

~ACTS~

Lesson 51- The Everlasting Surety of the Gospel

Acts 17:1-4

Today we start chapter 17 in our study through the book of Acts as Paul, Silas and Timothy travel from Philippi into Thessalonica to continue to preach the Gospel. Last week we saw the favor of God working in Paul and Silas as they continued to stand strong in the Truth; enduring persecution, being spitefully treated in Philippi, arrested, beaten with rods, and thrown in the inner prison with the sentence of death on them. But God turned it all around and we saw the Philippian jailor and his whole household believe and come to everlasting life in Jesus Christ. And through this, God showed Himself strong in Philippi by making an open show of His enemies as Paul and Silas were escorted through the city by the same people that beat them. Paul and his company had spent a couple of months in Philippi and during that time we saw the birth of the church of Philippi. And now Paul, Silas, and Timothy travel west into Thessalonica, but Luke stays back in Philippi to help shepherd the church. And we can infer this by his pronoun usage in verse 1...

1) Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Notice that Luke goes back to referring to Paul and company as “they.” The church at Philippi had just been born and Luke seems to be the one whom God wants to help shepherd this flock. And we find that Luke stays in Philippi for six years faithfully edifying and encouraging this church. And we can infer this because the next time Luke comes on the scene isn’t until Acts 20:5-6 when Luke begins including himself in the narrative again. And notice where Paul meets back up with Luke... in Philippi.

But for now, Paul, Silas and Timothy travel on foot to the great city of Thessalonica and Luke tells us the path they take saying, **Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica.** These two cities, Amphipolis and Apollonia, were also prominent cities of Macedonia, but Paul has his eyes set on the major city of Thessalonica. This path that Paul is traveling on happens to be a major thoroughfare for the Roman Empire. It is a road called *Via Egnatia*. This road was first constructed in the 2nd century BC and it was a road that stretched over 500 miles from Byzantium to the western part of Macedonia. For the purpose that Roman military could travel through this part of the empire. But it was also used as a main highway for anyone traveling, such as the Apostle Paul.

The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica was 100 miles and Luke says they passed through two cities along the way, Amphipolis and Apollonia. This journey probably took them about 5 days in total, traveling about 20 miles per day. And it seems that they passed straight through these other cities without entering a synagogue to preach, possibly because there may have not been one in these other cities. But it seems that Paul has his eyes fixed on getting to Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a large city. It was the capital of Macedonia, consisting of about 200,000 people. After Alexander the Great died, the city was named after his sister by one of his generals named Cassander. After Alexander’s death, Cassander gained control over Macedonia and married Alexander the Great’s sister and in honor of his wife, he changed this city’s name from Therma to Thessalonica. Paul, being led of the Spirit sets his course on Thessalonica because this city would become a strategic center for the Gospel by which the Gospel would sound out from into all Macedonia, **1 Thessalonians 1:8**. So Paul and his company arrive in Thessalonica where Luke tells us **there was a synagogue of the Jews.**

2) Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

This was always Paul’s strategy, **as his custom was**, to the Jews first then the Greek. His heart was for the Jew, but it was also a great way to build on the foundation that was already established. The foundation

of the Old Testament Scriptures. And as we will see, in these Hellenistic Jewish synagogues, there were always Jewish proselytes who would believe, and then tell their pagan Gentile friends and they would come and receive the message of the Gospel as well. So Paul always preferred to start preaching the Gospel in the synagogue building on foundation of the Old Testament Scriptures that point to Jesus. And notice what Paul does... **and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.** This is how the Apostles preached the Gospel. At this time, the New Testament hadn't been written. Paul will soon start writing a few of his epistles on this 2nd missionary journey, but the overwhelming proof that Jesus is the Christ is derived from the Old Testament Scriptures. The fact that these prophecies of Jesus came hundreds of years beforehand and they were fulfilled perfectly by the person of Jesus Christ is "everlasting surety of the Gospel." *Lenski- Interpretation of Acts, pg 692

For three weeks Paul stayed in Thessalonica preaching the Gospel from the Scriptures... **and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.** In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he mentions his care and his conduct during these three weeks, **1 Thess 2:1-9**. This laboring night and day that they might not be a burden to any of you, is Paul making tents to provide his own means instead of taking money and being a burden on these new believers, Acts 18:1-3. He makes this clear in **2 Thess 3:7-8**. Paul had a right as an Apostle to get paid for his work of the Gospel, but he didn't take advantage of this because he didn't want to be a burden to them. We see Paul doing the same thing with the church in Corinth, 1 Cor 9:8-18; 2 Cor 2:17.

