

Acts 17:1-9 (Special Service)

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[0:00] chapter 17 verses 1 through 9 that can be found on page 1025 in the white bibles again today's scripture reading is act 17 verses 1 through 9 on page 1025 in the white bibles please stand for the reading of god's word now when they had passed through amphipolis and apollonia they came to thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the jews and paul went in as was his custom and on three sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures explaining and proving that it was necessary for the christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying this jesus who i proclaim to you is the christ and some of them were persuaded and joined paul and silas and did a great as did a great many of the devout greeks and not a few of the leading women but the jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob set the city in a uproar and attacked the house of jason seeking to bring them out to the crowd and when they could not find them they dragged jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities shouting these men have turned the world upside down these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also and jason has received them and they are all acting against the decrees of caesar saying that there is another king jesus and the people in the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things and when they had taken money as security from jason and the rest they let them go this is the word of the lord you may be seated the holy trinity church was founded on the first sunday in may 1998 so next sunday will be the first sunday of our 21st year this sunday the final sunday of 20 years since our founding there is one book over those 20 years that i have not preached through in the new testament that is and it's second thessalonians and so as we conclude today the 20th year and commence next week the first of the 21st year we're going to look for seven weeks at second thessalonians i thought it would be helpful to draw our attention back to paul's planting of that church in the book of acts especially since two letters contained in the new testament deal with that congregation interestingly in the broadest sense there are some parallels that can be drawn between ancient thessalonica and its situation and our own there's some semblance unforced i hope between thessalonica topographically geopolitically religiously culturally and chicago that we call home let me give you some examples both have the advantages of being set along a vast

body of water thessalonica was along the aegean sea our own city lake michigan with all of its access to the great lakes as a result both cities were in their early and influential days port cities nowadays people go to navy pier for entertainment but navy pier was the center of the great lakes and the shipping industry that would find its way to the middle of the country let me give you another one thessalonica was founded in 316 bc by cassander by really annexing 26 villages and combining them into one city so too chicago became its sprawling self by annexing village after village neighborhood after neighborhood town after town now comprised one city 57 neighborhoods thessalonica was situated roughly in the middle of the roman empire just as we are situated roughly in the middle of our own country thessalonica was really the crossroads of the roman world the appian way and then the via ignatian way that that great road built by rome that would take the the empire all the way to the east laboriously put down between 146 and 120 bc extended then thessalonica's reach as both east and west and north and south so too chicago with its sprawling attempt at anybody driving a truck or a car to get around the bottom of the lake will know we are the gateway if you're on i-80 between new jersey new york and what will lead you all the way to san francisco or 90 starting in boston and moving you all the way to seattle 94 going north 55 going south people naturally found their way to thessalonica on their way to the empire's far reaches so too through o'hare airport many people find their way to our country in the same way both cities are free in a sense or they like to think of themselves as free they are centers of importance and yet both were devoted to their head chicago devoted to washington dc thessalonica devoted to rome in

fact as a free city rome was largely responsible for their economic development their strength they looked to rome as we look to dc to make many of the things happen big players on a national map situated in the center with some measure of prominence and influence and both religiously pluralistic and uh perhaps like us thessalonica knew something of being considered by other cities to be of a less noble sort uh civic unrest not all that different in thessalonica as in chicago so as we think about this city it is worth asking what was it like when paul walked in and planted a church he was there for only a short period of time it appears from the scriptures that he found his way into that city for no more than three weekends even if not three full weeks and yet he began something called the christian church what can we learn about early christianity from luke's account let me ask three simple things this morning in the time i have available what is the message that drove the formation of a christian church what is paul's method by way of instilling it in that locale and what outcomes might we expect if we are to emulate his model here the message what is the message that drove the formation of a christian church the clearest summary right there in verse 3 act 17 he was explaining and proving that it was necessary for the christ to suffer and rise from the dead and saying this jesus whom i proclaim to you is the christ that's the message that any christian church is founded upon that the scriptures of the old testament contain a promise of a king or christ a messiah and that this jesus is that christ as proven by his sufferings and his resurrection that god has in jesus fulfilled his promise to raise up a ruler for israel and through israel a rescuer for the world by one who would through death and resurrection be anointed a king in fact that's the other word you'll see at the end of verse 7 by way of the message this is the immediate moment in thessalonica where the penny began to drop paul walked in and people began to say that there was another king jesus there is a ruler in the world that goes beyond our geopolitical understanding and it goes beyond the kingdom as we know it that's the promise of christianity by way of message this is the earliest formation and i want to say that that fact the death and resurrection of jesus as the fulfillment of the scriptures promises for a king whereby we have the forgiveness of our sins in a relationship with god go to the very core of the earliest moments of christian faith take a look if you have scriptures with you back over to first corinthians 15 because this this fact of the death and resurrection of christ runs counter to two very contemporary assumptions and i just want to hit on this briefly one assumption an old one another assumption quite new the old assumption is that there was a jesus of history the man who walked the earth that over centuries three or four or five of which became the christ of of of this resurrected power that the jesus of history the is distinct from this christ of the church that that the resurrection was a long fabricated story to make sense of a failed experiment and yet one of the earliest texts we have of the ancient christian tradition is this material in first corinthians and look at chapter 15 paul writing i would remind you brothers of the gospel i preached to you which you received in which you stand and by which you are being saved if you hold fast the word i preach to you unless you believed in vain and here's the message for i delivered to you as of first importance what i also received that christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures this is one of the earliest attestations of the message it wasn't fabricated four centuries later the earliest proclamation that founds the christian church is the death and resurrection of jesus according to the scriptures in contrast to whatever you may hear from those who propound an assumption built of old that it took generations for the church to put the big picture together let me give you a new assumption that there's a false assumption that paul founded christianity whereas the apostles were doing their thing with jesus in a different way in other words that paul is very unlike the apostolic witness that that's that that needs a little or a lot of clarification if you look back we're here we are in act 17 right which is volume 2 of luke acts but look at the message we've just heard from paul in act 17 necessary to suffer and rise from the dead and then look at the way luke frames the call to the apostles of which paul was not numbered at the time in luke 24 beginning verse 44 then he jesus subsequent to his resurrection said to them these are my words that i spoke to you while i was with you that everything written about me in the law of moises and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled and he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and he said to them thus it is written that the christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from jerusalem you are witnesses of these things the the message that jesus gave to the apostles is the message that paul proclaims and that the early church although it had its schisms on whether you were a peter man or a paul man were by the ministry of luke brought together with the same message and i proclaim

