

Reactions to the King

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please turn your Bibles back to Acts 17. We're continuing to trace Paul's missionary journey.

One of my closest friends at uni was a Muslim. I remember a couple of times there were opportunities for me to talk about Jesus.

I got so scared. I got so nervous. I hesitated. And then the moment passed. And until today, I've never got a chance to tell him about Jesus.

And when I remember that, it saddens me. Why does it sometimes feel really hard to share our faith?

Well, perhaps some people fear rejection. I do. Others might worry that witnessing to close friends or relatives might damage their relationships.

[1 : 13] I do. Others might worry that they might not know enough about Christianity to give good answers. I sometimes do.

Well, here in our passage, we see Paul evangelizing without fear. And I think there's one or two things that we can learn from how he does it and the attitude that he has.

So, here Paul continues his missionary journey in Thessalonica, however you say it, before moving on to Berea.

And in these two cities, he focuses on evangelizing to the Jews in synagogues. So, let's read. I'll read it for you.

Verse 1 to 3. I think it's on the screen. Yep. When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

[2 : 20] As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

So, here Paul continues his journey, and he arrives in the city of Thessalonica, where he enters a Jewish synagogue, which is a normal thing to do for a Christian back then in the first century.

And he spends three weekends telling the Jews about Jesus. But pay attention to how he does it. In verse 3, he doesn't just tell them what to believe and then threatens them with hell if they don't believe.

No, he explains and proves his argument. And then in verse 2, he reasons with them using the scriptures, which is in this case the Old Testament.

We might think, well, this is nothing new. Of course, we have to use the scriptures, right? It's our highest source of authority. But we will see next week that when Paul deals with the Greeks, he doesn't explicitly use the scriptures.

[3 : 49] So, why does he use the scriptures here? Well, he uses the scriptures because both Christians and the Jews see the Old Testament as authoritative.

It's a middle ground between Paul and the Jews. And that is a good strategy. When we talk to our friends about Jesus, we can try to look for a common ground and begin there.

But more importantly, pay attention to the content of Paul's argument in verse 3, that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

This is something that the Jews can't believe. First of all, the idea that God's appointed king has to suffer is just unthinkable.

God's appointed Messiah has to win, right? A suffering Messiah just sounds wrong. And second, no one rises from the dead.

[4 : 58] It's just unnatural. It's unbelievable. And so here, Paul looks at Old Testament texts, and one of them is probably Isaiah 53, which is our first reading, where the Messiah is said to suffer for

the sins of God's people, and then to die, and then to see the light of life, be resurrected.

But Paul doesn't stay in the scriptures. Pay attention to what he says after, which is the only quoted sentence in the whole passage at the end of verse 3.

This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah. Paul doesn't stay in the Messiah. Paul doesn't stay in the scriptures. He uses the scriptures as a means to get people to Jesus, to see him as the Messiah, the king over the world and over their lives, and to see the beauty of his death and resurrection.

Paul meets the Jews where they are in the synagogue, and uses the Old Testament as a common ground to launch his argument.

But he doesn't stay there. He goes straight into the core of the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[6 : 26] The proper center of the Christian faith is not the Bible.

It's Jesus. Having faith in him, delighting in him, enjoying him. The Bible is extremely important, but only because it's his word, and it gets us to him and to know him.

We don't just delight in the Bible. We delight in the Bible because we delight in Jesus. Again, this is significant. In our evangelism, let's not get caught up too long in discussions about, for example, creation in the Bible, or LGBTQ and how the Bible responds to it, or the question of suffering in the Bible.

There's a place to have those discussions, but we eventually want to point people to Jesus, his death and resurrection and his kingship.

People don't get saved because they believe in the Bible. They get saved because they believe in Jesus. A couple of years ago, I was chatting with another Muslim friend back in Indonesia.

[7 : 51] We were comparing our faiths and even comparing the Jesus Christ of the Bible and the Isa'al Masih of the Quran. We were trying to find a common ground in our understanding of Jesus.

