

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## **R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: Proclaiming Christ in a Pagan Culture Acts 17:1-9 (Part 2)**

*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.*

We are working our way through this text; a text in which we find Paul and his team making their way from Philippi, where Lydia, a slave-girl and a jailer were brought to salvation through the preaching of Christ. They make their way to the significant and strategic city of Thessalonica, a city of some 200,000 plus people. What was Paul’s intent? He wanted to preach Jesus Christ to the people.

Last week we started noting six steps Paul took in order to reach the people of this pseudo-religious to non-religious culture. Let me remind you that we also live in an increasingly pseudo to non-religious culture. On one side of us we have, like Paul did, the “church-goers” – those who went through the motions of religion but were not changed by it. On the other side were the progressives, the secular, non-religious sort, who look upon Christians as naïve at best and just plain imbecilic at worst for believing as they do about God and Jesus.

As we dig into this neighborhood and consider how we are going to reach our culture for Jesus, I submit to you that imitating Paul is an effort worth investing ourselves. We did not move here to be comfortable. We did move to this location to hide within these walls. Like Paul, we came to this place intent on making Jesus known. And so, I begin this morning by reminding you of the actions to which I would exhort each and every one of us to adopt; to make personal; to apply to our lives so that we might effectively reach Northwest Arkansas for Jesus. This morning I will divide this message up into two key points. Point number one is, as I said, the actions that will reach a culture for Christ. Point number two is the anticipation of reaching a culture for Christ. Our first point is found in verses 1-3 and the second point is found in verse 4. Next week we will take the rest of the verses in this passage.

### **I. The Actions that will reach a culture for Christ (17:1-3)**

We begin with a bit of review, but of good review, answering the question, “How do we reach our culture for Jesus?” What expectations ought we to have on ourselves and upon one another? What do the Elders desire to see this congregation doing in proclaiming Jesus? There are six such actions in these three verses.

#### **1. Go to where the people are (17:1)**

In verse one we read that Paul and his team “came to Thessalonica.” This was the capital city of Macedonia. It was a place where people were to be found. Notice in verse 2 that Paul started with the religious people, going to the synagogue, the “church” of the Jewish people.

We are reminded that Paul used his position as a Jewish rabbi to gain opportunities to proclaim Jesus. In like manner, you and I are to use our positions, the places God has put us,

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the people God has surrounded us with, the talents God has given us to gain opportunities to speak to people about Jesus.

I know that sometimes we may feel as though we do not have any talents, or that we do not have much influence, or that we do not know many people. Beloved, let me remind you that so long as there is even just one that you can speak to, impact, or influence, that God has given you that person. And for those who think that they have little to offer another person; let me ask you this; do you have Jesus? Have you been changed by the gospel of our Lord? Do you possess eternal life by faith in Jesus? Then you have more than enough to offer someone else. Go to where the people are and proclaim what Jesus has done; what He has done for you; and what He promises to do for anyone who calls upon Him.

## 2. Use the Scriptures (17:2)

Notice the authority that Paul used when talking to others about Jesus. In verse 2 we read, “...for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures...” Now I know that this seemingly goes without saying, but then, that would be wrong. It must be said. The only truth we have to offer anyone is the truth of Scripture. Too often we rely more upon our arguments and defense of Scripture when speaking to people about Jesus. To be sure, we are to be able to explain the meaning of verses and passages, but not until you first speak the Scriptures to someone. I will never argue someone into the kingdom, but the Spirit of God will use the Word of God to open the eyes and hearts of people.

Beloved, be more familiar with God’s Word. Memorize more verses and then speak of them often in your homes, in your work place, in your playtime. In a remarkable statement, the Lord God, through the prophet Isaiah made this promise. I know you have heard it, but do you believe it? Do you practice it?

### **Isaiah 55:10-11**

**10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**

Let the Word of God speak! Let your mouth be the means by which others hear the truth of God’s Word. You may do more than speak the Word of God to someone, but you have done nothing until you have spoken the Word of God. Use the Scriptures often (see Deuteronomy 6:5-9 if time permits)

**5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

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### **3. Put the focus on Christ (17:2-3)**

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.”