that message to you today that you may have forgiveness of sins and enter into a right relationship with god through the death and resurrection of christ in accordance with the promises of the hebrew scriptures that are fulfilled in jesus the nazarene my savior my lord king over all the earth yes there is a new king in the world god has put him on the throne that's the message of the christian faith if you've been coming along to holy trinity and are wondering what are we giving ourselves to week by week in the consideration of scriptures why did the pastors in this church open the bible and to the best of their uh weak ability explain to you its meaning because that is the message that actually plants the church and it's a message that we will not move off of that's the message what about the method what was paul's method this is fascinating i could go on this for an hour and i won't what is the method how did that actually get instilled according to the text the christian church is not initiated by beginning a host of entrepreneurial startups that function as agents of change something that christianity often and more regularly does today in an effort to secure credibility rather according to the text the method of paul was to enter into places where people were accustomed to listening to biblical text and being in discussion on it according to the text it says that he went to a synagogue and as was his custom verse two he began to speak from the scriptures there are four words here that that really are underneath paul's sense of developing arguments from the scriptures concerning christ did you see the verbs they're they're wonderful verbs this is the the method by which he would have been known to have been preaching verse two he reasoned with them verse three explaining to them proving to them verse three again this jesus whom i proclaim to you and then verse four the consequence of which is some are persuaded that if if the goal of all speaking is persuasion then what we know of paul is this he persuaded by making arguments from the scriptures that could be gathered under four words of reasoning explaining proving and proclaiming now this is fascinating i don't know about you or how you learned about epistemology which is just a big long word of how do we come to believe what we believe and and how will you be persuaded to believe anything at all but there are four major boxes that i was schooled under that one would call an epistemological grid or the means by which we are persuaded of anything and they kind of trace a historical progression as well one box we are persuaded by an appeal to an external institutional authority this is the ancient world people believed christianity to be true based on a on the authority of the church or you believe things to be true based on the authority of your civil government that world gave way in the reformation and it gave way to luther saying i will not be convinced simply of the truth which someone gives to me on the basis of civil authority or ecclesial authority and so he set that box aside and said i will only be persuaded by the word itself and so for a season in our history all external authorities shook under the weight of the weight of the reformation and in its place emerged the simple declaration of the scriptures but

[20 : 29] that gave way for it wasn't long before human reasoning in the midst of our enlightenment said i'm not believing anything based on the church or based on the government or based on the word i will only believe as i am humanly able to empirically know through testing and verifiable evidence and so we move from external institutional force through the word of god and its declaration to human reasoning and the science as verifying what we should believe about anything but that world gave way to the world in which we find ourselves now at least by dominant footfall i'm not going to believe based on the church based on the bible based on science i'm going to believe based on my personal experience and so we are persuaded based upon my history what do you think about law enforcement today my guess is you're persuaded based upon your past history that those four quadrants almost in in subtle ways mirror aspects of paul's preaching these four verbs have resonance with those weighted means of persuasion let me see if i can put it out for you that that word there on proving proving proving is very akin to appealing to an externally seen authority that we trust paratithamy is the word now we don't use it in the same way today but to prove something to be true is is literally here the idea of of tasting and seeing something literally of setting something before you it's used analogously in luke on four other occasions to a meal that was set before you and so what paul was doing in his preaching wasn't merely appealing to the scriptures but he was setting something before them that they could see that had sensory objectivity to it that they could walk around test hold taste that was the means by which his message was instilled but not by that alone look at the other word there proclaim that's what we normally think of when we think of preaching this is just a sense of declaration i'm telling you this is true because the bible says it's true i'm not putting anything in front of you i'm not asking you to taste it i'm not telling you to see it i'm not telling you to verify it based on its authority i'm just telling you the bible says jesus is

