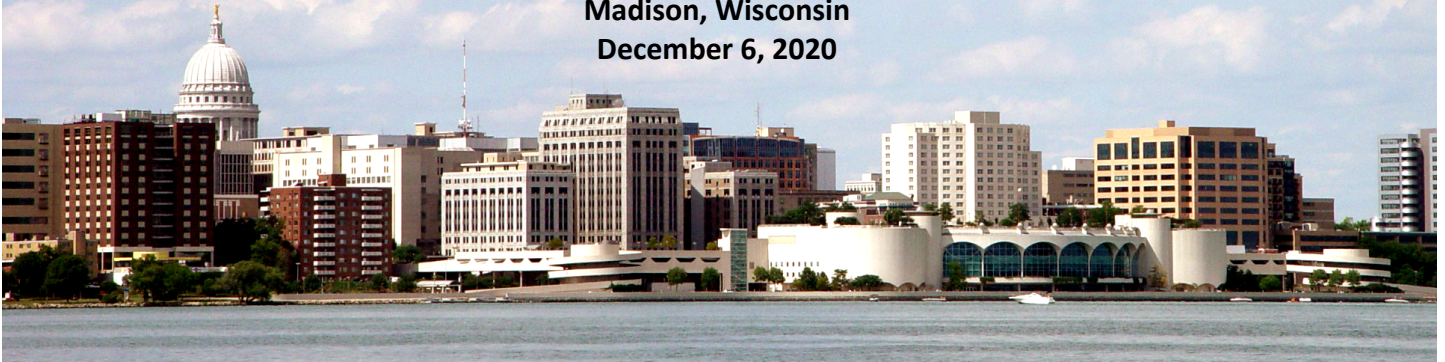


Upsetting the World

ACTS 17:1-9 • PART 2: THE PEOPLE REACT

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be with you this morning! As usual, I hope you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, preferably from home; but, if you need those, we do have some available on the table in the entryway. And due to the outbreak that we're having in Dane County right now, we are trying to emphasize giving either through the mail or through the church website. To find that link, you can either go to the "Get In Touch" tab on the website or go to the announcement section. All of this is also summarized on the back page of our bulletin, which is emailed to all of our members every Saturday. If you have any questions, please get in touch. After our study of the word this morning, John (one of our shepherds) will lead us in the prayers for the Lord's Supper, and then Caleb will be leading us in "Trust and Obey" (#714). So, if you are joining us from home or from your car, we are giving you a heads-up on the song, in case you would like to follow along in your own song book.

Before we get to our study, I'll also give the reminder that today is the deadline for collecting cake/cookie/brownie mix for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services. We're also collecting used inkjet and toner cartridges as well as old cell phones and checks for "perishables" (milk, meat, and fresh fruits and vegetables). The Shults-Lewis representative will be here this Wednesday at 10 a.m., so if you'd like to contribute, please let me know.

As our custom has been, we are starting this morning with God's plan for our salvation. God sent his Son to this earth to live a perfect life, but we killed him. Thankfully, though, God made a way for us to be saved, and he has told us about it in his word. After Jesus' death, he was buried, and he was then raised up on the third day. And in response, we are to believe the message, we must turn away from sin, we are to confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and then we are commanded to be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of our sins. And once again, we have several examples today. The first one today comes to us from the Boulevard congregation in Cleveland, Ohio. I don't have the woman's name, but we are thankful for her obedience to the gospel and we rejoice with the Boulevard congregation there in Cleveland.

We also have something from Russia this morning. A video popped up on my newsfeed, I copied and pasted the Russian text into Google Translate, and it simply said, "BAPTISM IN NORTHERN RUSSIA." So, I know nothing

about this other than what I saw in the video. The first half is of a man knee-deep in frozen water, hacking away at it with an axe and a shovel. The second half of the video is of a man being baptized, very quickly!

The next example comes to us from the church in Honolulu again, as Alvin Rocillo was baptized this past Thursday evening. And once again, as their custom is over there, the baptistery was literally crawling with children! Kids were everywhere – sitting on the edge, putting their hands in the water, stepping into the water – all over the place! But, we are thankful for Alvin and his decision to obey the gospel this week. And again, we share these examples by way of encouragement – what Alvin and our new sister in Ohio have done this week, you can do this morning. Let me know if we can help in some way, and we would be glad to get together.