All I want to remind you here is that the focus of Paul's reasoning from Scripture was the person and work of Jesus. Does our conversation with others about spiritual things focus upon Christ?

### **4. Emphasize Christ's work of atonement (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.”

When talking to “religious” or non-religious people, our starting place is to be upon what Jesus did to save sinners. Jesus **“had to suffer and rise again from the dead...”** People need to know why He died and rose again. Without that information; without that knowledge, a person cannot be convicted of his or her sin and thus their need of atonement; the provision of God to offer His own Son Jesus Christ as the punishment bearer of your sin. This is the Jesus that Paul was proclaiming to the people.

Now, if we are to reach our culture for Christ, we must go to where the people are; we must actually use, depend upon, and allow the Word of God to do its work; we must put the focus on Christ and we must emphasize the work of Christ on the cross for sinners. But there is more...

### **5. Give evidence of a reasonable faith; not an emotional appeal. (17:2)**

The words “reasonable” and “faith” may at first sound a bit contradictory. Faith to some is nothing more than blind, irrational and unreasonable devotion to something fictional, mythical, and mystical at best. But that is not biblical faith. Biblical faith begins with what can be and is known about God. Who He is; what He is like; what He has done. There is reason for faith, or trust in such a person. It is true that there are things we do not know about God or how He works, but based upon what He has revealed in His Word, we can reason that He is good, He is control and whatever He does is to His glory and for our good.

Too often we call people to come to Jesus to make their marriages better; their lives more interesting and full of meaning; to conquer some personality quirk like “anger” or “pride.” These are appeals to emotion. But we forget that Jesus did not come to make bad people good or good people better; rather He came to make dead people alive; to open a person's eyes to the reality that apart from God, they have no life and no eternal life; but that with God, they have reason to know, love and serve God.

Notice in verse 2 that Paul gives evidence for a reasonable faith. In verse 2 we read that Paul *reasoned with them from the Scriptures*. That word “reasoned” in the Greek is *dialegomai* which is the basis of our English word “dialogue.” Literally, *dialegomai* means “to speak through words.” The idea is that of interaction between persons. In other words, rather than simply preach, Paul interacted with these people. This was not a sermon like I am giving now, but was more like our sermon discussion times where the people asked questions and Paul gave answers. According to our text, Paul would put an Old Testament passage out there, show how it focused on Christ and then asked the people for thoughts and even objections.

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Can you dialogue with others about the Bible? That should be your goal, to know the answers to the questions that unsaved people may ask about salvation. Is your faith “reasonable”? Do you have reasons for believing what you do about Jesus?

Notice that Paul did this reasoning by two means. First we read that he spent time “**explaining**” the text. Literally this word means to open. Paul was opening the text, exegesis of the text, expounding, making the text meaning known.

Additionally we are told that Paul reasoned by “**giving evidence**” to the text. This phrase speaks of proving; of making a side-by-side comparison. To set two or more things side by side to make a point. What did Paul put side by side? He put Scripture on one side and Jesus on the other so show or prove that Jesus was the Messiah. If we were to read Isaiah 53, we would see clearly that Messiah had to die. If we were to read Psalm 16 we would see not only that Messiah had to die, but also that He would be raised to new life. The point is that Paul did not share his opinions. Why? Because opinions have no authority. The only authority is Word of God and it is the Word of God, the gospel that is promised in Romans 1:16 to be the “**power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...**”

Beloved, we cannot emphasize this enough. If we are to reach our community for Jesus, then we must proclaim a reasonable faith. We must give people Spiritual truth that will challenge their thinking. We must make an appeal to their will because truth like the gospel demands a response. Whenever Paul presented the gospel, it was simply Scriptural truth, no appeal to emotions, no tear-jerking stories; just the truth. I am not saying that testimonies cannot be used, powerful and emotional, but that is not to be the basis of our appeal to others to come to Christ. Our appeal is to the mind and is simple. “**But God demonstrates His own love for us in this; that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**” (Romans 5:8). That is truth. What say you? How will you respond to this truth? A reasonable person would ask “What is this love of God? Why did Christ die?” And again, we respond with the truth of God’s Word.

