



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Study 25: **TRANSFORMING THE WORLD WITH CHRIST'S MESSAGE** **Acts 17:1-34**

Paul and Silas had just been released from the Philippian jail and they immediately went to Thessalonica to preach the gospel. They were so committed to Christ and to the eternal welfare of the souls He died for. They did not allow persecution or temporal suffering to hinder or stop their obedience to the heavenly vision. Leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas reached Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Thessalonica was a strategically located city in Greece – a populous centre of commerce. It became a centre from which the gospel light would radiate in many directions. After preaching and leading many people to Christ there, they proceeded to Berea where “ready minds” were waiting to hear the gospel. Athens, the ancient centre of culture, education and fine arts was the next place for ministry. Paul was burdened by the ignorance and idolatry of the city. He lost no opportunity in preaching anywhere he went. Thessalonica received the Word, Berea researched the Word, Athens reacted to the Word; no one could remain neutral to Paul’s ministry.

TIMELY COMMITMENT TO AN ESSENTIAL, MANDATORY COMMISSION

Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10; Luke 24:26,27,44-47; Acts 3:19-26; 14:1-4; 18:28; Romans 1:14-16; 15:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Acts 20:20-28.

“**Occupy till I come**” was the watchword of the Apostle, Paul. He was occupied in the Father’s business, in Christ’s commission, in world evangelisation until Christ came to take him home. “**Occupy till I come**,” not until you are sixty or eighty, but until I come to take you home. “**And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations**” (Revelation 2:26). Paul persevered and “**laboured more abundantly than they all**” until he finished his course. Paul’s itinerant ministry took him next to Thessalonica where he preached the gospel with courage and conviction. He taught and preached “**out of the Scriptures**”, that is, from the Old Testament. There are four key words to underline in Paul’s proclamation of the Word. He “**reasoned**” with them (Acts 17:2; 24:25), he “**opened**” their understanding (Acts 17:3; Luke 24:32,45), he “**alleged**” and affirmed the necessity of Christ’s sacrificial death (Acts 17:3; Luke 24:26, 45-47), he “**convinced**” them that Jesus is Christ, the Saviour (Acts 17:3,4; 18:28). “**And some of them believed**”, indeed “**a great multitude**” of devout Greeks and of the chief, notable women believed. The conversion and salvation of individual souls is the goal of preaching the gospel. “**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God**” (John 3:3,5,7). And “**what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**” (Mark 8:36). The conversion of these Thessalonians provoked the unbelieving, religious Jews and they raised up persecution against Paul and Silas. The persecution led to the proclamation of the gospel in the next city, Berea.

TIME-TESTED CHARACTERISTICS OF EXEMPLARY MODEL CONVERTS

Acts 17:10-15; 20:1-4,24; 1 Thessalonians 2:13,14; 1 Peter 2:2-9; Psalm 119:97,148; John 5:39; 7:17; Acts 2:37-42; 1 Peter 1:10-12; James 1:21-25.

Paul and his fellow ministers were accused of turning the world upside down. Really, they were turning the world right side up, turning sinful men to Christ, their Lord and Saviour. Paul and his companions had to leave Thessalonica for Berea. Getting to Berea, these indomitable and irrepressible evangelists immediately preached in the synagogue of the Jews. The Bereans believed and received the Word with all readiness of mind. They were open-minded and simple-hearted. They were teachable and willing to forsake their old way and follow the true Way: Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. They affirmed faith in the infallibility of the sacred Scripture and committed themselves to searching the Scriptures daily. The converts demonstrated their decision and determination to be disciples of Christ. The honourable men and women who had believed fully surrendered to Christ and submitted to His authority and lordship.

The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica, hearing of the Berean evangelistic breakthrough, went over there to stir up opposition and persecution. Paul had to leave Berea “**but Silas and Timotheus abode there still**” (Acts 17:14).

THE TIMELESS CHALLENGE OF EVANGELIZING MEGA CITIES

Acts 17:16-34; Matthew 9:35-38; Acts 8:4-8; 13:44-49; Romans 3:23-25; Acts 26:17-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 5:30-32; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11; Hebrews 9:27,28.

“**And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens**”. It was a long journey from Berea to Athens. In Athens, Paul did not occupy his time with sightseeing – He placed a greater value on the immortal souls of men than on the

perishable beauty of transient things in Athens. ***“But this I say, brethren, the time is short ... the fashion of this world passeth away”*** (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

Paul encountered the Epicureans and the Stoics in Athens. The Epicureans pursued pleasure as their main goal in life while the Stoics sought after freedom from pain and pleasure as the highest wisdom in life. Paul confronted both classes of people ***“in the market daily”*** (Acts 17:17,18). The passion of the Epicureans was, ‘enjoy life’; the pursuit of the Stoics was, ‘endure life’; the proclamation of Paul was, ‘experience life’ – eternal life. Paul’s ministerial approach to the Jews in the synagogue was different from his presentation style with Gentiles in the marketplace. Taught and led by the Holy Spirit, he effectively reached sign-seeking Jews and philosophical Greeks, simple-minded people and superstitious people, ignorant idolaters and well-informed intellectuals, common citizens and civilized city-dwellers. He preached the same gospel to different classes of people with appropriate approaches and many believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 13:12,48; 14:1; 15:3; 16:30-34;17:4,12,34).

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:16,22,23).

Paul then confronted the Athenians with the greatness of God (verse 24), the goodness of God (verse 25), the government of God (verse 26) and the grace of God (verse 30). At the end, he called everyone to repentance and faith in the risen Christ (verse 31). Some believed (verse 34) while others rejected (verse 32) but they were all without excuse (Romans 1:19,20).

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