

Sermon Title: Thugs, Bullies, and Academics
Scripture Text: Acts 17:1-21 (Acts #40)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-28-24

This morning it is our privilege to dive into Acts Chapter 17.

As I work through the Book of Acts and its historical narrative, it is interesting sometimes to try to come up with descriptive titles for a sermon, but this week it just jumped right out at me: "Thugs, Bullies, and Academics." If that doesn't summarize the first 21 verses of Acts 17, well then, I swung and missed.

Here's the situation: After planting a church in Philippi, and then being beaten and thrown in jail, Paul and Silas and Timothy traveled about a hundred miles west by southwest along a well-known route called the "Egnatian Way." You have probably heard to the "Appian Way"—that starts in Rome and heads east, and then you run into the Aegean Sea. And on the other side of the Aegean Sea, it's the "Egnatian Way." It was a very significant road, constructed by the Romans for trade and armies and everything else back in the second century B.C. It crossed Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thracia, running through territory that, if you found it on a map today, that would be modern Albania, North Macedonia, Greece, and European Turkey.

And as we make our way through this record of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, we have yet another example of what was said of Paul when he came to Christ. Remember, he was blinded on the road outside Damascus, and God sent a man named Ananias to go give the message to Saul of Tarsus. And Ananias was not thrilled about going and talking to the guy that he knew had come to town to kill Christians!

But this is what God said to him in Acts 9:15 and 16—"The Lord said to him, 'Go, for he"—Saul of Tarsus—"is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' " (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

In the next three stops on the Second Missionary Journey, Paul was going to see many more converts and much more opposition (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9), and we can connect this travelogue with the ones who opposed Paul on this way. The three groups that he had to deal with were:

1. Thugs In Thessalonica (vss. 1-9)
2. Bullies In Berea (vss. 10-14)
3. Academics In Athens (vss. 15-21)

And you will see why we chose that. And then, after we have worked our way through the story, if you will—the history—we will circle back and observe principles that we can apply in our lives.

First up: The Thugs In Thessalonica

Acts Chapter 17, Verse 1—"Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia"—and I know you know right where those are—"they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews." Actually, that little tidbit that tells us that they "travelled through Amphipolis and Apollonia" is how we ascertain that they were

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following this major route: the Egnatian Highway. It was sort of the Roman version of an interstate highway. They did not stop in either of those two cities; it is almost certain that there were no synagogues there. But there was a synagogue in Thessalonica. Those would be two logical steps: "Amphipolis and Apollonia." It was about 30 miles from Philippi to Amphipolis, about another 30 to Apollonia, and a total of about a hundred from Philippi to Thessalonica. So the trip was in at least three stages, and probably even more than that.

And as soon as he got to Thessalonica, Paul did what he always did: He went to the "synagogue" and he was granted a hearing there for "three Sabbaths" (see Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). So, he took his time. Many souls were saved during that time.

And by the way: You might notice, if you are looking at a map, that this part is the westernmost extent of the Second Missionary Journey; so they are going to be generally heading back home, although they are going to take a *lot more time* to get back to Antioch from Thessalonica than it took to get from Antioch to Thessalonica on the front end.

Follow me, starting at Verse 2 in Chapter 17—"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ—"the Messiah" (Jn. 1:41)—"had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" (vss. 2-4).

Alright, so what did he do? He went to the Jews. He "reasoned with them from the Scriptures"—what we know as the Old Testament. He showed them that Jesus *is* the Messiah—the Savior promised (Ps. 2:2; 45:7; Is. 61:1). He and He alone fulfilled all the predictions from the Old Testament of that One to come (e.g., Ps. 16:10; 110:1; Is. 7:14; 53:2-12; Dan. 9:25-26a; Mic. 5:2).

The harvest of souls was rich. It included some from the synagogue and others of those who hung around the synagogue—those "God-fearing Greeks": the ones who had given up their paganism, but they had not become full converts to Judaism yet. And then "a number of" those whom he just summarizes as "leading women."