This morning I'd like for us to conclude a two-part series of lessons based on a scene from the life of the apostle Paul on his Second Missionary Journey, as he passes through the city of Thessalonica in Acts 17. Last week, we looked at Thessalonica, located along the Ignatian Way in northern Greece. We learned that it was perhaps the fourth-largest city in the Roman Empire at that time, a strategic city, roughly the size of Madison. This is where it is on the map, but I do want to share one more picture – this one taken from the harbor (in the Aegean Sea) looking north toward the city. I think this gives us a bit of perspective as to the population of Thessalonica, even today. Paul, then, makes a point of stopping in Thessalonica, and he's there preaching in the synagogue for three Sabbaths.

This, of course, is a picture taken from the city looking out into the Aegean Sea. Last week, then, we looked at Paul's METHOD in this city, and we learned that he...

- REASONED FROM THE SCRIPTURES – he dialoged, he discussed, he started with Moses, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, the Hebrew Bible, he started with a commonly accepted authority, and used those scriptures to point people to Jesus.
- We also learned that Paul EXPLAINED the word of God – literally, he “opened” the word in a way that made sense, he brought passages together, simplifying, guiding, sharing – just as Jesus opened the scriptures to the two men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24.
- And finally, the apostle Paul GAVE EVIDENCE – literally, he “laid it out,” he proved, he pointed to the word of God, and he applied those passages to Jesus, proving that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins, according to the Scriptures.

And we used all of this as something of a case study. We learn from what Paul did, and we do the same thing today. Today, we look at the world around us, and with any who might be interested, we REASON FROM THE SCRIPTURES, we EXPLAIN the word of God, and we GIVE EVIDENCE that Jesus is the Christ.

This morning, I want us to go back and look at the passage again, but this time, I'd like for us to focus on how the people of Thessalonica REACT to what Paul does here. And as with our study last week, hopefully we'll be able to learn something that changes us. Hopefully we will learn something that encourages us. And since a number of us are living in a city that's somewhat similar to Thessalonica, we need that encouragement!

So, let's go back to the text itself, to the account of what happens in this place nearly 2000 years ago – and today we focus on how the people of Thessalonica react to what Paul does here – Acts 17:1-9,

¹ Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them,

and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶ When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. ⁹ And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

Again, as we make a second run through this passage today, let’s take a few moments to think about how the people of Thessalonica react to what Paul does here. He REASONS, he EXPLAINS, and he GIVES EVIDENCE. Our question today is: How is this received? Is Paul successful? As we break it down, it seems that the crowd reacts in one of two very different ways...

I. ...starting with a good number of people who are PERSUADED by the message.

And I know it’s easy to look at this passage and even to read it a few times and to say, “Look! There’s a riot! There’s chaos! Paul basically gets run out of town! This is not good!” And yes, that happens – we’ll get to that in just a moment. Spoiler alert: There is persecution in this passage! But in the chaos, let’s not miss verse 4! ***“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.”*** Some of them are persuaded! So yes, the glass is half-empty, in a sense, but it is also half full! A lot of good happens when Paul reasons, explains, and gives evidence. Some are convinced!

There are a number of lessons we can learn from verse 4, including the fact that some of those who are persuaded are Jews, but many are Greeks, and a number of them are women. Now, when we get to the persecution part, we’re going to find that it is led by the Jews; however, not all of the Jews are involved in that, because some of them are persuaded. So, whatever happens later in this passage is not a unanimous decision!

I know we only have one verse of positivity here, but as he gets run out of town and as he keeps traveling, a short time later (as he’s still on the road) he writes a letter back to this new congregation, and the letter gives us quite a bit more information. As evidence, I would just read 1 Thessalonians 1. As Paul writes to encourage these people roughly two months later, this is what he says (and think about how positive this is) – 1 Thessalonians 1,

¹ Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; ⁵ for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ You also became imitators of us

and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

There's quite a bit in this passage, but I would emphasize that some people in Thessalonica **"became imitators"** of Paul and Silas. And not only that, but they **"became an example to all the believers"** throughout Macedonia and in Achaia. Word got out, not only in the area, but all over the Mediterranean world, and here we are, talking about it today! And then he talks about some of them who **"turned from idols to serve a living and true God."** How ironic, that Paul spends at least three Sabbaths preaching in the synagogue to the Jews, but most of those who are persuaded seem to be gentiles! The point is: A good number are persuaded! In fact, over in 1 Thessalonians 2:12, he continues by saying (among other things), **"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."** We have all of this evidence, then, reminding us that a good number of people in Thessalonica are **"persuaded."** They are convinced by what Paul has to say, and they believe it. They obey the gospel.