So Paul is in Thessalonica, working with his hands building tents, so as not to be a burden to any of them. And on the Sabbath he is preaching the Gospel and reasoning with the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. This word "reasoned" is *διαλέγομαι*- to thoroughly explain by arranging in a logical manner. The Bible is reasonable. It's not filled with confusion or illogical concepts. God's plan of redemption makes perfect sense. There is an order and a reason for everything Jesus did to be our Savior. Jesus had to come into this world legally and had to pay for our sins legally and suffer the wrath of God righteously as our Kinsman Redeemer in order for us to inherit Eternal Salvation. The more I study the Bible, the more I see the pieces of the puzzle coming together in perfect order. Notice Paul's whole purpose to the Scriptures... to explain the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

3) explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

The Old Testament Scriptures are the testimony, the everlasting surety of the Gospel, foretelling that Jesus, who is the Christ, had to suffer and rise from the dead. In these two verses, Luke uses three emphatic Greek words to describe Paul's teaching. In verse 2 he says Paul **reasoned** with them, *διαλέγομαι*, he thoroughly explained by arranging in a logical manner. Then in verse 3 he says Paul "explained," *διανοίγω*, to thoroughly expound by opening the mind. And he "demonstrated," *παρατίθημι*, to place alongside. So Paul is thoroughly explaining the Scriptures by arranging them in a logical manner, thoroughly expounding their minds and their understanding to the Truth and he is doing this by placing the Scriptures alongside what Jesus accomplished when He came to this earth as a man saying... **That the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."** This is the One we have been waiting for. This Man Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah whom the prophets foretold would come. And He is proving all this from the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Unfortunately we don't have a written record of Paul's sermon, but it is probably very similar to the one Luke recorded in chapter 13. Let's just take a minute and read from that sermon he preached in Antioch Pisidia, **Acts 13:23-41**. That's a little preview of how Paul reasoned and explained and demonstrated that Jesus is the Christ who had to die and was risen from the dead for our Salvation. And he is using Scripture, God's own Words to prove this. The Old Testament Scriptures are the Words of the Spirit of Christ, **1**

Peter 1:10-12. This Bible is the written *γραφή*, Word of God. It's the written account of the Logos, *λόγος*, who was in the beginning with God and became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:1-14. So an interesting concept to ponder is that the OT Scriptures are the beginnings of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the flesh. These words are more than just letters on a page, they are Life. But only to those who find Jesus in these Words, **John 5:37-40, 46.** Jesus said this on the road to Emmaus, **Luke 24:25-27, 44-46.** The Old Testament is so precious because it is the testimony of the Father to send His Salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. When God sent His Salvation, He sent His Word, His Mercy, His Truth and His Love in the person of Jesus Christ, Psalm 57:2-3, 7.

The prophet Amos tells us that God does nothing unless He first reveals it to His prophets, Amos 3:7. The Old Testament Scriptures is the substance of our Salvation, Col 2:16-17. Paul tells Timothy that *the Scriptures make us wise unto Salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*, 2 Tim 3:15-17. We don't know exactly what Scriptures Paul quoted. Probably some of the same ones we just read in Acts 13, like Psalm 2 and 16. But we also think of Psalm 22, 69, 110, and of course Isaiah 53. But Jesus said that Moses wrote about Him and when you go through the Pentateuch, you discover that it's all foreshadowing and speaking of Jesus Christ. The Promise of the Seed, Genesis 3:15. The Promise to Abraham that *in your Seed all nations will be blessed*, Gen 22:18. The Akedah, the binding of Isaac, *God will provide Himself the Lamb*, Gen 22:8. Not to mention the pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus to Abraham and Moses, Gen 15:1-21; 17:1-22; 18:1-33; Exodus 3:4-14; 6:2-3. And we see Jesus foreshadowed as the Passover Lamb, Exodus 12:23; 2 Cor 5:7, and the Rock who followed them, Ex 17:6; 1 Cor 10:4. And when Moses was hid in the cleft of the Rock, that was Jesus, Ex 33:22. And as Moses is describing the tabernacle and all the elements inside and all the sacrifices... it's all pointing to Jesus Christ, especially the mercy seat, the *ἰλαστήριον*, the place of mercy, Exodus 25:22; Romans 3:25. This is what Paul referred to in Hebrews 8:4-6. So Paul, being a Hebrew of Hebrews, one who was raised at the feet of Gamaliel, one who knew his Scriptures, is now unlocking the Scriptures by revealing Jesus Christ as the key to our Salvation. He says, ***"This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."***

Paul was in Thessalonica for three weeks preaching Jesus, but not only did he preach on His death and resurrection, He also taught about His glorious return and our blessed Hope. The Hope of Everlasting life with Jesus when we will see Him face to face in glory. This is the Hope that sustains us and preserves us and strengthens us in this life now. It's the anchor for our soul. Our Blessed Hope of His return should be at the forefront of our mind. Paul and the Apostles constantly wrote and spoke about end times events and our Blessed Hope of His return. And Paul thought this topic was so important that he even taught these three-week-old, new born believers in Thessalonica about the end times. He didn't wait until they were mature Christians before talking about the rapture and His return. This is a doctrine that Paul taught right along with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To wait for His Son from Heaven. To eagerly expect His return. This should be at the forefront of every Christians mind... the Blessed Hope of His return when will see Him face to face in glory. In Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, he continually speaks of this hope and he reminds them of the things he told them in the three weeks he was there in Thessalonica, **2 Thess 2:5.** This is everything Paul is preaching to them in these three weeks. And notice the results in verse 4...

4) And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

Some of the Jews were persuaded; a great many of the Gentile proselytes believed, as well as many prominent women who were also Gentile proselytes. In the next lesson we will see the two responses to the Gospel: humble or harden. There are those who receive the Gospel with an open heart, and those who reject the Gospel with a hard heart. And we will see in the coming verses those with a hard heart come violently against Paul and the Truth.