

Scripture Reading: 1 Thess 1:2-5 We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. ³ We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance.

Illus. Waking up and finding my mother and brothers clothes on the floor thinking the rapture had come and I'd been left behind. I had just watched the movie "a thief in the night" (the 70's version) and it terrified me.

Thessalonica, a city on the Egnatian Way—a major highway connecting eastern and western commerce was prosperous, free direct Roman rule (no garrisons) and very much interested in the royal arrival of King Jesus.¹

We learn from the book of 1, 2 Thessalonians that someone allegedly wrote them in the name of Paul to deceive them into thinking that Christ had already returned and they had missed it.

Paul had to reassure them they had not missed the coming of the Lord by telling them how Christ would return (1 Thess 4:16ff; 2 Thess 2:1ff):

- (1) his return will be visible and glorious—announced with the voice of the archangel;
- (2) his return will cause the dead in Christ to rise from their graves first;
- (3) followed by the catching away of every living believer to meet the Lord in the air;
- (4) his coming will be preceded by two important signs: the first being a coming rebellion which secondly would prompt the coming of a "man of lawlessness" who destroys the temple and raises a blasphemous standard where the Holy of Holies once sat. These two signs happened in AD 70 as the Jewish rebellion of AD 64 led to the destruction of the temple (still standing at the writing of Thessalonians) and the raising of the Roman standard (the eagle) in the holy of holies.

The question is do they have significance for *our future*. If you want to know whether this has any significance for *our future* then you get there *from the past*, not extrapolating from our present.

Here in Acts 17 is the account of Paul planting this church.

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2539.

Here's what we learn from this passage in Acts 17...

[1. The Gospel is missional.] The church of Jesus the Christ is in nature and in effect, an outgoing, missional enterprise where we seek to make natural connections with people and bring them to a saving knowledge of the biblical Jesus.

[Acts 17:1-3] Now when they **had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days **he reasoned with them** from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, **"This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."**

What does Paul do here?

First, he goes out to Thessalonica. The gospel is by nature outgoing and outward looking.

It requires us to take risks and reach out and start those conversations with folks who may make us uncomfortable.

Second, he makes natural connections. Now, it is true that the Gospel was first offered to the Jew then the Gentile—but they've learned by now that the Gospel reaches the gentiles *through the Jews*.

Third, he makes a rational argument from the Scriptures. Paul presented a reasonable case from Scripture for Jesus as Messiah. He explained how texts were fulfilled and how they related to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection: predictions and patterns.

The central message of the gospel has to do with Jesus's identity and his work.

- **Jesus's identity is that he is the Jewish Messiah/Christ—which means "The anointed king" and the Son of God.** This is why in our gospel presentations we must never forget this title because it tells who he is before it tells us what he does. [Jesus is God's rightful king displacing all other rival kinglings.](#) And he was chosen and anointed king because he is God's Son from eternity past.

How do we know the crowd took it this way? How do we know Paul's audience interpreted it exactly like that?

[vs. 7 "Jason received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."]

They immediately interpret the message as a counter-imperial message. When we present the Gospel, we must help people to understand that there is a Sovereign Lord—the God of heaven is making a claim on their souls. He who sins is a slave to sin. Sin reigned from Adam to Jesus—Now Jesus reigns in grace.

That's Jesus's identity, what about his work?

- **Jesus's work is as the atoning sacrifice for our sins—who suffered death on a cross (taking our punishment);** bodily resurrecting from the dead (vindication defeating sin and its judgment—death).

The Word of God is the power of God for the mission of God.

Now, we'll talk in a few weeks about how Paul preaches to people who aren't Jews. Greek philosophers who want to dialogue about Christian philosophy but do not begin with the same worldview, or beliefs. Here, In Thessalonica, Paul can reason *from* the Scriptures—but in Athens he will have to reason *into* or *toward* the Scriptures.

Whether the gospel is reaching out to people who are sympathetic or unsympathetic—*the gospel is going, it's reaching its moving outward.*

Result: [17:4-5] 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**.⁵ But the **Jews were jealous**, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

I think by now it is safe to say that Luke intends for us to discern a pattern. The Gospel is successful to save people breaking all racial and social barriers. **The Good News of Jesus's kingdom is the only political philosophy that can unite the world.** Because it's the only message that can save us from the things that break us apart. **The way in which the Good News unites the world is to forgive sinners and then forgiven sinners to forgive each other.** The Good news saves some Jews, a great number of Greeks, and some prominent leading women in the city. **The Gospel is opposed by those Jealous of its success.**

Mobs setting cities on fire, is nothing new. America, it turns out, didn't invent that. It's the "wicked men of the rabble" who incite the crowds. **Now, I love that word "the rabble."** Who are they? They're the bystanders who've gotten swept up into a river of emotion. A current of emotion that's sweeping people downstream toward city center or wherever. These are those protesters who are like, "Yeah, Yeah—we're here to protest—what that guy said." **But, the wicked men of the rabble** provoke and enflame the crowd into a mob—they are instrumental in breaking down Jason's door to get to Paul and Silas.

This isn't a very strongly worded email. This isn't an "ALL CAPS" text. This is a mob, whipped up by evil men who strategically stir the mob into a frothing frenzy—showing up at your house ready to break in and kill your guests—Paul, Timothy and Silas.

