

~ACTS~

Lesson 52- Expectant Ears and Hard Hearts

Acts 17:4-15

We left off last time in the book of Acts as Paul was preaching the Gospel for three weeks in Thessalonica; proving from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ; that He had to suffer and die and rise again from the dead for our Salvation, Acts 17:2-3. And for three Sabbaths, Paul proved Jesus to be the Christ whom they had been waiting for. But as we have seen so far in the book of Acts, there are two responses when the Gospel is proclaimed... they will either Humble or Harden. There are those who receive the Gospel with expectant ears, being saved unto Everlasting Life, but there are others who harden their heart and reject the Gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. We, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, are commanded to speak God's Word knowing that there are these two responses to the Gospel. This is what God told Ezekiel three times, "*Whether they hear or whether they refuse...*" It's their choice, but God says, I want you to proclaim my Word, Ezek 2:5, 7; 3:11. It is NOT our job to save, but to proclaim His Truth to a fallen world. And in Thessalonica, in our text today, we see the same two responses when the Word of God preached... Humble or Harden. There are many people who come to Jesus by receiving His Word, but we also see many hard-hearted unbelieving Jews reject the Truth and begin persecuting Paul for his preaching, Acts 17:4-15.

4) And some of them (Jews) 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; not all, and not many, but some. And Luke tells us that a great many Gentiles believed as well. These "devout" Greeks, *σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων* were Gentile proselytes who believed, then they told their pagan Gentile friends and many of them received the Gospel as well. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, it seems that he is writing predominantly to Gentile believers, **1 Thess 1:9-10**. Their testimony is that they turned away from worshipping pagan idols and turned toward worshipping the One True and Living God. I believe the progression of the Gospel was very similar to what we saw in Antioch Pisidia, Acts 13:42-45. It started with believing Gentile proselytes and then branched out to their pagan friends. But then in verse 5 we see the hard-hearted jealous Jews begin to oppose the Gospel message and persecute Paul and Silas...

5) But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Notice it is their pride and jealousy that causes them to reject the Truth. This was the heart of the Jews who crucified Jesus, Matt 27:18. And the same heart of jealousy was toward Paul on his first missionary journey in Antioch Pisidia. And that hard heart of jealousy rejects the Truth, Acts 13:45-46. So here in Thessalonica it's the same spirit of antichrist coming against the Gospel. And then notice how they again stir up the crowd to come against the Truth... **becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar...**

Stirring up the pagan crowd and rulers of the city has always been the common tactic for the unbelieving Jews. They did this with Pontius Pilate when they wanted to crucify Jesus, Matthew 27:20-25; Mark 15:10-15; John 19:4-15. Herod killed James and arrested Peter when he saw it pleased the Jews, Acts 12:1-3. When Paul was in Damascus, they conspired with Aretus the king to try to kill Paul, Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33. On Paul's first journey through Galatia, they enticed the mob against them, Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5. And here in Thessalonica they are doing the same thing by taking **some of the evil men from the marketplace**. I love how the KJV translates this, "The Jews... took unto them lewd fellows of the baser sort." The Jews didn't mind working with the most evil men of the town to thwart the message of the Gospel.

Evidently, the Jews found out that a man named Jason was harboring Paul, so they attacked Jason's house. Luke says at the end of verse 5, (the Jews) **set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.** We don't know much about this man Jason, but we can assume he was a recent convert of Thessalonica. This could be the same Jason that Paul refers to in his salutation in Romans 16:21. So the Jews have these evil men of the marketplace ransack his house looking for Paul and his company...

6) But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Wouldn't you love to have that said about us? That we as Christians have turned the world upside down. This is similar to what the Jews said about the Apostles in Jerusalem, "*You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine,*" Acts 5:28. Luke says that the Gospel message has **turned the world upside down.** That's what Jesus does. Christianity is a complete change of life, a change of mind, a change of heart. That's what repentance means, *μετάνοια*- a change of mind... to turn away from sin and turn upon Jesus Christ.

These Jews are speaking to the rulers of the city saying...

6-7) ⁶ "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus."

