this joining with is really essential part of functioning well in a church. It's not just signing up on a list. Yeah, I'm here. Count me in. It is the personal interactions that you have to do in order to really understand the Scripture and have the understanding of the Scripture lived out in your life because, let's face it, you cannot do the things the Scripture's telling you apart from the people around you that are fellow believers because you're supposed to be doing that with those people and to those people. So, you got to go the next step and engage people relationally, and as you do that in the context of like our growth groups that meet for home Bible studies during the week, it gives you a great opportunity to understand the word of God better, more personally to you, and gives you the opportunity to serve with other people just like what we saw here with the Thessalonians. And incidentally, Paul has only been here a few short weeks, and these people are now persuaded and then joining with. It doesn't take a long time for them to be a participant and being an active engager in the life of the Thessalonian church, and this includes even the leading women; "...the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women." I just can't miss that we keep seeing this in the second missionary journey. An emphasis to the second missionary journey is the response of prominent women to Paul's ministry, including back with Lydia, the first convert to Christianity in Europe, who was an importer of high-end fabric, and then we'll see this later in Acts chapter 17 as well. Prominent women are a part of this ministry even though,

really, they didn't have as much of a place in the society as women do today in our society. They still were a valuable and an important part of the church, and we keep seeing them come up in the Scriptures here. So, we need everybody to be engaging with the church to build up the body of Christ as God intended.

So, as the Scripture was engaged, and some people were persuaded, then they believed and they joined with. And this message then began to go out to the city of Thessalonica. And as happens, there's the Jews that believe, and they're persuaded, and then we have the others, and this isn't the first time we've seen this where there's another group of people who are looking to suppress this. This Jewish suppression then comes upon the church, and verse 5 shows us this; "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." So, this uproar of the nonbelieving Jews against the church, against their fellow Jewish brothers who followed Christ rather than oppose the Messiah - there's now a rift and the jealousy and the plotting to take wicked people from the marketplace, kind of like the thugs, and recruit them to do some damage. They form a mob. It's not the first time we've seen a mob. In fact, we saw a mob gather in Philippi, in Acts 16:22; "The crowd rose up together against them..." bringing them to the authorities.

Here we see it again, a mob forming "...and set the city in an uproar..." and they bring them to Jason. They come upon the house of Jason. So, Jason (this is basically all the information we get about Jason), we know that Jason was a common name for a Jewish person that was Greek, like a non-Hebrew Jew, not someone from Jerusalem, someone that had been part of the dysphoria, the spread of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire. It's a very common name, Jason. Also, he was converted through Paul's ministry, obviously. He's from Thessalonica. He lives in Thessalonica, and the word of God now has come to Thessalonica. So, he's been a believer for just weeks, maybe months at the most, and his house is a focal point now of the church. They go to find Paul and Silas at his house. I think it's some evidence that he had a house that was something of a meeting place for the

church, and we'll see in a bit that he had some financial means, so it was probably a large enough house. Also, he is probably... can't say this definitely, but it's likely that he gets referenced in Romans 16:21. In Romans 16, there's just the greetings you see in Romans 16:21, and he's one of the people that sent greetings. Romans, the book of Romans, is written years later from the city of Corinth which we'll be getting to on this journey, not too far away from Thessalonica, so it's very possible that that's the same Jason. Now, Jason hadn't been a believer for very long and is being charged with certain things because they can't find Paul and Silas, so they take it out on Jason and drag him and some brethren (there's some other unnamed people that get dragged before the city authorities), and they get charged. The first charge was aiding men who disrupted the civil peace. They say about Jason; "These men who have upset the world have come here also [that's Paul, Silas, Timothy] and Jason has welcomed them..."

So, he's now a coconspirator He's an accomplice to what they're doing. So, they're charging him with aiding the men (Paul, Silas, Timothy) with disrupting the civil peace. That was an issue; that the Roman's did not like their peace disrupted. One of the reasons the Roman Empire thrived was the Roman soldiers were able to keep the peace, and the Roman Empire was expanding and thriving because of that, and they kept the peace with an iron fist. So, if you opposed that, you disrupted the peace, then it came upon you. So, this was a charge. It's impossible to miss the irony here. I have to say that the Jews that recruited a mob in Thessalonica "...to set the city in an uproar..." are describing Paul and Silas as men who have upset the world. They're the ones that were upsetting the city. This is quite an overstatement. The only place that Paul and Silas had really been to was Philippi, spent any time there, so this world that got upset, as far as these people were concerned, was only Philippi. So, word got around, obviously, and maybe some things of what had happened earlier in the first missionary journey might of been passed along, but all that didn't affect Greece or Rome much. So, it was an overstatement and rather ironic because they were the ones making such a ta-do.