So, in a matter of three weeks plus in Thessalonica—"three Sabbaths" plus whatever time before and after that—a church was born that already included more souls than the church that had been planted in Philippi. And as is always the case: As soon as new life comes, Satan redoubles his efforts (see Jn. 8:44); and he uses the most willing instruments at his disposal to try to oppose and attack what God is doing.

So look at Verse 5—"But the Jews"—that phrase "the Jews" is that same generic term we have heard for the *leaders* of the Jews who opposed the Gospel—"But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people."

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Now, understand: There is no one more dangerous than a person who believes they are doing God a favor by attacking Christians (see Jn. 16:2). They are not subject to any sort of rational discussion.

In our generation, in our century, the murderous hostility *usually* comes not from zealous Jews but from radical Muslims—or, in some of the darkest places on the planet, from pagan witch doctors and the like.

Our dear ministry partner friends in Russia face this kind of hostility and opposition from the ones there who are of the Russian Orthodox Church leadership. They profess to be Christians but in reality, they are the most vehement, persistent persecutors of all those who preach the Gospel.

Well, there in Thessalonica, it wasn't very subtle. The leaders of the Jews went to "the market place," and they recruited "wicked men." They might have even paid them. They went to find the local rabble: "Hey! Who wants to fight a little bit? You know, maybe we will pay you a little bit. We want to get rid of these guys here." So they "formed a mob and set the city in an uproar." It is interesting: What they did was *exactly* what they *accused* Paul and Silas of doing.

How about this guy "Jason"? Well, the truth is: We don't know anything more about him, except what is here. "Jason" is a Jewish name, so *probably* he had been a member of the synagogue. And since he is said to have "welcomed" Paul and Silas (vs. 7), it is likely he was among those first ones who came to faith in Christ.

But in the eyes of the Thugs of Thessalonica, Jason was *harboring criminals!* They did the same thing that the enemies of Jesus did. Remember, when they were trying to figure out a way to convince Pilate to order Jesus' crucifixion, they kept spit-balling ideas: "What can we accuse Him of? What can we accuse Him of?"

And they did the same thing here. They kept turning up the heat until they finally reached the level of accusing Paul and Silas of being enemies of "Caesar" (cf. Lk. 23:2; Jn. 19:12, 15). That was never *true*. Nobody among the Roman leadership was *at all* upset by these guys, but that is what the Jews kept saying over and over again.

So, Verses 6 through 9—"When they did not find them"—in other words: They came to Jason's house and could not find Paul and Silas—"they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them."

How unfortunate for the Thugs of Thessalonica that Paul and Silas were not home when they came to Jason's house. So they just did what evil men do: They decided, "Let's squeeze some cash out of this situation," so they demanded money from Jason and the others, and made peace that way.

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Interesting: One of Paul's earliest letters to any of these churches that he planted during his missionary journeys was to the church at Thessalonica. It is interesting that we think Paul's *earliest* letter was "Galatians"—that is where he spent most of his time on his First Missionary Journey. He just quickly passed through part of the northern tip of Galatia on this journey, and now he comes to Thessalonica.

Probably the *second* letter Paul wrote was what we call "First Thessalonians," and in that letter he reminds them how God had allowed their faith to be tested from the very start. That's over in First Thessalonians 2, Paul's later commentary on what we are reading about in Acts 17. He said this: "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea"—you are going through what they went through around Jerusalem—"for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost" (vss. 14-17).

That is a pretty quick summary of a month or more that was spent in Thessalonica. A *huge* response to the Gospel; a church was born there. Next stop is Berea.

The Thugs in Thessalonica got rid of them, sent them on to Berea; and as was becoming all too common, the Christians—one of their first duties was to accept the responsibility for getting Paul to safety. This time, they sent them a little more than 40 miles away to the city of Berea.

It was not on that main Egnatian Highway, but it was a significant city. We read about it in Chapter 17, Verse 10—"The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews."

It is interesting: They "sent" them "away by night." That *probably* means they were hiding them; they had probably kept them someplace secure while the thugs were looking for them, and then sneaked them out of town overnight.

