



Time to Reflect

- Why do you think some people are so hostile to the Christian message?
- How great a sense of urgency do we possess to make the Good News of Jesus known within our local communities?

Last week we started to look at Paul's second missionary journey and we reflected on a series of important encounters which highlighted the importance of frontline mission, as well as some of the challenges that can be expected. This week we continue to look at Paul's second missionary journey and we will encounter themes of proclamation and opposition.

"Paul and Silas were redirected multiple times throughout their second missionary journey. Their willingness to set aside their own priorities and submit to God's redirection allowed them to be even more fruitful in their pursuit of kingdom expansion. Despite hardship, persecution, discouragement, and adversity, Paul continued to fulfil his calling to the work of missions."

(John-Michael Wong, *Opening Up Acts*, p114)

Passage Specifics

- In this week's passage we encounter Paul on his travels and a range of people and places are referred to. Initially our attention is drawn to Thessalonica, which was the capital city of Macedonia and had a population of about 200,000 people.
- This was a major and strategically located settlement and as was his custom, Paul availed of the opportunity to declare the Good News of Jesus (v2).
- For three sabbaths he taught in the synagogue, using the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Messiah (v3). We are told that three distinct groups of people were impacted by Paul's message – some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks, and quite a few prominent women.
- Isn't it so encouraging to read of this response to Paul's faithful preaching! The message of God was directly impacting people's lives and transformation was happening. Yet, opposition was to resurface.
- The unbelieving Jews became jealous at the spread of the Gospel and rounded up a mob, started a riot, and sought out Paul and Silas (v5-9).
- A man called Jason and some other believers were dragged before the city officials and accused of treason. The mob twisted Paul's words and sought to eradicate the Christian message from Thessalonica. This pressure and persecution prevented Paul from returning to Thessalonica.
- In 1st Thessalonians 2:17-19 we read: **"But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?"**
- Some Christians in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas to Berea (v10). Note how they got straight to work and engaged in evangelism once more. There is a word of encouragement here for each of us to keep focused and remain resolute in our faith, regardless of wider situations or circumstances.

- We are told that the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica. They received the Gospel message with eagerness, and they were drawn deeper into the Scriptures (v11).
- Once more we encounter positive signs of growth in the Early Church (v12). But a familiar pattern emerged again (v13).
- The Thessalonian Jews heard that Paul was in Berea preaching the Gospel and they travelled over forty-five miles to oppose his ministry. Like they did in Thessalonica, they stirred up the crowd against Paul and he had to be moved on – this time to Athens.
- However, the work of the Gospel did continue in Berea (for a period of time) through Silas and Timothy.
- Athens was a religious centre within the Roman Empire, and it was also a prominent city of culture, learning and philosophy. Yet it was also full of idols and Paul saw the broken reality of this mighty city. He was provoked to action by seeing so many people who had drifted far from God (v16).
- Paul engaged in frontline mission in Athens, preaching in the synagogue and the marketplace on a daily basis (v17). We sense the urgency in his ministry.
- Paul engaged with people from all different backgrounds (v17) and he presented them with the truth. However, some of them tried to dismiss him as a babbler (v18). But his preaching must have had some impact as a group of the philosophers in Athens prepared a place for Paul to explain and defend his teaching at the Areopagus – the moral and religious court of Athens, also known as Mars Hill.
- Paul sought to address the underlying problems that he encountered in Athens. He did so by preaching about God, beginning with the facts about God’s creation and general revelation to humankind.
- He didn’t ignore the problems that existed in Athens, and he specifically mentioned the worship of an unknown god (v23).
- Paul cleverly connected his preaching with their daily experiences. This reminds us of the importance of application as we study the Bible.
- He also taught the Athenians about the real God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and emphasised that we can know God in a personal way (v24-28).
- Paul’s preaching moved towards a conclusion by calling his listeners to repentance (v30). Again, we are reminded that Bible teaching should always challenge us to reflect on where we are with God, and it should encourage us to grow closer to God and deeper in our love of Him.
- When Paul mentioned the resurrection and judgement to come, the crowd went into uproar. Some sneered and others wanted to delay their decision (v32).
- Yet other people did respond to the Gospel message (v32-34) and the amazing grace of God was demonstrated once more.
- Our title this week is *“This I Proclaim To You.”* We have been thinking about what it really means to make the love, mercy and grace of God known to other people. This is a message that challenges all of us, and it requires a response.
- We have discovered that there are those who opposed the Gospel message, while others sought to delay their decision (which is also an act of rejection). But there were people who heard the Good News and it took root deep in their hearts – they responded positively.
- Today this pattern still exists and rather than be discouraged we should follow the example of Paul. He persisted, remained faithful, and consistently sought to make God known. So should we.