

Acts 17:1–15

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[0 : 0 0] verses 1 through 15. 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, 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 an 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 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 and 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. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily, to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, dear God. Well, good morning. I'm glad to be together this morning. For the alumni who have wandered their way back to Hyde Park. Special greetings on this day. Just a brief prayer as we make our way.

The Bible reads, But this is to the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. And so Father, we come. And would your gaze be fixed upon us, not because we're so deserving of it, but because we come in humility and contrition. And in some holy reverence of your word, believing that in your word we find life. And so Father, would we find this life this morning? For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we've come off the heels of quite a dynamic chapter.

Acts chapter 16 records a conversion, an exorcism, a jailbreak denied. Three detailed snapshots of what God was doing in the city of Philippi. With about half that space this morning, Luke, the historian who's writing to us the book of Acts, gives us what transpired in two cities, namely Thessalonica and Berea. There is far less detail, but don't take it to mean less importance. Upon reading it, you will see little character development of the people involved. But we would be amiss if we thought humans were the soul and only characters in the book of Acts. Perhaps you've picked it up by now. People are largely secondary in the book of Acts. The primary figure we need to focus in on is the word of the Lord. It is the crown jewel. It is the Larry O'Brien trophy. It is Lord Stanley Cup. And if you don't know what those are, to you, it may be the Nobel medallion. If you venture into art museums, you'll know when you come upon the centerpiece. The entire room is arranged in order to point to the centerpiece. It may be set apart with partitions around it, preventing people from touching it or accessing it physically. It may be guarded both physically and digitally. It is usually illuminated with natural light, possibly with secondary light as well. The entire room revolves around this piece. The crowds hover over it. The cameras focus upon it. No one has to tell you what to look

at. Instead, you're eagerly away creating the crowds in front of you to dissipate so that you may have a closer look. It would be quite bizarre if you found yourself in Florence, Italy at the Galleria dell'Accademia in the shadow of the nearly 18-foot-high statue of David by Michelangelo. If you only stared at the security guard that stood next to him, or the visitor holding the camera, or the lively grade school class on a field trip, if you spent more time admiring the building it was situated in, or spent more time focused on the periphery of the statue, you've gone for the wrong reason. Why? Because the centerpiece is actually David. You may be distracted by everything around it, but don't be misdirected by those things. In Acts, your attention is to be on the main centerpiece, which is the word of the Lord.

In previous chapters, it's repeatedly mentioned. You can go, I mean, you can go backwards. Every chapter from 17, 16, 15, 14, all the way backwards, descending to 10, and it's mentioned. It's mentioned in every city. Paul isn't even mentioned in every city.

[6 : 57] Neither is Peter. But the word of the Lord is. The word of the gospel, the good news, it is the foremost most character. People are subservient to it, speak of it, and are saved by it. We'll find others are vainly opposed to it, ignorant of it, and in contradiction to it. And as we continue through the book of Acts, you'll continue to observe, you'll continually observe the narratives revolve around the word of the Lord. Much of what unfolds only makes sense in light of the word being the centerpiece.

It is what is the most precious thing. It is the Christian's treasure. It is our centerpiece here at Holy Trinity. It is what we fasten ourselves upon week in and week out.

Acts chapter 17, Luke presents to us a couplet in this text. This couplet is contrastive. It's comparing two cities. Luke wants the final recipient of this travel narrative, namely Theophilus and now us, to come to the understanding that the word of the Lord did not have universal acceptance.

Rather, there was mixed receptivity. When the gospel is truly preached, it will both have promoters and detractors. For us this morning, we must be reminded that the gospel, the proclamation, the transmission of the word of God will have both opposition and reception. This is sobering news. It's sobering news in this sense, that if it was universally accepted, then you and I would have big fat heads thinking that whenever we spoke of this word, it would, it would just save. And no, that's not, it keeps us humble in this sense that it's on occasion rejected and opposed. The church is given the gospel and it will be both effective and ineffective in her witness to the world. We will experience both opposition and reception. Enough opposition to keep us humble and enough reception to keep us hopeful. Firstly, opposition in Thessalonica, verses one to nine. Well, leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas head southwest through a few cities and Phiphilus and Apollonia, finally arriving to Thessalonica. It was about 30 miles between each city, a day's journey. Thessalonica served as the capital of the whole region. In ancient literature, it was called the metropolis of Macedonia, the region where it was situated. It was called the mother of Macedonia. The road traveled was the Via Ignatia, which ran along the eastern coast of Macedonia. Population estimates range from 20 to 100,000 what's noteworthy is. It was a free city, meaning it was self-governed. Though situated in the Roman world, it was able to come up with its own self-government under the Roman empire. It was known to be very loyal to Rome. Upon Paul's arrival, he demonstrates his continual commitment to his fellow countrymen and makes his way into the synagogue where other Jews would have gathered regularly. Whether he was there for three consecutive Sabbaths or was there for three total Sabbaths over a period of time, we're not completely sure. Modern commentators have projected that he was there for one to three months. Though the time frame may be unclear, the task that Paul gave himself to was very clear. It's worthwhile to read the verses again in verse 2. 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, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ. Paul was an orator.