And as usual, "they went into the synagogue." But what is *unusual*: The leaders of the synagogue in Berea were *not hostile*, and the response was marvelous. God opened up *countless* hearts there (see Acts 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:25).

Verses 11 and 12—"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

Notice the word "therefore": You get people to interact with the Scriptures—"Therefore many of them believed." (see Jn. 5:46; 6:45; 8:47; 10:27; Acts 16:14; Rom. 1:17; 10:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15; Jas. 1:21).

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We are not given any more detail than that, but it is clear that this response was even better in Berea than it had been in Thessalonica; and in this case, it included not only those who were Jews by birth, but "a number of prominent Greek women and men." The text literally says: "not a few of them," so it was a big number.

God was blessing the work of Paul and Silas (1 Cor. 3:6-7). "Many" were coming to faith. But the opposition continued. The ones who went after them in Berea were actually the same ones who I called "The Thugs of Thessalonica."

They decided that the most important thing that they could do was to travel 40-plus miles on foot in order to become The Bullies in Berea. Verse 13—"But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds."

Now, this was not just a quick stop in Berea. They had to be there long enough to preach long enough to have this huge response so that the news could get back to Thessalonica and the thugs could organize to come down and be the Bullies in Berea. It all took a little while to come to Berea and make more trouble.

They used the same tactic: "agitating and stirring up the crowds." Notice: There is a total lack of evidence that the Roman authorities were upset. That was not the issue. The leaders of the city were not upset. It required people to come and make a bunch of accusations while they hired the local riffraff to make trouble.

I just saw a snippet of a video this week. You know, we have had these protests going on: anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, pro-Hamas, pro-Hezbollah, pro-Iran happening on college campuses. And there was one of those going on; and someone stuck a microphone in front of somebody and asked them this question, and this girl started talking, and then she turned to her friend and said, "What are we protesting?" (see Acts 19:32)

Those are the kind of people that were the Bullies in Berea, and the Thugs in Thessalonica got to come do their trouble. "Let's just keep making up things and accusing them until we drive them out of town!"

Well, that leads us to something that we have not seen until all the way back to *four verses earlier*. Here it is again: Acts 17:14—"Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there."

Well, "the brethren" immediately took care of their now-beloved Paul. This time, "Silas and Timothy" apparently could, to some extent, fly under the radar. They "remained there" in Berea with the new Christians to continue the work there.

And the next stop for Paul was Athens. So they took Paul "as far as the sea"—that was about a 25-mile trek from Berea to the nearest seaport. And from there, they sailed to Athens, which is about 190 miles to the south; they would have gone through the western portion of the Aegean Sea.

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So, tracking Paul this time: He deals with The Thugs in Thessalonica, then The Bullies in Berea. Now he is headed for The Academics in Athens, the next group to oppose him.

Verse 15—"Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left."

We don't know who traveled with Paul. There may have been somebody in this group that eventually became part of his team; we don't know. I know *I* would have volunteered for that duty, if I had the opportunity. We can only ponder or wonder how long the trip took. If they had *hoofed* it, they could have gotten from Berea to the seaport in one day—more likely two. Then they would have had to get there, find a ship that was headed to Athens, book passage, and wait for the ship to leave. And then, how long it would take to sail from that seaport to Athens—as I said, about 190 miles—that would depend upon the wind. So in all, it took *a while* to get Paul down to Athens.

And then as soon as they got there, he told them to return to Thessalonica and send Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. So that means they would have had to reverse the process, go back to the seaport, find a ship, headed north this time, book passage, wait for the ship to leave, go however long it took. And you know, they probably would not have favorable winds to go south *and* favorable winds to go north at the same time; it would have most likely taken different amounts of time for them. So that means that Paul was left alone in Athens without his team for some time—at *least* probably two or three weeks for the trips to take place.

That brings us to Verse 16—"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols."

