

## Journey 2: The Spirit's Means of Preaching

Acts 17:1-15

Studies in Acts #21

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**Y**ou've heard me say many times that *theology that does not become biography is wishful thinking*. And so in chapter 16 we saw the theology of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in leading Paul where to he wanted him to go and then the Spirit did his work of saving. With Lydia we read that it was the Lord who opened her heart to receive the Word. And we all shout out "Amen" to this theological truth! So here's the biography part of the equation: does our belief in the absolute sovereignty of God to save absolve us of responsibility in bringing sinners to salvation? Are we the frozen chosen? Do we just let go and let God save?

In chapter 16 the focus was on the divine power to save individuals: Lydia, a slave girl, and the Roman jailer. Now in chapter 17 the focus is on the human means of saving: preaching. Or theology of God's sovereignty must become the biography of our commitment to preaching, teaching, evangelism, and witnessing.

And so after leaving Philippi Paul, Silas, and Timothy journeyed over the Roman thoroughfare known as the *Via Egnatia* through **Amhipolis** (33 miles) and **Apollonia** (27 miles) before finally arriving in **Thessalonica** (35 miles). By horseback this would have been possible in three days. Why Thessalonica? Again Paul goes where the people are as it was the capital of the province of Macedonia. Paul puts his theology in his biography in his preaching of the Word.

## The Source of his Preaching (v. 2)

First, we see *the source of his preaching* in verse 2. Unlike Philippi, here in Thessalonica **there was a synagogue of the Jews** (v. 1) and as we've seen many times before, according to Paul's **custom** (v. 2) he started there. And **on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures** (v. 2). **The Scriptures** meant the Old Testament (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15–17). Paul was a Bible preacher.

Let me apply this to you who are not preachers, which is almost all of us. What are you to use to witness to people? Paul used the Old Testament to show Christ. What is most evangelism focused on today? It is focused on telling people what God has done for me retelling my subjective experience and maybe tying it into John 3:16. We must be in the Word, both Old and New Testament daily. We must listen to the preached Word while it is happening and then meditate on it after it is done. And then we need to bring that Word to anyone who would listen.

## The Method of his Preaching (vv. 2–3)

Second, notice *the method of his preaching*. In verses 2–3 there are three verbs used. If anything shows us that God uses us as his means of sovereignly saving, here it is. First, Paul **reasoned** (v. 2) with his listeners from the Scriptures. This means he expended the energy to debate, ask questions, and engage in argument. Second, Paul **explain[ed]** from the Old Testament **that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead** (v. 3). He knew the narrative of the Old Testament and used it to proclaim Christ. Third, Paul **prov[ed]** from the Old Testament **that it was necessary for**

**the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead** (v. 2). In other words, he knew his Old Testament so well that he was able to show exactly where these things were prophesied and how they were fulfilled by Jesus.

Why would he exert himself in reasoning, explaining, proving if God were absolutely sovereign? It was because he had a passion for their souls. Look at 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 with me. There he says he was as gentle as a mother. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 5:20 he says he was compelled by the love of Christ to implore them to be reconciled to God. Listen to C.H. Spurgeon:

...if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies! And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves! If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for!<sup>1</sup>

As a Church we must be known for the method of Gospel preaching.

### **The Content of his Preaching (vv. 3, 7)**

Third, look at *the content of his preaching*. As with his sermons before, his content was one thing: Christ. But note how Luke states this here. Paul was reasoning, explaining, and proving that **it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead** (v. 3). And his conclusion was, “**This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ**” (v. 3).

The Messiah had to suffer. Why? Because our sins must be punished by a righteous God. Where do we learn this? In the Old Testament prophecies such as Abel, whose

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, New Park Street Pulpit, #349.

blood cried out for vindication. We see it in Genesis 49 and the prophecy of Judah, who would bind his donkey to a vine and be bathed in its sacrificial blood. We see it most clearly in Isaiah 53 and the Suffering Servant.

The Messiah had to rise. Why? Again, because Christ died for our unrighteousness we need to know that God accepted his sacrifice. This is why Paul says in Romans 4:25 that he rose for our justification. Where do we learn this? We see it in Psalm 2 where the Father says of his Son, “Today I have begotten you” from the grave. We see it in Psalm 16, where David prophesies about his body not seeing corruption but instead seeing the face of God. We see it in Psalm 22 where after his cry, “My God, My God,” we hear him praise God with his brothers in the assembly.

### **The Result of his Preaching (vv. 4–5, 12–13)**

Finally, let me conclude with *the result of his preaching*. As we’ve seen already, some believe and some do not. And as we saw with Acts 13:48, the reason is that those ordained to eternal life believe and those not do not. Look at verse 4: **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 others do not believe. Notice verse 5: **But the Jews were jealous.** And their unbelief is not just an intellectual rejection; their unbelief leads to violent action in verses 5–7 and again in Berea in verse 13.

This led **the brothers immediately to sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (v. 10)**, where Paul did what he always did: he **went into the Jewish synagogue (v. 10)**. Notice their response: **Now these Jews were more noble than those in**

**Thessalonica**, meaning, they were of a high-minded behavior and actually listened to and considered Paul's arguments; they didn't resort to violence (v. 11). Then we read that **many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men** (v. 12). Notice three things about the Bereans' faith. First, they **received the word with all eagerness** (v. 12). Second, they **examin[ed] the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so** (v. 12). This word for **examine** (*anakrinontes*) is used in Acts of legal investigation (4:9; 12:19; 24:8; 28:18). Third, they were not casual in hearing the Word but daily not casual about it but **examin[ed] it daily**.

## **Conclusion**

Tonight you have heard the Word of God. Do not lazily hear it but receive it with eagerness. Do not mindlessly hear it but examine it intently. Do not casually hear it but go back to it daily.