

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Proclaiming Christ in a Pagan Culture Acts 17:1-9 (Part 3)

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.

Last week we finished looking at the actions needed for reaching a culture for Christ along with the first two of three anticipations we can have if we strive to reach our culture for Christ. Let's review the first two of anticipations beginning with verse 4.

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

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.

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. God has promised results. If we would be resolved to proclaim Christ in our culture, we have the promise of results. 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 those results. Let me remind you of the first two we looked at last week and then we will look at a third anticipation we are to have when proclaiming Christ.

1. *Some will believe (17:4a)*

Notice in verse 5 that some were “**persuaded**” – meaning they were convinced to trust that Jesus was indeed the Christ and Savior. When we do what God asks us to do in proclaiming Christ, some will believe. Additionally...

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

What did these new converts do immediately upon coming to Christ? They “**joined Paul and Silas.**” The idea here is that they placed their identity with Paul and the others. They threw in their common lot; associating themselves, consorting with and participated in the body of Christ. Those who believe; those who are saved; those who have come to see Christ as Lord

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know that He is head of the church, the body of Christ and these long to for the fellowship of the body. This is a clear evidence of salvation; a longing for the fellowship of the church. People do their faith a disservice by neglecting the body of Christ; it hinders not only their fellowship with other believers, but also their fellowship with the God they profess to know and love.

I have shared this illustration before, but it is worth repeating. A friend of mine, who was in his late 20's and wanting so badly to be married found himself at a restaurant routinely where he was waited upon by the same waitress repeatedly. He was a police officer and would do his reports. The two of them got acquainted and my friend was asked by the waitress if he would be interested in dating her. Now my friend had grown very fond of this waitress. She was a single mom, having a young boy. My friend prayerfully considered what he needed to do as this waitress, as nice as she was, had really expressed no interest in spiritual things or in going to church. He made arrangements to talk to her. At that meeting he asked her how she would feel if the person she dated were to want nothing to do with her son; to see him as someone to tolerate at best but ultimately the hope would be that she might abandon him altogether. Of course she responded with disgust at such a prospect. Then he explained to her that this is how he felt with his relationship to Jesus and His church; that he would find it difficult to be with a person that did not want to have anything to do with Christ and His Church. She was not a believer and she did not want to consort with God's people or with God Himself. She did not have enough interest in my friend to appreciate or even tolerate what he found important. My friend knew that he had to be engaged with the people of God. So they never pursued a relationship.

My friend gave evidence that he was a believer, not only consorting with the church, but being careful to keep at minimum anything that might take away from his consorting with God's people. Beloved, devotion to the church where God placed you is one key evidence that He has saved you. How can we claim to love Christ and not love His body? So then, if we are resolved to proclaim Christ in a pagan culture, some will believe and those who do will give evidence of it. But there is one more anticipation we must have...

3. *If we proclaim Christ, some will be antagonistic (17:5-9).*

As we commit ourselves to proclaiming Christ, we can anticipate a reaction; and that reaction is one of antagonism and hostility. We need to remember that we are in a spiritual battle. When sinful hearts are confronted in love with the gospel, their response will be anything but love. So, while it is true that we can expect a harvest as we faithfully make Jesus known; it is equally truth that we can expect hostility. Where the gospel is proclaimed, some will be saved, some will be curious and others will be outright furious. Notice verse 5 with me...

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.

Note with me two things that are true about hostility toward the gospel.

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A. Hostility begins in the heart (5a)

Verse 5 begins with **“But the Jews becoming jealous.”** The word jealous – “zelosantes” – speaks of having a warm or burning feeling against something. You know that feeling? It has the idea of envy, resentment, and increasing anger that bubbles over into a reaction. These men heard the same message that persuaded others to faith, but these rejected and responded harshly because of a heart condition. They were filled with *jealousy*. Do you realize that jealousy is a major reason why some people refuse the message of salvation? Let me show you how this is so. Remember I am telling you this so that you will know what to anticipate as we strive to faithfully proclaim the gospel.