[11 : 16] But you will discover elsewhere in his letters that he did not desire to be defined by eloquence, artistry, or creativity. Paul was most concerned with content. Content. The core of his message is the word of the Lord, centered around the necessity of a suffering Savior rising from the dead. He was asserting that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer. Jesus was obligated to rise from the dead.

To ultimately fulfill the promised plan of God according to the scriptures. This is the same message that the apostle Peter preached. You can refer back to in chapter 3. This is what Jesus asserted in

Luke chapter 24. This is the apostolic message. Did you know Jesus had to die? He didn't have been out. There was no other way. The plan of God from the beginning was for God to give himself unto death for the ransom and the redemption of humanity. The ones he created. There is no alternative medicine, remedy, or way. The verbs give us some insight of how he did it. Paul reasoned. It means to mingle thought for thought. It's an interaction of thoughts. It involves conversation, dialogue. He explained and proved these terms convey the act of opening up, of unfolding, of setting before an audience. Interestingly, the word to prove right there is used earlier in chapter 16 verse 34.

In chapter 16 verse 34, it may surprise you, it's used to describe that when the Philippian jailer was converted, Paul and Silas were invited into his home and he set food before them. It is the forensic detective who has all the evidence laid out on the table. It is the loving generosity of a host laying out a complete meal before their invited guests. See, these verbs convey something important about our faith.

It is reasonable. The Christian faith is coherent. Paul could take the Old Testament scriptures and he could use it authoritatively. One, because he was speaking to Jews and he was also a Jew, but he could reason and because they both held the Old Testament in high regard, he was able to argue from it sensibly. Though God's ways are mysterious and inscrutable, his word is not. His word is understandable.

It can be examined. Its claims can be tested. You can investigate it. You can dissect it. You could examine it. You can study it. It's a coherent word. It makes sense from front to back.

[14:19] It's a compelling word. It diagnoses the human condition and depicts reality. It's a comforting word and it holds out these lavish promises. See, while you look at these verbs, however, you may come to think that, oh, maybe Christianity is just the faith of the mind. But Luke makes it sound very very intellectual, void of experience or emotion. And it's important to say this. Perhaps in our context, it's very important. There is an emotional component to faith as well. Because the Philippian jailer who was saved was described to be rejoicing. Our faith is not only captivates our head, but it must our heart as well. We must always be aware that the Christian faith lays claim on the whole of the individual. It doesn't only seize your mind, but it wants to redeem your mind. It also desires to redeem your body and redeems your soul. We are exhorted by Jesus himself to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. The result, according to Luke, in chapter 17, verse 4, some are persuaded, particularly the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. And as a result, as the followers of Jesus increase, potential followers of Judaism decrease. The Jews, therefore, become jealous and stir up the city, gathering some of the rabble. They're ruffians around the marketplace. They storm the home of

Jason in search of Paul and Silas, the narrative tells us. And they're unable to locate them. They seize Jason and a few others and drag them before the city authorities. And they're accusing them of two crimes.

Firstly, these are social disruptors. There's a social disruption going on. They are disturbing the social order of society. The accusation they were trying to overthrow the world by causing trouble everywhere. It's the same accusation earlier in chapter 16, verse 20. These men, the accusation the people of Philippi had is, these men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. There is a social unrest, a social disruption. The second charge is more serious. They are subverting the political regime.

Rome had prohibited rivals to Caesar. So it was unlawful to try and predict or try to overthrow or try to predict the downfall of an empire or the death of its emperor. Caesar's place was not to be challenged. And though Luke does not record the explicit words proclaimed by Paul announcing the new king, the Jews understood what he was talking about. They understood the implications of Jesus being the promised Christ, Messiah, king. And since the city was loyal to Rome, the authorities are alarmed and disturbed and rightfully so. The rival of Paul and Silas disrupted the city religiously, politically, and socially. And in order to squash it, they demanded monetary compensation or security or bail from Jason. It's not exactly sure what this money was required of, but it most likely served as some form of guarantee that, Jason, you know these fellas. Tell them to be quiet or leave. Put an end to this upheaval taking place. The intensity of the opposition and rejection led the brothers, probably Jason, among them, to send Paul and Silas away. In haste, most likely. By night, the text tells us. Concerned for the security of both Paul and Silas, they move on. Banned, ejected, and cast off, they make their way to

Berea. Paul would write later in his letter, 1 Thessalonians, that he felt torn away, probably reflecting on this moment. We see opposition in Thessalonica, and it's contrasted by reception in Berea. Reception in Berea.

