

Acts 17:1-12 [Paul and Silas] came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. ⁵ But the 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 brothers 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 made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. ¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Dear Christians Using God's Word to Stay Strong:

The Bible is much more than just a tool, but often we can use it as a tool. In fact, the Holy Spirit uses it as a tool (or instrument) through which he creates and cultivates faith in human hearts. God's Word is equally effective at home, in church, in school, in the hospital, or overseas used by those serving in the armed forces. *Wherever* people hear the Word, it is God's effective tool to firm up our faith. Here's what God promised: "***[My Word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it***" (Isa 55:11).

In Acts 17 we see Paul and Silas using God's powerful Word to reach out to hurting hearts and lost souls in need of the gift of salvation. As these first missionaries used the Word then, so also today ***Christians Use the Word*** (1) *So precious souls may be saved*, and (2) *To be sure we are hearing the truth*.

1

Years ago, when we were still in the old church, I preached a sermon about some of the challenging moral issues facing our society. A woman, visiting that day, told me after service point blank that she disagreed with almost everything I said. I was confused. I had used Bible passages each step of the way to make it clear that this wasn't my doctrine, or just our church's doctrine, but God's teachings about how he wants us to love him and our neighbor.

The truth is, however, there are many people who don't grow up with God's Word. It's not a part of their lives nor do they try to order their lives according to it. I'm not telling you anything new. You work in the everyday world. You see that more and more people just have no connection with God's Word. It's foreign to them.

However, even we who regularly have the Word struggle with it. We are sinners just the same as those who don't have the Word. We rebel against God's Word every day! Truly, our salvation is purely by God's grace through Spirit-created faith in Christ -- alone!

Paul & Silas preached the Word in a synagogue in Thessalonica. They showed the Jews there OT prophecies and how the One name Jesus fulfilled them exactly as God promised. "***On three Sabbath days [Paul] reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.***" Some of their listeners believed, and others, like that person who approached me after church years ago, disagreed with everything Paul said.

Their reaction was not unexpected. Paul and Silas had just spent time in jail in Philippi for preaching the same message of forgiveness and eternal life. And here, in Thessalonica, it happened again: ***“The Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.”*** The mob traced Paul & Silas to a believer named Jason, but they weren’t at his house. Jason and his friends were hauled off to the Roman magistrate, but ultimately the magistrate must have figured their accusers were making a mountain out of molehill. These Christians were made to post bond and were released.

During his ministry, Jesus told his followers, ***“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master”*** (Matt 10:24). He also said, ***“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”*** (John 15:20). Jesus felt the rage of the jealous religious leaders of his day. Now Paul and his friends did also.

Sometimes we do to. Usually it’s much more subtle in our society. But how many of you have heard, ***“Where’s your God now with all this sickness and death going on?”*** We humans are too arrogant to admit that the cause of all earth’s ills -- war, violence, sickness, hunger, viruses, bacteria, floods -- all begin with us. Our rebellion and sin guarantee that this earth is no heaven and it never will be. Jesus even warned us that troubled times would *increase* as the earth nears its final day.

While Paul & Silas were persecuted, the Holy Spirit did produce fruit through their message: ***“Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.”*** When the Word is preached, there will always be some, like the woman at church I told you about, who will simply disagree. But there will also be those who believe. And sometimes those who disagree become those who believe. A case in point is the Apostle Paul himself. The one who once hunted down Christians in zealous hatred became the world’s greatest missionary for Jesus.

2

Because of the uproar, Paul & Silas knew it was best to move on. They traveled to Berea, a few days’ journey away from Thessalonica. ***“On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”*** These folks took God’s Word seriously. And because of it, they weren’t knee-jerk reactionaries. They gave Paul his due. They listened to him speak. But they didn’t just accept what Paul said. They checked up on him. They went to the OT Scriptures to see if what Paul said matched up with what God had written. And wonderfully, they realized, it did!

Paul didn’t get angry with them for checking up on him. No, it says, ***“The Bereans were of more noble character than the [others].”*** This was good! It’s good when you check up on pastors and Christian teachers making sure that what they say and teach is in agreement with God’s Word. Pure doctrine matters. If Mom sends you to the store for a can of tomato soup, do you buy the can that says 100% pure tomato soup or the one that says 95% tomato soup and 5% toxic waste? What’s pure is healthy. Here’s what John wrote, ***“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”*** (1 John 4:1). That’s what the Bereans did. They didn’t believe every single soul who came along with a message. They tested them vs. God’s Word to see if they were getting something healthy or a scammer’s snake oil.

In this case, Paul and Silas’ message was healthy. And what happened? ***“Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.”*** The point here, of course, is not just that people believe something, but that people believe something *true*, something that will change their lives and futures forever. That something true is God’s Word. After Jesus, God’s Word is the best gift he’s given us. We are so blessed to be able to use it together!

Amen.