

# Kicking Out the Gospel

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on June 6, 1999. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled, Kicking Out the Gospel, and is from Acts 17, verses 1-15. Lord God, thank you for your special revelation of yourself to us in the Bible.

God, as we examine these verses from the book of Acts tonight, we pray that we leave here not just with a whole bunch of knowledge, but we have been touched by your Spirit and enabled to serve you better.

We ask that in your Son's name. Amen. One of the things I do each week on a Wednesday lunchtime is go to the Secondary College down the road, Doncaster Secondary College.

And we run a group there called Student Focus. And these groups are run in secondary colleges right around Australia. They run under the auspices of a youth dimension, of a youth organisation called Youth Dimension.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] Now at this group, Student Focus, we run games and activities, and in the middle of the fun and activity, we stop and have two or three or four minutes of quiet, and there's a very simple and sensitive gospel message proclaimed.

Some aspect of the Christian faith is described. Well, a year or two ago at a school not far from here, where Student Focus was being conducted, one parent was agitated about this group's presence in the school.

And they wrote letters to the school saying they didn't think that this group should continue. I think the family concerned had an Islamic background. To cut a long story short, youth dimension decided to close that group in the school and to put their resources into running a group in another school that was more receptive.

And this is a bit like what happened to these guys, Paul and Silas, in this town called Thessalonica. If you want to follow it in the Bibles, the Black Bibles in the seats, it's page 901, 901, and you can follow that with me as we go through it.

It's the start of Chapter 17. Well, we can see from the map that Vaughan's about to put up the area where Paul and Silas have been travelling.

[ 2 : 3 2 ] This was Paul's second missionary journey. He was a great missionary of the first century. And you can see that at this reading, we've left Philippi, the town almost, most northernmost town where the red line is.

And we've been going westward. And we just go through a town called Amphipolis and another one which is not labelled there called Apollonia. And the reading today ends all the way down at Athens.

So we'll just lay that up so you can get your bearings, so to speak. Well, Paul, Silas and Timothy were travelling along the main Roman highway called the Ignatian Way. And it went from east to west, from Philippi to Thessalonica.

It's a journey of about 160 kilometres. And in the first verse of this reading, most of that distance is just described in one sentence.

It says, Paul and Silas passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica. Just in that short sentence, we've just sort of covered about 80 kilometres. So there you go.

[ 3 : 39 ] Well, they probably didn't stop in Amphipolis or Apollonia except perhaps just to rest. They would have perhaps not proclaimed the good news there because there was no synagogue.

Paul's habit was to go, first of all, wherever he went, to the Jewish synagogue because he'd know he'd find Jewish people meeting there on the Sabbath, particularly. And there, he always initiated his evangelistic efforts and proclaimed the gospel.

We're not told that he stopped in Amphipolis and Apollonia. Perhaps there was no synagogue there. But he did reach Thessalonica. And it was a big town with a population of about 200,000 people.

Now, I find that hard to visualise in my mind. So to help you, I always imagine big crowds, I think of the MCG, which holds 100,000 people. Okay, so this is a town that could hold 200,000 people.

Quite a big town. And in verse 2, we read that Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures.

[ 4 : 47 ] So, Sabbath is Saturday, the days the Jewish people met. And on three Sabbath days, Paul argued with them from the scriptures. Now, let's not just say Paul spent two or three weeks in Thessalonica and left, but he only went to the synagogue for three Saturdays.

He actually did stay there quite a bit longer. In verse 3, we read that he was explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this is the Messiah, Jesus, who I am proclaiming to you.

Paul's style here was not one of just proclamations, sort of like what I'm doing now. I'm proclaiming and expounding this Bible passage for all of us. But there won't be an opportunity for us to discuss and for you to ask me questions.

That's possibly a good thing. But in Paul's day, there was opportunity for a bit of repartee, some points of clarification and, well, what does this mean? Explain this to us, could you?

More of a dialogue sort of situation. But the bottom line of Paul's message was, look, Jesus Christ is the Messiah that you've been waiting and hoping for.

[ 6 : 05 ] He's already come. As he says, as I read in verse 3, this is the Messiah, Jesus, who I am proclaiming to you. He goes on in verse 4 to describe, Luke goes on to describe the response.

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. I think it's a great model for our evangelistic efforts.

We need to provide people with opportunities to ask points of clarification. When we proclaim the good news of Jesus and explain the Christian faith, that's a lot of information for people to understand in one go.