[18 : 52] Paul and Silas make their way 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica to a town of Berea. Berea was off the main road. It wasn't on the Via Ignatia, which Paul had traveled. In ancient literature, Berea was described as out of the way. It was emblematic of its obscurity. One person has actually suggested that Paul was trying to lay low. And so instead of going to a prominent city, he sought refuge in Berea, possibly waiting to return in Thessalonica. So if you read the book of the letter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul has this desire to return, but he's never able to. And he attributes it to Satan at work. And though, so Paul may be trying to lay low. And though he was ejected from Thessalonica, Paul certainly was not dejected.

Because upon his arrival in Berea, the first thing he seems to do is, hey, the place that got me in trouble earlier, I'm going back. He lands once again in the synagogue. And we could presume that he did exactly what he did in Thessalonica. Namely, he proclaimed the word of the Lord, or word of God, according to verse 13. Yet the response contrasts the Jews in Thessalonica and the Jews in Berea.

Instead of rejection and opposition of the word, the Jews received the word with great eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. As a result, the Bible tells us, many of them believe. And here is, I believe, the means whereby God draws men and women to himself. It is an individual's eagerness to examine the truthfulness of the scriptures. And as they do so, they find themselves coming to faith. My father was an immigrant, came here for education, and ended up doing his graduate studies in Northern California. And there I've shared that often in California there's pockets of immigrants that reside together and kind of live socially together.

And my parents were unbelievers. Yet they find themselves in a Chinese church because that's where the community is. And they have a home and they begin hosting a Bible study. Now, my father is an unbeliever. My mom was maybe loosely a believer. And so they host Bible studies. And it comes time where the Bible study leader is departing, moving elsewhere. And he approaches my dad and he says, hey, would you want to lead this Bible study? And my dad is very capable, very, very clever, highly educated. And part of Asian culture is you don't say no to anything. He said, yeah, how hard can it be? And there he is, he says, he's volunteering to lead a Bible study. What he does not know is that the word of God is living and it's active. And in his self-study, as he prepares material to lead a Bible study with a word that is yet to be authoritative in his life, he is coming to faith. He is coming to faith. And he comes to faith. And it's not, when you sit down with the Bible, it's unlike any other book. It's a dialogue that's taking place between the word and the man. But there's this third party known as the Holy Spirit doing some incredible things.

[23 : 02] And for me, it's near and dear, not only for the conversion of my father, but for me, that the call to ministry really began as, as I worked as an engineer and I volunteered at this small church with six youth. And I'm like, I have no idea what to do with these, these teenagers, but I better read the Bible with them.

I better read the Bible with them. And as we read the Bible, as we taught the Bible, as we studied the Bible, as we tried to live the Bible, I saw these six young men and women come to faith. And I said, wow, the Bible does that? Then I might have to give my entire life to this book and its proclamation. Do not neglect the word of the Lord in your life. Do not neglect it in its power. It's power that can be unleashed in the life of the unbeliever.

See, most Christians that I meet are not transformed against their own volition. See, there's an individual eagerness that is described here to examine the truthfulness of the scriptures. Faith is not something you will stumble into. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is not accidental. And here is a bold assertion. You will not become a Christian through effortless attempts of reaching toward God. You will not. And I say that knowing that the Lord will supernaturally, he's a champion of grace and we're all people who receive undeserved favor. And you're correct.

Our salvation is a free gift. It's unearned, unobtainable, if not for the generosity of God in Christ. You are correct. But grace is never an imposition. The word of grace is a table set before you. The spread is laid out. The fine meal is there. And if you're a parent, you know this so well. You know it well.

[25 : 06] The meal is laid out. It's spread in full. Your desire is for your child or children or many children to come and sit and eat. And I have to be cautious because children are in here.

And your desire is for them to freely consume with joy and delight, with gladness, freedom. It's an entirely other ordeal when the table is set, the meal is prepared, all laid out, and the child must be force-fed, resentfully chewing, commanded to partake. And so it is with the gospel. It is set before you. And you're encouraged, exhorted, pleaded with, knowing the love, the preparation, and the cost and the value of the meal to a starving soul, you're encouraged to ingest. And as you ingest, you will find that you believe and are saved. This is an invitation to you. Search the scriptures, study them, examine them, for in so doing, you may find what many have found, namely the saving son of God at work in life. So regardless of the circumstance, context or setting, the time of the salvation. So the work in Berea flourished. But as the work flourished, opposition followed. It literally followed. From Thessalonica arrived the Jews who were stirring up the Berean crowds. And once again, the brothers immediately send Paul off. At least for this leg of his journey, Paul seemed more like a fugitive than a missionary. As I wind things down, regardless of the circumstance, the context or the setting, the priority of gospel transmission is clear. If the word of the Lord is not only the central character in the book of Acts, but it is central in all of history, it should be our commitment, as was it was Paul's. It would not matter if Paul was speaking with Lydia at a riverside in Philippi, or whether he was thrown in jail, beaten, and imprisoned. It would not matter where he was.