You know, if I landed in Athens and I was alone, I didn't have my beloved teammates yet, I would have probably been rather overwhelmed by all that is there: the architecture, the wealth, the history, the international nature of Athens. But that was not what impressed Paul. I would have probably booked a tour to go see the city. Paul was "provoked in his spirit" (cf. Ps. 119:53; 2 Pet. 2:7-8). It was a "city full of idols."

You see, being made in the image of God, all people are designed to worship *Him*. If people reject the truth about God—which is innate in *everyone* (Ps. 19:1; Ecc. 3:11)—there is then an inevitable drive to *replace God* with some kind of substitute (e.g., Jer. 10:3-5, 8-9, 14-15). It is not an accident that the first two commandments are about idols—things that people worship in place of God.

Now, I can't prove this; I'll just say, "This is my theory. This is my opinion. You are free to disagree with me and be wrong." But *I* think it is quite likely that Paul was remembering his first impression of Athens when he wrote one of the most famous portions of the New Testament that he ever penned, over in Romans Chapter 1, starting at Verse 18—"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have

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been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

So, what is an Apostle to do when he is plopped down all alone, immersed in a godless culture, in a "city full of idols"? Look at Verse 17—"So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present."

I love that that verse begins with the word "so." That is the right English word for this. It is actually the Greek word that is usually translated "therefore," but here it is coupled with another little word that doesn't get translated, to make it that *this is the obvious connection*. The "city" is "full of idols," so what do you do? You talk about the true God when you are surrounded by false gods and their worshippers (Acts 14:15; Eph. 5:11).

So whenever there was a gathering in the synagogue, Paul was there—at least every Saturday on the Sabbath; maybe more often than that. When the synagogue was not in session, what did he do? He talked to anyone "who happened to be present in the market place." "Market place"—the central place in Athens; that was the place where, like in other cities, city business was done; but that was also the place of the thinkers and, in this case, the philosophers.

And that was where Paul encountered a *different*, more esoteric kind of opposition. This time, it was not the Thugs and the Bullies, it was the Academics in Athens. Verse 18—"And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, 'What would this idle babbler wish to say?' Others, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

Isn't that cool? Every time they describe what Paul was talking about, even if they hated him, they got the message: He is "preaching Jesus and the resurrection" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3-4).

And he handled himself well enough there that the local philosophy nerds became curious. "We have to talk to this guy!"

He mentions two of the brand names of philosophies that were there: "Epicurean" philosophy sought, as the highest good of man, the avoidance of pain. We take the word "Epicurean" usually to describe "foodies" and food snobs and highfalutin chefs and all that. But Epicurean philosophy said: "We just want to make things as comfortable as we can." Their view of God was not to deny Him, but it was rather like the "Deists" of the last century: They don't deny that God exists, but they don't believe that He is involved with the everyday lives of people—so, "Let's just be as happy and pleasant as we possibly can!" (see Is. 22:13; 1 Cor. 15:32).

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"Stoic" philosophy—that's another word that is also used in our world, kind of for somebody who doesn't react to things—"Stoic" philosophy sought, as the highest good, total self-mastery. They wanted to achieve a state in which they could be *totally indifferent* to pain *and* to pleasure. Don't get too high when things are good; don't get too low when things are bad. And they heard Paul. "Jesus and the resurrection? What are you talking about?"

Some of the groups immediately called him names; they ridiculed him. "Idle babbler" is a good translation, but it is actually from a Greek word that literally means "seed picker." The idea, in this context, is someone who just picks out scraps of knowledge and spreads them around. So some had just said, "Ah, this Paul, he's just a *seed picker!*"

But some of them became curious, because they loved to debate philosophy and various "deities." After all, it was a "city full of idols." So that led to the next situation that Paul found himself thrown into: Verses 19 through 21—"And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.' " And then I love this parenthesis that Luke added: "(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)" They just *loved* to talk, talk, talk, listen, listen, listen, debate, debate, debate. The "Areopagus" was the public court or hearing place for philosophical opinions.

This time, Paul was not under arrest. He was not being tried as a criminal. He was not being accused of breaking any Roman laws. They just wanted to hear him out! "Hey, we have some fresh meat here! Some ideas we have not heard about before. Maybe we will learn a few new words." Some of them wanted to make sport of him.