Notice their tactic. They are bringing them to the rulers of the city as treasonous evil doers against Caesar. And they are claiming Jason to be conspiring with these evil doers because they heard he is harboring them in his house. These Caesars had an ego. Not only did they claim themselves to be king, but many demanded they be worshipped as gods. So when Christians would claim Jesus as King rather than Caesar, it was a treasonous act. They used the same tactic against Jesus Himself in front of Pilate, claiming that Jesus was a threat to the kingship of Caesar, Luke 23:1-5; John 18:33-37; 19:7-15. When they arrested Paul his final time, he wasn't in jail for being a Christian, but rather suffering as an evil doer as a leader of the sect of people who burned down Rome, 2 Tim 2:9. These Jews are trying something similar with Paul by saying he is preaching another king- King Jesus. When Paul taught for three weeks in Thessalonica, he not only preached on the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also the glorious return of our coming King, 1 Thess 1:10; 2:12; 2 Thess 2:5. But of course the Jews twisted this as a threat to Caesar in order to get the city rulers on their side.

Thessalonica was a free city. They were still under Roman rule within the Roman Empire and had allegiance to Caesar and Rome, but they were not a colony like Philippi. But rather an entirely free city to govern itself without appointed Roman authorities such as praetors and proconsuls. I say this because in verses 6 and 8 Luke uses a very unique word to describe these rulers in Thessalonica. He describes them as *πολιτάρχης*, literally city rulers. For over 1800 years historians accused Luke of making a mistake by calling these rulers *πολιτάρχης* because nowhere in Greek literature is this word found. But then in 1876 a stone plaque was discovered in Thessalonica that had this word engraved, naming seven *πολιτάρχης* of Thessalonica. Proving that Luke did not make a mistake but was in fact completely accurate in every detail proving that Thessalonica was governed by Greek *πολιτάρχης* instead of Roman praetors. Since then, there have been seventeen other inscriptions found that prove Greek *πολιτάρχης* to be rulers in Macedonia. Just another instance of worldly historians and unbelieving scientists trying to disprove the Bible based on their limited knowledge, when in fact the Bible is always completely infallible.

So Jason is standing before these city rulers as they hear the accusations from these unbelieving Jews...

8) And they (Jews) troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

The crowd and the city rulers are being stirred up by these accusations, but the favor of God is working. These evil men can't find Paul and the city rulers don't have enough evidence to convict Jason of this crime of harboring treasonous criminals, so they make a concession...

9) So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Not having sufficient evidence to convict Jason and the other brethren, they tell them to pay security and they let them go. It is uncertain what this security was. The Greek word is ἰκανός- meaning sufficient or many. This could have been some sort of bail, or it could have been a promise that no attempt against Rome would be made. This wasn't a compromise. I don't believe Jason would have agreed to not preaching the Gospel, but this was possibly an agreement and a promise that their preaching was not a threat to Rome and to Caesar. This was the main reason why Luke is writing this letter to Theophilus; to prove that Christianity is not a hostile sect that might threaten Rome, but rather the message of hope to a fallen world. Tensions are rising in Thessalonica. Paul, Silas and Timothy have been in hiding, and now with this attack on Jason's house the brethren help them escape the city...

10a) Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

Fleeing persecution is not a cowardice act. The Gospel went forth mightily in Thessalonica, but not without much persecution, **1 Thess 1:6; 2:2, 14**. And now the Holy Spirit is moving them from Thessalonica to Berea. Berea was about 50 miles south-west of Thessalonica and large enough to have a Jewish synagogue. And as Paul's custom was, he enters the synagogue again. Notice the remainder of verse 10...

10) Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Paul just doesn't stop! The unbelieving Jews continue to persecute Paul in almost every city he goes, but yet he still enters into the Jewish synagogue in Berea to preach the Gospel. But here in Berea he finds that many of these Jews have open hearts to receive the Word of Truth...