But eventually, I had to say, you know what the greatest difference is between Christianity and Islam? It's that in Christianity, Jesus did not only come as a prophet to show us the way to God, but he's God himself who came down here to us because we had no way to go up there to go to God. In Christianity, we know that no matter how many animals we sacrifice or how many good deeds we do, both of which are core to Islam, we will never reach the perfection of God.

But God came down here in the person of Jesus and gave himself up as a sacrifice for us. That's the greatest difference.

And she said, wow, I had never heard of that kind of God. We started with a common ground. And yes, before that conversation, I had to read the Quran.

[9 : 19] But that's not where I wanted to end up. I wanted her to hear about Jesus. Well, my friend's response was quite favorable, but Paul got a mixed response in verse 4 to 5.

4 to 5. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But other 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, probably where Paul and Silas had been staying at, in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. So in verse 4, some people actually believe the gospel, and they come from different walks of life. But other Jews are jealous, so they cause trouble by calling some people of bad character to help them cause a riot, which is ironic if you think about it.

They want people to join them to worship the holy God by using people of unholy character to cause chaos. But anyway, when the Jews report the Christians to the Roman authority, they show that they actually get Paul's message in verse 6 to 7.

[10 : 53] But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting, These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house.

They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus. They get it. So earlier, Paul explains that Jesus is the Messiah, and the Jews get the implication.

If Jesus is the Messiah, then he is the king, then they must choose between Caesar or Jesus. Now the irony is that the Jews don't even like Caesar.

but it seems like they don't like Jesus more. Here in their report to the Romans, they are happy to elevate Caesar's kingship as long as the kingship of Jesus is not recognized and his dominion

doesn't spread.

You see, the work of Christian mission is a spiritual battle. And although the victory of Jesus is certain, opposition is also expected.

[12 : 15] And we might also expect opposition when we talk to our friends about Jesus. Christians. And so, in verse 8 to 9, when they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.

Then they made Jason and the others post-bond and let them go. So the Christians are required to post-bond, perhaps with a promise that Paul and Silas won't return to Vassilonica.

But really, the message of the gospel has taken its roots. Some people have believed and therefore the gospel spreads nonetheless.

Later on, in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, he says, the Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia.

Your faith in God has become known everywhere. The people evangelized later become the evangelists.

[13 : 20] That's the nature of the gospel. People who have been affected by the beauty of Jesus, the king, just can't help it. They just have to share the beauty.

It's too beautiful not to share. Just like people who see a good scenery cannot help but either take a picture and then show it to others or tell others about it.

Hey, you have to see that. It's really beautiful. People who are affected by the beauty of Jesus do the same. So perhaps this is a good call for us Christians to share the gospel.

If we really think that Jesus is beautiful, then we must let ourselves be moved by his death and resurrection and share it.

reason with others using evidence. Look for a middle ground. Get to know their position.

[14 : 27] Here, Paul reasons with the Jews using the Old Testament. And we will see next week that Paul uses Greek poems and Greek philosophy to engage with the Greeks.

the Bible. So we must try to understand the worldviews of our friends as well. Perhaps we can use movies to talk about Jesus with younger people or songs or secular books.

Yes, dwell in the Bible. Dwell in the Bible and get to know it. but visit many books and movies and songs not for our own sake but so that we can use them to point people to Jesus crucified and resurrected.

So, here's my challenge for you this week. Think of one person that you know and who's not a Christian.

Find out what they're like, how they see the world, how they view God, and think about a common ground that you can use to get them to Jesus. If you can use the Bible to get them to Jesus, great!

[15 : 48] But it's worth thinking and praying about. One person. One person. So, the story continues.

Paul and Silas get kicked out of Thessalonica. So, they go to a city called Berea. And the first thing they do is go to a Jewish synagogue in verse 10.

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. What's going on here?

Is Paul looking for punishment? He just got kicked out of Thessalonica because he evangelized to the Jews in a synagogue and now he's doing it again.