But there's another charge, a second charge, that we find in verse 7. They all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king, Jesus; "...they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." So, we learn of a second charge, and that is sedition or the inciting people to rebel against the government, like putting forth another

king, Jesus. Well, fundamentally, here, this is a false charge because Paul taught in Romans 13 that the followers of Jesus must obey the governing authority. So, we are not against the government. Even the government we don't think is great, we are to submit to, but so, that wasn't true, but there's a part of this that makes you understand why they're saying this. All you have to do is look to the writings that Paul did to this church. A few months after he left Thessalonica, he wrote to the Thessalonians from Corinth, and he wrote them stuff about the future. Paul taught that Jesus would reign over a future kingdom. He taught that to the Thessalonians. For example, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, he wrote, "...so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." He taught about the King Jesus. He just didn't talk about Jesus in a political way, he talked about Jesus in a coming kingdom that would come from heaven, come from above. And, you know, the teaching of Jesus about future things, that's a big topic in the Thessalonian epistles, and it's intended for our comfort.

People can think that, oh, this is, like, this future stuff, and we can't know all this stuff. It's amazing how much stuff we find in the Scriptures about the future, even the Old Testament and the gospels and the epistles, and in the Thessalonian epistles it is a major topic that Paul teaches about. So, as he teaches them that the Lord will return and come to take us and catch us up in the air. Chapter 4:18 says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." This was intended to, actually, serve people and comfort them, this teaching about the coming kingdom and we saw this in the beginning of Acts, Acts chapter 1, the way Jesus left - the Ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:9-11. Just the way Jesus left, He's coming back the same way. This is the truth, and this is what we have to look forward to. It's a wonderful thing, and we're eagerly awaiting this. This isn't opposing any political government. This is the truth of the coming of the Messiah to earth to establish the kingdom that He has promised. So, it's evident that Paul is teaching that to the Thessalonians. It's evident that he's teaching that to the Thessalonians here in Acts chapter 17, and it's abundantly clear he's teaching that when we get to reading the epistles to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians and then later 2 Thessalonians - major topic.

So, then we have the outcome of this escape; "They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them." So, there's an

outcome of a release. So, Jason is successfully freed based on a pledge. The pledge was an amount of money that would be forfeited if there was any trouble that would occur in the future, and it was evidently a large enough sum of money that Jason didn't just have this himself, others in the church contributed to this pledge, and remember they were new Christians. They'd only been Christians for months, and here they are with Jason and some of the brethren that were arrested and now a pledge was given to insure the peace of Thessalonica. There was a settlement between Jason and the authorities to calm the uprising, and that resulted in the departure of Paul from Thessalonica. And we see that not only did Paul depart from Thessalonica and end up going to Berea, but so did Silas. Silas, also, was sent away with Paul at night. Verse 10; "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea..." and that's because they couldn't continue being in Thessalonica without the mob getting all upset. They had to leave.

Finally, we eventually see Timothy making his way to Berea. Also, we find him in verse 14 at Berea too. So, the three of them, because remember Luke had been left in Philippi... so the four of them had come to Philippi. Luke remains behind. We know this because of the pronouns in Acts chapter 16. Luke, the author of the book of Acts... we have a "we" there, and then when we get here, it's now back to "they." So, Luke quite evidently was still remaining, and then Paul, Silas and Timothy go off to Berea. This didn't change Paul's desire to be with the Thessalonians. The agreement was the reason why Paul was unable to fulfill his desire to return to Thessalonica, and it's worth reading what he writes to this church in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 about his desire for them. He writes to them, "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us." He had a desire to be with them and was trying to get back there, but for the authorities and the mob... it just wasn't a situation that he could get back to. So, he was with them in spirit, but he was not able to get there in person.

I think we can learn from this that our desire should be with those who we serve. Here's another verse from what Paul writes to this church. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul says, "Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." In just these short weeks

they'd been with them, there'd been a bonding together and a concern. In fact, that concern extended to Timothy. Timothy would be returning a few months later to encourage them - because when he wrote 1 Thessalonians 3, this is what he writes, and it's worth reading. 1 Thessalonians 3:1; "Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you..." You see that relationship that Paul had with them; that he's had Timothy go and bring back news of them, and this connection even though they'd only been there a few months, and in spite of the difficulties that they faced, in spite of these uprising and the persecution. Why would someone in Thessalonica who had only known Paul for a short period of time be so compelled to be faithful and continuing in spite of the persecution, in spite of being dragged before the authorities and having to put up money to insure the peacefulness of the city?

Why would these people be so willing to continue to endure this? It wasn't just because it was such a great church, and they all liked each other so much because they had sinful people there just like we have sinful people here. It wasn't that they had such great teaching because the only people left after Paul and Silas and Timothy end up in Berea is only people that had been Christians just a short period of time. It wasn't that they all just only loved each other. It was something bigger than that, and that's what we can learn about the faithfulness of the Thessalonians and devotion to the Lord. Let's face it; they weren't just a community that cared about each other and continuing to persevere because of their own strength. It's because of their faith. They truly were persuaded in the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and they believed it, and their faith in Jesus and their following of Jesus enabled them to persevere. That is what bonds them together. That's what bonds us together, that we have brothers and sister in Christ, and the faith in Christ connects us. So, this is a great time to remember the Savior

Jesus Christ who came and died and rose again on our behalf so that we can be forgiven of sin.

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