11) These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Luke is making a comparison with the Jews from Thessalonica to those in Berea saying the Jews in the Berean synagogue **were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**. This word "fair-minded" is εὐγενής- meaning "well born, noble or high in rank." Luke is saying this, not because of their social status, but because of their high regard for the Scriptures. Notice where this starts... with receiving the Word with all readiness, with an eager heart to know the Truth, a willing mind to receive the Word, receiving the Word with expectant ears to hear. If a person doesn't have this, they won't progress to the next step in searching the Scriptures daily.

For 2,000 years, these Bereans have given us an example to rightly divide the Word of Truth. We as Christians have the right to personally examine the Scriptures. This word "search" is ἀνακρίνω, to highly judge or examine closely. Paul was proving Jesus as the Christ from the Scriptures and these Bereans didn't just take Paul's word for it. They personally went to the Scriptures themselves, highly judging and examining the Scriptures **daily to find out whether these things were so**. This is our right as Christians, and why it is so important to read the Bible for ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to speak and teach us on a personal level. The Catholic Church took this right away from the people for over 1,000 years by making it illegal to own or read the Bible in the common language and it sent the world into the dark ages. It is good to listen to good teachers that help us learn our Bible, but it is vitally important to go back

and study these things for yourself and find them in the Scriptures to see if what they are saying is right. Don't take Zack's word for it, be a Berean and study the Scriptures for yourself to find out if these things are true. Paul, being an Apostle and using the Scriptures as the basis for his preaching would have encouraged them to do this. This is why Luke says they were more fair-minded, they were regarded high in rank because they diligently sought the Scriptures. This is seeking Jesus, finding Him in the Scriptures. Because we only know who Jesus is by learning about Him from His Word and there is great reward for those who do this, **Matthew 7:7-8; Proverbs 8:17; 25:2-5**. It is interesting the connection we see with the term Luke uses, εὐγενής- as in well-born or noble stock. We as Christians have been born again into the King's family. We are sons of God and heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus the King, and one day we will rule and reign with Him in His kingdom, Rom 8:17; Isaiah 53:12; Rev 2:26-28; 3:9-12, 21; Rev 4:4; 20:4. I love the picture we get from Revelation 4-5 with the 24 elders seated around the throne of God and we as faithful Christians are seated on thrones with Him with stephanos crowns on our heads given the privilege of ruling and reigning with Him. The Bereans were faithful and regarded the Scriptures highly and took them seriously. Now look at the results in verse 12...

12) Therefore (indeed- μὲν οὖν) **many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.**

Notice the contrast between the Bereans in verse 12 and the Thessalonians in verse 4. Verse 12 says ***MANY*** Berean Jews believed, but only ***SOME*** of the Jews in Thessalonica believed. This is why the Bereans were more fair-minded than the Thessalonian Jews. And also, many Gentiles believed as well. And as a result, the enemy attacks the Truth again...

13) But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

The unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica tracked Paul 50 miles south to again stir up the crowds against Paul. The Jews did this on his first journey through Galatia when unbelieving Jews from Pisidia and Iconium hunted Paul down in Lystra and stoned him to death. Now here in Berea, the brethren help Paul escape.

14) Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

Notice that Paul is the main target for these Jews, so Paul is sent away on a boat down to Greece while Silas and Timothy stay in Berea. But there is no doubt that Silas and Timothy are suffering persecution as well. This word "remain" is ὑπομένω- meaning to under-abide. It is translated many times as endure or persevere. Paul was probably only in Berea for a couple of weeks and now Silas and Timothy stay back for another couple of weeks enduring persecution while edifying this new church in Berea.

15) So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

The brethren from Berea travel with Paul and put him on a boat to bring him down to Athens, Greece. It is finally here in Greece that Paul finds some reprieve from persecution and stays there for about 1-1/2 years. And it seems that those who brought Paul to Athens were fellow believers because Paul tells them when they get back to Berea, to send Silas and Timothy to come to him in Athens as soon as they can.

Next week we will see Paul preach the gospel in Athens as he waits for Silas and Timothy to meet him there in Greece, Acts 17:16

Homework- read Acts 17 and 18 and 1 Thessalonians 3 and track Timothy and Silas travels to Greece