Beloved, if we would reach our culture for Jesus, we need to be engaged in dialogues with people, explaining, opening the Word of God and then “proving” – giving side-by-side comparisons as to who the Bible says Jesus is. Many of you are familiar with this passage I am about to direct you to; but let me tell you afresh that 1 Peter 3:15 speaks of knowing Jesus well enough to prove your faith is reasonable.

***but sanctify [set apart; regard as so worthy of your heart, mind and soul] Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [to explain, and prove] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;***

Did Paul have such a regard for Jesus so as to want to have dialogues through which he could explain and prove the person and work of Jesus? Do you have such a regard? If not, why not? How do you intend to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so that you may have such interactions with people? This brings us to a final step in reaching a community for Jesus; one that we might forget...

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## 6. Allow the Spirit to work in His time (17:2)

We can be so anxious to have a person make a decision for Christ that we might be working against the Holy Spirit. Notice in our text in verse 2 that Paul had his dialogues for three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue. I have no doubt that Paul was desirous for the people to come to Christ, but he also knew that the Holy Spirit was the one who would work the truth into people’s hearts and mind. Some people will need to hear the gospel multiple times and think through it all before they come. So, we proclaim Christ, we begged for a response, but then we let our sovereign God do His work.

Ok, let’s assume that we adopt this kind of approach to reaching or community for Christ. If we do, can we anticipate anything? The answer is yes and leads us to our second key point.

## II. The Anticipation of reaching a culture for Christ (17:4-9)

As we start this second point, I am going to let you know that there is too much here for us to cover between now and the end of the service. So, I want to divide up these verses into two parts. I would say today that we are going to look at the positive anticipation we can have if we follow the six actions of Paul in proclaiming Christ and that next week we will look at the negative anticipation we can have if we do things Paul’s way. But, if I say that, some of you might not want to come back next week. So, let me say that today we are going to look at the exciting anticipation we can have by following Paul’s method of evangelism and that next week we will look at the more exciting anticipation we can have if we follow Paul’s example.

Now let me remind you that our God is a saving God. Our God is in the business of rescuing people from the bondage of sin and reconciling them to Himself through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. He has promised results. Did you hear me? If we would be resolved to proclaim Christ in our culture, we have the promise of results. And one of those results is the salvation of sinners. God planned in eternity past to save sinners. This being so, we have every reason to believe that God will save sinners through the efforts and actions of our congregation. Paul proclaimed Jesus expecting results and Luke records for us here some exciting results. There are two we will consider.

### 1. Some will be saved (17:4a)

*And some of them were persuaded...*

Praise the Lord. Where the true gospel is proclaimed, some will be saved. Our text tells us that some of them were “persuaded.” The word persuaded means to be convinced, to believe, to rely upon with certainty. This is saving faith. But just who are these “some”? Is it a tiny few or is this “some” a significant number?

Well, if we read all of verse four, what conclusion do you come to? *“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.”* The text indicates that there were Jews, along with a “large number of God-fearing Greeks, along with a number of leading women.” Remember that this first wave of evangelism was taking place among religious people; those who already went to “church” as it were but had not heard the gospel. If a community is to be reached for Christ, then the pseudo religious need to be shown what a real relationship with Christ looks like. People need to not only hear our words, but look at our lives and see that we follow Jesus.

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Listen to what Paul would write to these Thessalonians concerning his coming to them here in Acts 17. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 we read:

**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 [living testimonies of the grace of God]. 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,**

There may be a lot of valid and biblical reasons for proclaiming Christ, but I cannot fathom anything more exciting than the promise that our God saves and He saves via the proclamation of His Word concerning His Son Jesus Christ. We have the promise that some will believe. How exciting to be one of God’s tools and see that process first hand! But there is one more anticipation we ought to have if we proclaim Christ and see some believe...