He would be always about the business of gospel propagation. Whether it be a Thessalonica, intentionally, or whether it be in Berea, perhaps incidentally, Paul would proclaim Christ.

And this is the great application of our text. The necessity of gospel proclamation. Now, some of us are in Thessalonica. I know that. I hang out with students. And it is hard.

[28 : 04] It is hard. You routinely enter classrooms or laboratories or even local public high schools. And you go through every day hoping that you don't get found out.

Can you believe this person is a scientist and they're a Christian? Yet Christ is real to you. And where you are, you've been set to be a herald of the word of the Lord.

Some of you have it very difficult. You return to an unbelieving spouse who finds this gospel unreasonable and absurd.

And your prayer is through the steady faithfulness of your life that God would draw your loved one to himself and somehow bring a defiant soul under his saving power.

Here in Thessalonica, some of us may be called to give up our lives to go somewhere we don't necessarily desire to go.

[29 : 15] But we've been set down. Some may be called to countries where they put Christians to death. And perhaps even in this room the first Holy Trinity martyr may sit.

And I say that knowing my children are in this room. That God may call one of them to say the word is the most valuable thing.

Take it. And in obedience they'll go. And it may be as a father in bitterness I will send. Some of us aren't that Thessalonica.

Strongly opposed. And I know some of us are in Berea. Maybe myself really. Where the gospel is received so openly.

So well. There are both Jason's and Lydia's. Some of us will lose money for the gospel. Some of us might make money.

[30 : 26] Well that sounds bad but Jason's property was violated. He was fined. His reputation in the city of Thessalonica was marred.

And there you have on the other hand Lydia and Philippi unharmed untouched. She housed the apostles. And here we see the gospel spreads by all means voluntary and involuntary.

And despite where the Lord may set you down the pattern is clear make Christ known. It is God's sovereign plan to have you here in this place. whether you receive hostility or hospitality be about proclaiming Christ.

We don't get to sign up for the experience that we have in this life. We don't get to choose our own adventure as much as you think you do. But we have our marching orders don't we?

Gospel proclamation disseminate the word go and as you go make disciples and you do so.

[31 : 32] And as you do know this I'll really wrap up now. Christ lays claim on every city. We are in a portion of Acts that is known as a travel narrative. We read of cities that no longer exist and are obscure unknown as if these places are irrelevant.

But they are more than a travel narrative. One author has recently proposed it's actually a conquest narrative. The word of the Lord has been marching from Jerusalem.

From city to city to city overtaking city. We read it from city to city conflict between the word of God and the religious authorities and the political leaders.

Unbeknownst to the Roman world there was a conqueror headed toward Rome. He was invisible. He does not come with an innumerable army or weapons of carnage.

Rather he approaches a city with proclamation. And as ancient cities would capture ancient conquerors would capture cities they would also I mean you probably see in the movies a conqueror would come into the city and say it is for your good that you're being conquered.

[32 : 43] Oh really? Actually you're here to exploit everything about us. They would promise peace, prosperity and goodness and they would announce to their captives that it was good for you to come under Caesar's rule and reign.

Caesar promises peace, safety and prosperity and whether that is true is debatable. But what was asserted by the mob in Thessalonica is true. There is another king named Jesus and he's laying claim not only to the Roman Empire but the empire of this world.

His promises are peace safety prosperity and they far surpass any promise made by Caesar and may you know this morning what it means to be conquered by Christ.

It's a great conquest where his subjects become sons where the captives become free where the captors where the captives also wear crowns.

That is the promise of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's close our time in prayer.

[34 : 09] Father we come to you this morning Lord we all experience both opposition and reception because of the gospel and yet we have been given a charge and whether we go to prominent cities like Thessalonica or obscure places like Berea whatever our context may be the charge is clear make Christ known because as Christ is made known as the word of the Lord goes forth you conquer you conquer not necessarily out of force or might or carnage but you conquer out of love out of grace and here you set before us a table and you tell us to ingest consume and as we do so we have come to see faith and reality and what it means to fall under the lordship of Christ and so

Father as we go into another week we ask Lord that you would empower us to live and live as heralds to bear to be witnesses for Jesus sake Amen