People may want to ask questions and a dialogue with us and we need to be ready for that. Note also that Paul had as his main reference point the scriptures, the Old Testament as it would have been for him in his day.

Now we have the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments and Christian people believe that this is where we can find out about God today. Sadly, it seems to me that some so-called Christian speakers and thinkers these days come up to their own conclusions about God without any reference to the book that God has given us.

[ 7 : 30 ] for example, I can think of two secondary school chaplains, one in an Anglican school, one in a government school, one I've had a long conversation with, one I've just heard about.

And they're both universalists. That is, they believe that everyone goes to heaven. Now, that sounds nice. That's what we want.

We want everyone to go to heaven. But that's not what we read in the scriptures. It's not what we read in God's Bible to us. Mind you, God wants everyone to be in heaven. He wants and invites everyone to enjoy his forgiveness and life and love forever.

But it's clear from the Bible what God says to us is that only those who trust in Jesus Christ and ask him to forgive their sins will spend eternity in heaven with him.

those who reject God and reject his invitation will miss out on that life and love and forgiveness forever. The reality is that people who reject God won't be in heaven.

[ 8 : 37 ] These two secondary school chaplains are proclaiming falsities. It's really bad. They're twisting what God says here. They're misrepresenting God. We must be sure that like Paul, our understanding of God is grounded in the Bible, in the Scriptures.

This is what God has said to us. This is how God has revealed himself to us. Let's go on to verse 5. The Jews became jealous and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.

While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly they attacked Jason's house. Well, these Jews were jealous. Paul and Silas had withdrawn from the synagogue.

They were no longer meeting there but their new Christian converts probably met with them in someone's home. So the Christians kept on meeting regularly, Paul kept on teaching them and the good news kept on being explained.

Well, the Jews were possibly jealous of Paul and Silas' successful evangelism. They're converts amongst the Gentile people. So they did a pretty typical sort of rent-a-crowd sort of act and got together some larrikins and bad characters, formed a mob and we'll hear about the charges they brought against Paul and Silas shortly.

[ 10 : 04 ] We don't know much about this guy called Jason whose house it seems they were staying in but it seems that Jason was the host of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica.

In verse 6 we go on. When they couldn't find them, that is Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities shouting, These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also and Jason has entertained them as guests.

They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor saying that there is another king named Jesus. Well the charge that these people were acting against the emperor's decree saying there's another king called Jesus was actually treasonous.

It was suspiciously like treason. Paul and Silas weren't advocating rebellion against Rome but the fact they called Jesus a king sounded like they were wanting to undermine the emperor.

The other charge was that they had been turning the world upside down. Perhaps a more accurate translation of that phrase would be they'd been causing trouble everywhere. Obviously Christians had become known amongst the area and they had got a reputation for causing trouble.

[ 11 : 28 ] That's probably because their ideas were quite different to the ideas that were going around at the time. I don't think Christians were intentionally causing disruption and trouble. But the gospel does cause disruption.

It does disrupt our complacent lives. It does call us to turn to the living God and put our trust in him. In verse 8 we read that the people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this.

Well these city leaders and the people were sufficiently disturbed to take swift and prompt action against Paul and Silas.

Jason made a kind of undertaking with the city leaders that they wouldn't preach in Thessalonica again and Paul and Silas had to abide by that. I wonder that if Paul had been before the city leaders he would still be in Thessalonica.

But Jason on his behalf had made this undertaking and they had to go. Well it's worth remembering that on this side of Jesus' return Satan is described as the ruler of this world.

[ 12 : 40 ] And that's Jesus' comment in John chapter 16 verse 11. And Jesus promises that as he suffered, he suffered ultimately for us in dying on a cross, as he suffered those who follow him will suffer also.

And as I say, I mention Satan because Satan is often the source for many of our troubles. Paul in his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, he travelled further on, went further southward and he wrote letters back to the people in Thessalonica.

And he made this comment in the first letter, chapter 2 verse 18. He said, For we wanted to come to you. Certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again, but Satan blocked our way.

Well, the Bible speaks very openly and clearly about a being called Satan who is in opposition to God. Now, he has been defeated by Jesus because Jesus defeated all evil and death when he died on the cross and rose to life again.

Jesus showed us that he's more powerful than any force, good or bad, in the world. He defeated death itself. He defeated sin. And those that trust in him can share in his victory. Yet until Jesus returns, God allows Satan to have some influence in this world.

[ 14 : 03 ] And that's not always easy to understand, but we hold on to the firm and sure promise that when Jesus returns, Satan will be destroyed forever. One of Jesus' best friends, Peter, in one of his letters in the New Testament, describes Satan as being like a roaring lion.