## **2. Those who believe will evidence it (17:4b)**

*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.*

Do you see the very first way in which these new converts demonstrated their new faith? While Jesus Christ and His work is the grand theme of the book of Acts, there is an equally true and powerful subtheme running through the book. Do you know what it is? Next to Christ and His gospel, what in the book of Acts is paid more attention than anything or anyone else? The church! And what did these new converts do immediately upon coming to Christ? They “joined Paul and Silas.” They, as the KJV puts it, “consorted with” Paul, Silas and by extension, the other believers. When a person comes into relationship with Christ, he is not just linked to Christ, but also with all others who have also received Christ. For believers, the church is not optional add-on to life. When these Thessalonians were saved, they immediately attached themselves, associated themselves, glued themselves to the fellowship. They threw in their common lot with Paul and Silas.

This is so contrary to what we hear from believers today. Just this week I spoke to a man who himself is not tied to a church and justified it because his mentor in another state sees no need or future for the church; so he has started his own ministry apart from the church reaching lost people for Christ. But what is he asking them to be a part of? Have the gates of hell prevailed against the church. Too many today speak of believing in and being joined to Jesus but refuse the to join the church. There are others who “join” the church, calling a fellowship their church, but they are not really connected. Beloved, to join a church is not signing membership papers and promising to come to church for a couple hours a week (if it is convenient). When these Jews and prominent Greeks and women joined the church, they took themselves a new identity and a new devotion to live for Christ in the context of His body, in constant association with others who love Him. Beloved, the New Testament knows nothing of a “Christian” who is not striving to be engaged in the body of Christ.

One of my greatest heartaches, I mean truly a heart ache are to speak to people who claim to be Christians and yet ignore the people whom Jesus has saved, forsaking the body of Christ, the church! Let me tell you something; they are robbing themselves; they are robbing the

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church; and they are robbing Jesus. And for what reasons? Are there any legitimate reasons for breaking the heart of Jesus by neglecting the very people that Jesus died for you to associate with? I came across this interesting and humorous complaint by a pastor who wrote:

*"Football in the fall. Basketball in the winter. Baseball in the spring and summer. This pastor has been an avid sports fan all his life. But I've had it! I quit this sports business once and for all. You can't get me near one of those places again. Want to know why...*

*Every time I went, they asked me for money. The people with whom I had to sit didn't seem very friendly. The seats were too hard and not at all comfortable. I went to many games, but the coach never came to call on me. The referee made a decision with which I could not agree. I suspected that I was sitting with some hypocrites -- they came to see their friends and what others were wearing rather than to see the game.*

*Some games went into overtime, and I was late getting home. The band played some numbers that I had never heard before. It seems that the games are scheduled when I want to do other things. I was taken to too many games by my parents when I was growing up. I don't want to take my children to any games, because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best."*

Sound familiar? Yes, we can complain about anything and yet how is it that we can so easily entertain complaining about the church? Is the church perfect? No, not yet. Do you know that the Lord loves His church, imperfect as it is? Why? Because He intends, in His time, to perfect us by His own doing. And let me tell you this, He has called each one here to love His church, His people, as imperfect as we are. And do you realize that one of the key evidences of your salvation is your love to God as expressed in your love for God's people. What does 1 John 4:7-11 tell us:

*7 Beloved, let us love one another [command], for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God [reason]. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love [warning]. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [plea]*

And what did Jesus say in John 13:35? Anyone? [pause]... **“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** If we are to reach our community for Christ, if we are to proclaim Christ to our pagan culture, it will be through the vehicle of fervent, frequent fellowship with those with whom we hear and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. People will see the reality of our love for God as we love one another; are joined to one another; are associating and consorting with one another. This is how these believers in Thessalonica evidenced their salvation; how will you evidence your salvation but in like manner? Let me close with a few applications of what this looks like from Romans 12:10-11:

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**10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;  
11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**

If we would be “joined” to one another then we must...

1. Treat one another like cherished family members (Romans 12:10a)
2. Lead the way in showing respect to other believers (Romans 12:10b)
3. Be an example to one another in serving the Lord (11)
  - a. Diligently
  - b. Fervently (without laziness or inactivity)
  - c. Enthusiastically (with joy and anticipation)

If we would love like this, we would become more effective in reaching our community for Christ. Will you resolve to proclaim Christ with the actions and anticipation of Paul, knowing that some will be saved and some will join us to the glory of God? May it be so!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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