lord and you ought to repent that's proclamation but there's another one notice that it has in it there this idea of human reasoning meaning notice the word reasoned that's where you and i get the term dialogue that paul's preaching was doing a give and take he was speaking in a way where people knew he was in conversation with them and so here's paul doing all things from the scriptures in ways that are appealing to external authorities that they would trust in ways that are declaring the truth as it was put down in ways of

reasoning and conversing and then finally they're explaining that really is akin to our understanding of personal experience do you remember the the travelers on the road to emmaus after the resurrection that jesus comes to them and indicates that they were slow of heart to believe things their personal experience had depressed them the one that they had wanted to believe in had died and what jesus comes and does same word here same word to explain is he opens their minds he alters their past experience with new information there's a show and tellness to it and so when you think about the christian gospel and the proclamation of the word you ought to be situating yourself in a church where the gospel message is clear the death and resurrection of christ is there but the means by which it is being instilled is drawing on on the full utilization of the means of persuasion there ought to be within every conversation you have with one another and particularly with your friends who don't know christ an element where you are learning how to persuade through proclaiming proving explaining reasoning there ought to be a give and take to us there ought to be a show and tell to us there ought to be in a sense of taste and see to us there ought to be a proclaim and teach to us this is what paul did and when people heard him they thought this is rational and yet this is experiential this is verifiable this is truthful this is persuasive indeed we've seen the message we've seen the method and look at the outcome and i wonder what would happen to us at holy trinity if we emulated it verse four some of them were persuaded as did of many great uh devout greeks and not a few of the leading women as the message of jesus goes forth from this place for the next 20 years may we see this may we emulate that from the scriptures we have a king to whom all of our allegiance is owed and may that persuade some did you know that even this week i met someone who's been coming to this church last week we had a testimony of someone who came to christ a little over a year ago we had a baptism of someone who had come to christ and in this week in our office i meet another person who's been coming on here weekly now for a number of weeks saying i now believe as well this this is routinely happening and it will routinely happen over the next 50 years and it is my belief that god is situating our church in this city for the propagation of the gospel that as we face the entire south side of chicago in the shadow of a world-class context that we will be the voice of the living god as we understand the scriptures and give ourselves to jesus christ but that's not the only thing that's happened take a look at verses five there there was a persuasion of some but there was religious hostility where would we find our hostility in the coming days well it could be in the sense of just religious plurality that begins to disagree more openly with the message that we hold to be dear about jesus look at verses five and following it indicates jews but i think what it really indicates is paul's opponents as he was grabbing hold of their literature and trying to point its relationship to jesus and they form a mob and they set the city in an uproar and they attacked the house of jason whom we learn later was probably housing paul and they were seeking to bring him out to the crowd and they dragged him before the civil authorities there is religious hostility as a reaction to the message of the gospel there will not be uniform acceptance to the ministry of holy trinity church in this city rid your mind of that it will never be universal acceptance and gratitude that glad you're here some will be persuaded some will want to squelch it very interesting to me what happens here as the church was planted in thessalonica people were more likely to take to the streets against the christian message rather than the church itself taking itself to the street to proclaim a message message this is this is natural as you go and tell there will be a rebuttal of equal force the reason the church of jesus christ in the city of chicago receives such little pushback is because it does so little proclaiming by way of a push push but as you begin to speak of jesus as you begin to say he is your king as you begin to indicate that he is god's promise rescuer for the whole world as you begin to say that unless one repents and begins following jesus they remain under the wrath of god as you begin to say that there is a day of salvation but later a day of judgment as you preach as you prove as you reason as you explain as you hope to persuade not merely be part of the conversation there will be some resistance so ready yourself for it you're seeing it on the papers every day in other parts of the globe why do we think in our own democracy that we will be forever freed from it the other movement here as you finished for

the day is this civil disturbance is also an outcome the politicians here the magistrates are here it's as though these these people in thessalonica were suddenly finding themselves in city hall and having to defend themselves or before the county board the transformation of the city did not carry itself out the way in which they had envisioned they began to be known as the people who had turned the world upside down rather than today's christian message figuring out how we can come alongside the world so that we all view it as right side up there's an element where the gospel confronted challenged not merely connected and as a result of that all of this is the outcome let me let me close it let me finish because our day has been full as you begin to think about thessalonica and as we move next week to six weeks through second thessalonians know this the gospel came to a city of import through the proclamation of a message that was sophisticated in the manner in which it was instilled and whose outcome was varied as it will be as we emulate it our heavenly father as we have looked at your word today and we have considered many things in regard to the importance of your work in this city we pray that we would be charged to live obediently under the glorious reign of jesus our savior your king my lord my god my lord It is in his name we pray.
Amen.