He doesn't learn from his mistakes. Well, it shows that Paul's not afraid of suffering for the gospel. He's not afraid of rejection.

[16 : 49] He's not afraid of breaking relationships. He's not afraid of not knowing enough. It seems like whatever fear he might have had was overshadowed by his desire to share Jesus.

Perhaps we should pray that our vision of the beauty of the gospel might overcome all fear. Paul's methodology of evangelism in Berea is not described but it implies that Paul just uses the same method to the one he uses in Thessalonica.

The result though is different in verse 11 to 12. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

As a result many of them believed and as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. Such a contrast.

The Bereans receive the message with passion, with great eagerness and they examine whether it's true, whether the message is true, every single day.

[18 : 21] Wow! That's an attitude that's noble even for us who have been Christians for years or decades.

And these people are not even Christians. As a result, in verse 12, many people believed from all walks of life.

But again, Christian mission is a battle, so there's always opposition in verse 13 to 15. But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

And that leads to next week's sermon. But it's a pattern, isn't it? The apostles fight the battle for Christ. Christ wins some.

[19 : 33] His enemies fight back. But there are always some small seeds that eventually grow. And 2,000 years later, Jesus is not only known among the Jews and the Greeks, but all over the world.

And that should encourage us. When I was a high school teacher, there was a student who was not a Christian.

Christian, she was really into biology and science, and she would describe herself as an atheist. One day she saw that I was reading a Christian book and she got intrigued, so she approached me and asked me questions.

At first I didn't even use the Bible to answer her questions. I just used science and philosophy, because that was the common ground that I could find.

And at the end of every conversation, I would give her something to read. And she devoured those reading materials. Like the Bereans, she was so eager to find out whether what I said was true.

[20 : 55] And slowly I got her to read the Bible to see for herself, to see Jesus for herself. And by the grace of God, she became a Christian after I left.

And after she graduated from high school, she went to uni to study neuroscience and theology at the same time. Imagine that. And then after she graduated, she joined a national, in Indonesia, a national Christian apologetics organization to travel across the country, to tell people about Jesus and to defend the faith.

I planted a tiny, tiny seed in one person, and God grew that seed to produce many fruits.

The fact that God is the one who grows the seeds of the gospel should reduce our fear, even if just a bit. Now, this episode from Berea, I think, calls those who don't believe in Jesus to adopt a certain attitude.

And I'd like to echo that call. If you don't believe in Jesus, but you're here right now and you're listening to this or you're watching this online, I invite you to have a conversation about Jesus with your Christian friend or with someone from this church.

[22 : 30] Let's reason together. I plead to you that you don't just reject us outright because of your presupposed belief like the Thessalonians, but to examine things like the Bereans.

I've got a friend who came here from Pakistan as a student with his brother. His family is a hardcore Muslim family in Pakistan.

And one day he went to St. Paul's Cathedral in the city as a tourist and he heard someone praying for the Muslims. He was intrigued and he thought, I've been taught that these people are our enemies.

I've been taught by my religion to curse these people, not pray for them. And yet they are praying for my brothers and sisters?

What kind of faith, what kind of hope enables them to do that? So he bought a Bible from the cathedral and secretly without his brother knowing, he read the Bible every night like the Bereans to investigate what this Jesus guy was all about.

[23 : 58] And then he became a Christian, got baptized, got disowned by his family in Pakistan. He could not go home because people might kill him.

And now he's a Christian pastor. father. If you don't believe in Jesus, don't you want to know what it was that changed his life?

What it is that changes millions of people's lives? I encourage you to investigate. Talk to us.

Because Jesus truly is king, and he's beautiful, and he can change your life. Let's pray.
Father, we thank you for giving us Jesus to be our savior, our lord, our redeemer, our king. Help us
by your spirit to see more and more of his beauty and the beauty of his gospel, so that we might be
moved more and more to share this beauty of Christ the king with others.
[25 : 17] In his name we pray. Amen.