He wrote this in 1 Peter 5, chapter 5, verse 8. He said, Like a roaring lion, your adversary, the devil, prowls around looking for someone to devour.

Paul, in that letter that I quoted from before, identified his troubles that he faced with the work of Satan. And we need to keep alert also for his unwelcome hindrances as we seek to live the Christian life.

Now we can overdo that and we can sort of trip over or stub our toe and say, Oh, that was Satan. I mean, that's just ridiculous, isn't it? That's laughable. But we need to not be the other extreme and sort of think he's not there, he doesn't exist.

We live in a spiritual realm as well as a physical world. And Satan is present, prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. But if we trust in Jesus, we need not fear him.

[ 15 : 21 ] Along with Paul and Silas and every Christian person, we can share Jesus' final victory over Satan, which he has already won in his death and resurrection for us.

Well, we go on to verse 10 and Paul and Silas go a bit further south, southwest in fact, about 45 miles to a town called Berea. And the people here were probably the most receptive audience you could possibly imagine.

Let's read from verse 10. That very night, the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea. And when they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so.

Many of them, therefore, believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high standing. Jews. And they welcomed the Jewish synagogue. Once again, Paul's starting place is the Jewish synagogue.

[ 16 : 30 ] And the Jews there welcomed the message eagerly. Sort of a dream congregation for a preacher. They were particularly diligent in studying the scriptures.

Not just on the Sabbath, not just on Saturday when they normally met each week, but every day. Well, as a result, they saw that what Paul was saying was right.

They said, this guy's right. He's speaking the truth. And they believed and put their trust in Jesus. Friends, this Bible that they were studying has the same power for us today.

As people examine the Bible with an open mind, asking God to guide them and strengthen them as they do that, they will encounter the truth and believe and trust in Jesus.

It may take a while. It may take years of study. But if one is diligently seeking God, one will find him revealed to us as we open up the scriptures. Do we examine this Bible with the same diligence and care as the people of Berea?

[ 17 : 39 ] Bible with the same Bible with the same Bible.

And the Jews there were jealous again. And they came to Berea in order to cause Paul trouble. We're told they stirred up and incited the crowds, probably with the same charges of treason.

Let me read from verse 13. But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea as well, they came there too to stir up and incite the crowds.

Well, the Christians there took swift action as well. The believers immediately sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy remained behind. Verse 15, the last verse we're looking at today says, those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens.

And after receiving instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they left him. Well, the Christians felt the best course of action here was for Paul to go.

[ 18 : 52 ] He went eastwards to the coast, to the eastern coast of what is present day Greece. And he travelled south, we're not sure, by road or by boat, probably by boat, and to Athens.

Now, Paul sent word back to Silas and Timothy and Berea to join him as soon as possible. Next week, we'll see what effects Paul had as he preached the good news in Athens.

But what can we learn tonight from this reading, from the excerpt from the book of Acts? Well, I've mentioned the things already, but I think they can be summarised in two words, each beginning with the letter S.

The first one is scriptures, and the second one is suffering. Just in the time that I used to prepare this sermon, I've become even more convinced of the power and truth of the Bible.

I believed in it before, and I was convinced that it was powerful as we opened it up, but I'm just more convinced that God speaks to us very clearly through this. As the Bible is studied and read by people today with open minds as they ask God to help them, God is able to show the truth of Jesus to them.

[ 20 : 06 ] And the other word is suffering. Those who seek to follow Jesus in this world should expect to have to suffer. We live in a world that basically doesn't care about God, or they give him token acknowledgement.

Generally they ignore him. Sometimes they hate him. Therefore we will be ignored, or snubbed at, or maybe even hated, if we seek to honour and follow him ourselves.

Even Jesus in Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 30, said that his followers should expect persecutions. And yet it's worth it.

Not because we're masochistic and we like to suffer, but because we've found the truth. And when you find the truth, you can't compromise it.

We've found God's truth in the scriptures. We can't pretend truth is elsewhere other than in this book that God has revealed himself to us in. He's the God of the universe.

[ 21 : 13 ] The only God, the only one who is absolute truth. The Christian way of looking at the world is the true way of looking at the world and the universe. Like Paul, we know that in Jesus we have found the way, the truth, and the life.

Even though we may suffer for following him, we know that it's worth it. And on that last day, we will be vindicated, along with Paul and Silas and all of Jesus' followers.

As Jesus says to us, well done, good and faithful servant.