[2. The gospel turns the world upside down and inside out.]

[17:6-9] And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, **“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,** ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Jesuses I’ve seen in Pop-Christian culture couldn’t flip a coin much less the world. These false, watered down Christs will not change the world.

- **[The good-teacher-Jesus.]** CS Lewis said it best, if Jesus was not who he claimed to be then please never call him a good teacher. No one could be good who claims the things Jesus claimed (if not true). **You can accept him as a Liar (a conscious deceiver), a Lunatic (unconscious self-deceiver), or he is Lord.** But never, Lewis said, call him “good teacher.” Don’t call him a good teacher if you’re not willing to rid yourselves of your false gods and not follow him.
- **[The find-your-destiny-now Jesus.]** This Jesus exists to fulfill your longings and desires. He has big, bold destiny which usually translates into personal potential and prosperity. **Now, let me say this to the cranky folk who are always railing on this: don’t pretend you don’t like prosperity.** We live in America; We drove here in a car; We live in a house with food in the fridge and heating and air conditioning. If your employer came in and said “we’ve decided to pay you twice as much as last year for the same job” you’d *take it!* Prosperity and personal potential messaging becomes a problem when it stops serving the Gospel and replaces the it—when the story is always and only about us.
- **[A magical-miracle-a day- Jesus.]** or the **my-fairy-God-Jesus** who is a Jesus in a genie lamp, we rub the bottle out pops magical Jesus to grant our wishes. **This is the Jesus I believed in when I was 4.** I’m shocked at times when I have had conversations with people like this, “Look I tried. I prayed, read the Gospel of Matthew, and God didn’t heal me; or he didn’t give me the promotion; or he didn’t bring my children back to the faith; or ‘I was being a good Christian and my house caught fire’” etc.
- Bonus: **Social Justice Warrior Jesus:** God does care about justice. But he does not identify you as a victim.

A harmless, domesticated Jesus who makes no demands on us, who provides comfort without a cross, or a cross without the comforter, who promises prosperity and miracles and a hardship-free life where we can discover our best version of ourselves—that Jesus will never ever change the world. Because he doesn’t exist.

The Gospel is disturbing. It's unsettling to find out that there is a rival king to my own self-rule. It threatens my sense of self-importance; challenges my self-appointed title—I am the self-god of my own life. The Gospel threatens kings because it replaces the tyrant of sin with the freedom of the Son of God.

[Application: Become thoughtful ambassadors of the Kingdom's salvation.]

[2 Cor 5:20] “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, (**Ambassador?** In Paul's day, an ambassador was a diplomatic official of the highest rank who represented both their country of origin and the direct authority of their Sovereign to advocate for the interests and deliver the message) since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God’” (**Reconciliation:** has to do with the restoration back to fellowship—this is what the atonement is—an act of reconciliation).

[Eph 6:20] “For this I am an ambassador in chains (**Receiving countries** do not think Paul has diplomatic immunity). Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.” No matter how others see us, we are to view ourselves as diplomats.

How do Christian ambassadors engage in faith diplomacy? What are the commitments of those principled conversationalists?

- **[We seek to understand and to be understood (Acts 17:22-30; 19:9; Matt 21:24; 22:41; Lk 10:30)]**
This is the essence of translation. If you can't translate your message you don't have a hearing. We seek to understand the culture, the people, the language and social customs not to affirm them but to save them. Gospel must be fundamentally intelligible.
- **[We insist on respectful dialogue over contested matters of faith (1 Pet 3:15; Acts 19:9).]** People need to know that our conversation about Jesus isn't going to turn into the Maury Povich show.
- **[We distinguish between acceptance and approval (Rom 2:4; 14:22; Phil 1:10).]** While we accept all men regardless of their creed, ethnicity, class, gender or experience—we *do not approve of all ideas as equally true or compatible with the gospel.*
- **[We seek to build rapport and we resist isolationism (Jn 4:1-26).]** We are not fundamentalists. We are evangelicals. God has not called us to isolate and to merely preserve tradition. He's called us to safeguard the sacred and to risk contact with those who remain unreconciled.

- [We advocate for the interests of our sending country (Acts 17:1-3).] We do not only seek mere understanding, we want to be understood. We have been commissioned with a message and we represent the interests of another realm.
- [We establish credibility through an accurate and informed critique of others (Matt 15:19).] The easiest way to lose credibility is to caricature or parody someone's belief system. A good example of this is infamous atheist Richard Dawkins. I don't know how many times I've read or heard him parody the belief system of the Christian faith. Out of ignorance or spite—he constantly misrepresents our belief system.

Recap:

1. The Gospel is missional.—it goes to Thessalonica, The gospel seeks to make natural connections with people sympathetic to its claims; making a rational argument from the Scriptures.

The Word of God is the power of God for the mission of God.

The Gospel is an outgoing, forward moving enterprise.

2. The gospel turns the world upside down and inside out.

good-teacher-Jesus.

find-your-destiny-now Jesus.

magical-miracle-a day- Jesus.

Application: Become thoughtful ambassadors of the Kingdom's salvation

People who want to be understood, show people the patience and acceptance of the Gospel, challenge their false beliefs, to build rapport and resist isolationism, to advocate for the values and truths of our sending country and realm; to build credibility through an accurate and informed appraisal of false beliefs that are holding people captive from King Jesus.