Before we move on from the positive part of what happens in Thessalonica, we need to make sure we don't miss what happens with the women. If you remember from our study of Luke, Luke tends to lift up the oppressed and overlooked, including women. And that's what happens here. Luke, as the author of Acts, makes sure we know that **"a number of the leading women"** are persuaded to follow the Lord. Now today, many people would accuse Paul of oppressing women. And yet here, Paul apparently takes the time to study with these women! He reasons with them, he explains, and he gives evidence. And it works! And this is so significant that Luke lists these women separately – we have the Jews, we have a large number of the **"God-fearing Greeks,"** and then we have **"a number of the leading women."** Enough of them are converted that they have their own category here. So, overall, we first have a rather positive response, as **"...some of them [are] persuaded and [join] Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women."** And it's important that we look at the good news first, because all of this leads to the much more negative response...

II. ...as we find (starting in verse 5) that the Jewish leaders become JEALOUS and start PERSECUTING those who have been persuaded.

Now, when I hear the word "jealousy," I sometimes think of kids in middle school – somebody's jealous that somebody else is more popular, or something like that – but this is serious. This is the kind of burning rage that causes us to do something physically harmful to another human being. A few chapters earlier (in Acts 6), Stephen uses this same word to describe Joseph's brothers as they sell him into slavery in Egypt. This is serious. This is the righteous indignation Jesus predicted in John 16:2, when he warned the apostles, **"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God."** And not only do they disagree with the message, but in this case, they see that Paul was one of their own. We think of a politician who switches sides. I think of John DeBerry, a faithful gospel preacher in Memphis who has represented Memphis at the state level for quite some time. He apparently spoke up on behalf of the unborn a few too many times, and his own party kicked him out, "You can't be one of us anymore." Of course, they did this right after the deadline for him to run on the other ticket. He's seen as a traitor. This is

how the Jews are looking at Paul. Or to put it terms we can understand here in Wisconsin, we might think about Brett Favre playing for the Vikings. That's Paul in this passage. He has switched sides. Just a few years before this, Paul was the one leading the persecution, but now, motivated by an intense, burning hatred, these religious leaders bring down what they see as the wrath of God on Paul the heretic. They are motivated by jealousy. In their view, there is no possible way that the Messiah could have possibly been a poor, homeless carpenter who was executed by Rome on a cross. And yet, by reacting to Paul's message in this way, these religious leaders are doing the same thing the Sanhedrin did to Jesus in Jerusalem just a few years earlier. In fact, Paul explains this in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, where he says,

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

So, Paul describes what happens here: Those who drove us out were the same ones who killed both Jesus and the prophets.

And going back to Acts 17:5, we find that the Jewish leaders don't respond to Paul's arguments, they don't come back with different scriptures, this is not a rational discussion on their part, but they respond with violence. But they don't even have the courage to be violent themselves; no, they subcontract their violence. The NASB says that, ***"...the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar."*** I appreciate what the original King James Version has here in verse 5. I'll put it on the wall up here for just a bit. This is a scan of this page from the original 1611 edition of the King James Version. And I've zoomed in on verse 5. It actually splits between columns. I consider myself to be a pretty good reader, but the original 1611 edition is on the verge of being unreadable for most people – the typeface, the differences in letters, the spelling, and then the words themselves – it's technically English, but just barely. In this case, the translation needs a translation. And we understand that, because we know that language changes over time. But in the original KJV, I have to translate it a bit just to read it to you, because of how some of the words are spelled. But to the best of my ability, verse 5 says, ***"But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people."*** When I copied and pasted, my spell check thought I had lost my mind! I share this, because I always get a kick out this, that the Jews went out and found ***"certain lewd fellows of the baser sort."*** Or, as we might say today, the "rustled up a mob." They went out and found some bad people to do their dirty work for them! These are people these Jewish leaders wouldn't be caught dead with. These are the kind of people who caused them to accuse Jesus of associating with "sinners." They wouldn't let Jesus associate with these people, but when they needed to rent a mob, these guys are okay with that!