But whatever the motives might have been, it sets us up to be ready to study one of the most interesting sermons recorded in the Bible. I *dare you* to read ahead in Chapter 17, before next Lord's Day. Read it every single day, and see how much I can get out of it, will you? Paul's message on Mars Hill—we will deal with that next Sunday, Lord willing.

But I have just *raced* us through 21 verses in three cities, covering a few months of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. It is not just a travelogue. This is God's Word, so we know it is "profitable for [our] teaching, for [our] reproof, for [our] correction, for [our] training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

So, think back over this with me, and I want to suggest to you nine points to ponder and apply. I'll bet if you spent ten more minutes on it, you could make it ten or eleven or twelve—or, maybe not nine, but six better ones. But think about this:

From Verse 1: just where they went. Ministry requires hard work and sacrifice. We want people to come to Christ, right? (Acts 26:29) We pray for them, right? (Rom. 10:1) We pray for the Gospel to spread, right? (Matt. 9:37-38) Well, how is it going to spread? We are it; it's us (2 Cor. 5:18-20). They walked about a hundred miles, not long after they had been "*beaten* with rods" (Acts 16:22). They cared. Are we willing to sacrifice?

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You know, we just sent two of our finest *thousands of miles* across an ocean, and they are doing *wonderful* things for the Lord, and they are training people who will preach the Gospel and train people to preach the Gospel, and it is going to spread through Sierra Leone. But you know what? I have thought about this a lot: *You don't have to cross an ocean to find an unsaved person!* But are you willing to take the Gospel to them? How about right here?

Verses 2 and 3: The Gospel is rooted in the Old Testament. As soon as Paul got there, what did he do? He "reasoned with them from the Scriptures"—that's the Old Testament. My friends: You need to *know* that first three-quarters of your Bible, too. Yes, we are New Testament people. Yes, we are under the New Covenant. Yes, this is the Church Age. But it is *all* the unfolding of the plan of God (Lk. 24:27, 44; Jn. 1:45; 5:39, 46; Acts 10:43; 13:27; 26:22; Titus 1:2).

A famous nationally-known preacher who has exposed himself as a *total* anti-Apostolic, anti-Bible *apostate* says: "We need to unhitch from the Old Testament. Don't go quoting verses from a 2,000-year-old book! Just preach the resurrection of Christ!" Well, why would you preach the resurrection of Christ? You would have to know that He rose from the dead. How do you know He rose from the dead? Because of the record in the Bible that He rose from the dead. "But it was the resurrection of the Christ." "The Christ? The what?" "The Messiah." "The who?" "The One predicted in the Old Testament who would crush the head of Satan." *You cannot disconnect from the Old Testament!* We need to know *the whole thing!* (see Matt. 4:4) "He reasoned with them *from the Scriptures.*"

Verses 4-9: And then, as I mentioned, something else to draw from here: Understand that religiously motivated persecution *is* the most vicious. When people think they are doing God a favor by opposing you—or even killing you (Jn. 16:2)—no amount of rationality helps.

Remember September 11th, 2001? That was a *religious* day! That was *all* motivated by people who thought they were *doing God a favor* to attack America, attack Christians, kill people! You don't reason with people like that! You give them the Gospel, but they are still going to want to kill you. And that is a whole lot of what is going on with Israel and her enemies as well. Be wise. Don't go around trying to *poke* people who hate you. But understand: Religious motivated persecution is vicious.

From Verses 10-13: Understand: The most powerful thing that you can do for evangelism is to help people be like the Bereans. Get them involved: engaged with the Bible for themselves (Is. 8:20; Acts 20:32; Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 3:15). The Gideons are *right!* Giving away Bibles is a *really good thing to do!* But don't just give them away, get people to *read* them! Talk to somebody. If you can get them at all interested, if they don't just shut you off completely, say, "How about let's do this: Let's both read the Gospel of John, Chapters 1 through 4, and then get together and talk again next week."

If you get people to start to *engage with Scripture*, amazing things happen (1 Thess. 2:13), because the Holy Spirit wrote the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit is the One who "convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn. 16:8).

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Verse 16: Something else I think we could learn: When Paul got to Athens, "his spirit was being provoked within him" because he saw "the city full of idols." I don't want to just try to exhort you to be miserable—but, do idols bother you as much as they should?

You say, "Well, this isn't Athens. I mean, we don't have gods and goddesses of this and that." Yeah, we don't have idolatry in *exactly* the same form. Well, there *is* a big gold statue on a big marble building about a mile or two from here, but there are tons more idols. When someone rejects, suppresses the truth of God within them, they are, in essence, setting up their own idols, whether they carve a statue and bow down and pray to it or not! (see Matt. 6:24; 10:37; 16:25; Jn. 12:25; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5)

Look: Think of every single empty chair here. There is something that is telling people, or people are making up their minds, that *there is something more important* than worshipping God; there is something more important than being with God's people; there is something more important than the salvation of my soul. They are idolaters! Different kind—yes, I get that.

It is a horrible provocation when you *are* around idols. Always, when we take people to Russia, we take them to the biggest Orthodox church in Russia; and they see idols, and they see people bowing, praying to statues, kissing statues, lighting candles, doing all of those things. We were in one of those buildings, and we were whispering back and forth, and we got shushed twice before one of the ladies that was there; and finally, she threw us out. Before she did, we were there and Larry Howell was standing next to me; and I said, "Okay, take note: Is there anything else that you want to talk about before we leave?" And I loved his comment. He said: "Nope. I have enough baloney for two sandwiches already."

It *provokes* you when you see it so *starkly*! But my friends: It is *all around us*! Whatever someone thinks is more important than the salvation of their soul and knowing the God who made them—that is an idol (see Lk. 12:15-21).

Verse 17: Do we have the habit of doing what Paul did? A "city full of idols," so what did he do? He was always talking about spiritual things with anybody he could: The Jews in the synagogue, the Epicureans over here, the Stoics over there, the random haven't-decided-what-philosophy-I-want-yet people over here. Always: "Jesus and the resurrection."

And Verse 18: Understand: You are going to be called names (Ps. 37:12, 32; Prov. 3:25; 29:27b; Lk. 6:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:4). "What would this idle babbler wish to say? This *seed picker* came from somewhere over there on the other side of the water." Don't be daunted by that. Just keep on going. They "hated" Jesus; they will "hate you" (Jn. 15:18-19; cf. Matt. 10:25). If they called Paul a "seed picker," they will probably call you worse.

And then, Verses 18-20: Are you known, above all, for being a proclaimer of "Jesus and the resurrection"? It's what Paul *always* did (see Ps. 40:9-10; 71:15-18; 119:13, 46).

Sermon Title: Thugs, Bullies, and Academics
Scripture Text: Acts 17:1-21 (Acts #40)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-28-24

And then, finally, Verse 21: You are going to be around people who sometimes won't just blow you off; they will actually engage you. Are you willing to tell people who want to hear "something new" that the most important thing they could hear is not new? It is "the old, old story" (see Jer. 6:16; cf. Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:8; Titus 1:2).

If you have been a Christian for a little while, you have probably been in church services, and you have sung the song: "I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory, to tell the old, old story, of Jesus and His love." ("I Love To Tell The Story," 1866, lyrics by Katherine Hankey, music by William G. Fischer) Oh, may that be for us!

My dear friends, have you *embraced* the "old, old story"? "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Oh, and by the way: He is coming again! (Matt. 24:27; 25:31; Acts 1:11; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:11-21; 22:12) Are you ready?

Let's pray:

Father, thank You for Your great grace to us. Thugs may come after us. Bullies may try to intimidate us. They might even make our lives miserable. Academics may call us "seed pickers." They, too, may ridicule. Oh, but we know the truth. We know the risen Savior. Have Your way with us, we pray. Don't let anyone go from here apart from embracing Christ. And please, give us opportunities to speak to anyone who will listen about the life and death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.