After they rustle up a mob, the Jewish leaders then proceed to ***"set the city in an uproar,"*** attacking the house of Jason. Paul and Silas are not there, so they drag Jason out of his house, dragging him before the ***"city authorities."*** Just a brief note on this: Luke uses a word that's only found in this passage, the word ***"POLITARCHS,"*** coming from two words, meaning "city" and "rulers." For many years, skeptics and critics accused Luke of making up this word. They couldn't find it anywhere else in the ancient world. They had ***"magistrates,"*** like we had in Philippi, but never ***"POLITARCHS."*** So, Luke is obviously inaccurate. They made

this argument, until a number of years ago, when the word turns up on an inscription – in the city of Thessalonica, dating back to the First Century BC! Thessalonica is ruled by **“POLITARCHS.”**

Anyway, back to Acts 17, notice the charges that are made. First, they accuse Paul and Silas of upsetting the world. Is that true? Have Paul and Silas been everywhere in the world at this point? Far from it! They’re just getting started! And not only that, are Paul and Silas the ones wreaking havoc in Thessalonica? Who are the ones stirring up a mob here? Paul’s not stirring up a mob. Paul is preaching a gospel of peace. It’s the Jewish leaders who are stirring up a mob. And so, the first charge is blatantly false.

But let’s also notice the second charge, **“...they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”** Does that sound familiar? Isn’t this pretty much the same accusation made against Jesus before Governor Pilate, that he claims to be another king, a threat to Caesar? These people hate Caesar, but here they are defending Caesar. What they’ve done is to take a spiritual truth (that Jesus is a king), and they twist it into something political. In reality, Christians are to submit to governing authorities. Four years ago, I remember seeing good brothers and sisters posting online under the hashtag “RESIST.” And now, I’m seeing it again from the other side. And yet, are we really called by God to “resist” our governing authorities? I understand the reasoning, I understand the thought, I understand the frustration, but what did Paul say in Romans 13? **“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever RESISTS authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”** As Christians, we are not called upon to resist. Far from it. We submit. And my point in bringing this up is that the second charge here in Acts 17 is just as bogus as the first: 1.) Paul is not the one causing a riot here; the Jewish leaders are, and 2.) Paul is not the one acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar – it’s Paul and one or two others, there are no weapons involved, they are not challenging the right of Caesar to rule in Rome – none of this, this is not a political revolution at all.

Nevertheless, these are the charges. There’s just enough truth in the charges to make them seem reasonable. So, the Jewish leaders stir up the crowd and the city authorities, and in response, the city authorities demand some kind of pledge from Jason and the others, and they release them. So, instead of a beating followed by imprisonment (as we saw in Philippi), the city authorities force the church to basically post bail, “You give us a huge pile of money, promising not to cause trouble, and we will let you go.” And that seems to be what happens here. There’s no trial, but Jason and the other Christians are threatened and allowed to go home. Paul continues on his journey, and the church in Thessalonica continues to grow. By the way, this pledge and promise to leave is probably what Paul refers to later in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 when he said, **“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.”** It seems that Satan was perhaps working through that pledge. Paul wanted to go back, but he couldn’t. Satan was blocking his way.

Conclusion:

Last week, we looked at what Paul did. We looked at Paul’s method, and we applied that lesson with the reminder that we need to be doing what Paul did – just as he reasoned, and explained, and gave evidence, so also we need to reason, and explain and give evidence.

As we wrap up our study of Paul's first visit in Thessalonica, we've now looked at how the people react. And as often happens today, they reacted in one of two ways: They either accepted the message, or they rejected it. So what? What does this mean for us? I look at this, and the message for us here in Madison is: Let's not get discouraged! Our mission is to get the word out. Our mission is to reason, explain, and to give evidence. We do this publicly – in this building, online, at home, at work, from house to house, out in this community, with our friends and family. How they respond is up to them, not us. Some may turn against us, but others will be persuaded. The good news here is not that God will somehow miraculously keep us from being persecuted – the good news is that some people obey the gospel. The good news is that some will ***“turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”*** The good news is that some will ***“receive the word of God”*** which they hear from us. The good news is that some will accept that word ***“not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.”*** The good news is that his word ***“performs its work in those who believe.”***

But for any of this to happen, we need to be upsetting the world like they did. We'll never be persecuted if nobody knows we're here. So, my encouragement is that we step out and take a risk. Let's put ourselves at risk by doing what Paul did. And then, let us not get discouraged.

As we close and before we partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only holy and Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth. Thank you for making a way for us to be saved, for sending your Son, for allowing him to suffer and die in our place. Thank you for giving us your Word, and thank you for the great privilege of being able to share your love with the world. As we reach out with the good news, we pray that we would keep the focus on you and not on us. We pray for courage and patience so that we can continue without getting discouraged.

Thank you for hearing our prayer. We come to you in the name of your Son, Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com