First of all, people reject Christ because they love their sin. I know that I have spoken to many people who may well be convinced that Jesus is who He says He is; that He is a Savior who saves, yet they reject receiving Him, coming to Him, surrendering to Him because of one thing. They love their sin more than they love God. This is the testimony of Scripture. According to John 3:19-20, and here I am reading from the English Standard Version:

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

So, people reject Christ because they love their sin, they resent and get angry at the idea that their lives may not be right with God. But there is a second reason to note; people reject Christ because they do not want to change. When we read that the Jews were “jealous” – we are being told that they did not like the idea of losing what they had. They had some kind of power and control, at least over their own lives and even to some extent over other peoples’ lives. To receive Christ meant to relinquish that control. But they envied it; cherished it and resented anyone or anything that threatened it. What is it that keeps you from coming to Christ? Is it resentment over what might have to change in your life? Is it a habit, a person, or a lifestyle that keeps you from eternal salvation in Christ?

Do you realize that God does not command that you change your life in order to be saved? You are not being asked to clean up your act in order to make yourself presentable to God. You cannot do that. The power to change your life does not reside in you. What God is expecting is for you to be willing to be changed; to plead with God to make you the person He wants you to be. The command of God is simply this; **“Call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved”** (Romans 10:13). It is simply, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...”** (Acts 16:31). You confess that Jesus is who He says He is, Lord and Savior; and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead as your only and sufficient atonement, payment for your sin, and God will take care of the rest. But jealousy will stand in the way. The hostility of jealousy will drive a wedge between what your heart wants on its own and what your heart needs to be saved.

But all of that is a sin of the heart. A person’s pride, ego and reputation is on the line when it comes to confessing one’s self to be a sinner in need of a Savior. To be sure, it all begins with a heart problem; but as the gospel is proclaimed, that heart problem can quickly lead to sinful reactions.

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B. Hostility leads to sinful reactions (5b-9).

Our text reveals the two ways in which those who are hostile in heart toward the gospel, will become hostile in their reactions to the gospel. Let me say to those of you who may be thinking, “Well, I am not a believer and I have never been “hostile” to the gospel or toward believers; or to some of you believers who may be thinking that hostility toward the gospel can only reveal itself in such an angry and overt fashion as we have in our text; that you would be wrong to think that. Hostility toward the gospel may result in harsh, overt reactions; or it can also reveal itself in a more passive-aggressive fashion such as disdain, disgust, painful tolerance. So let me present to you two general reactions toward the gospel that may manifest themselves in either as directly hostile or even in a more passive-aggressive form.

The first reaction to the gospel *is to attack the messenger(s)*. Notice again from verse five, *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.*

When a person cannot or does not want to deal with the truth of the gospel, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; inferring that everyone is a sinner who needs to be saved, one reaction is to attack the character, integrity, and even, if possible, the physical well-being of the messenger. Luke records that some of the Jews rounded up some “wicked men”, those that one Bible commentator referred to was “*lewd fellows of the baser sort.*” Another commentator calls them simply “bums.” These Jews instigated a mob using these men, making their way to Jason’s house to find Paul and Silas. It would seem that Jason was a Jew who had believed the message of the gospel and was practicing hospitality, hosting Paul and the rest of team. These Jews, so jealous and resentful of what the gospel was doing, gathered mercenaries to attack Paul and the team. No doubt that the speech used to incite these men was filled with misrepresentations and lies about the Christians.

While it may be that there are few physical attacks on Christians here in the States, it is clear that Christians are increasingly under attack as to their character and integrity. Because we stand up for declaring all of God’s Word as true; and because God’s Word flies in the face of what so much of our culture wants to say is right; Christians are declared to be bigots, homophobes, non-intellectual, unenlightened, archaic; and the list goes on. Mark my words, the days are upon us that we will begin hearing of Christians being locked-up or physically harmed because of what we believe and proclaim. Tactic number one is to attack the messengers. But there is a second reaction and tactic...

The second reaction toward the gospel *is to attack the message*. There is a progression of attacking the messenger to attacking the message in verses 6-7...

When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren [it was not isolated to just one believer] before the city authorities, shouting, [notice the slander and overstatements] “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 [the Christians are all lawbreakers], saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

After attacking the messengers, there is one final charge given to stir the emotions of the crowd and it twisted the message of the gospel. You might remember that Jesus was charged

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similarly in Luke 23:2, **“And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.”** Is it true that Paul preached there is another king? Yes, but not in terms of mounting a military coup, as is implied here, but one who masters hearts and minds. All the crowd heard was political takeover. This got the crowd going as we read in verses 8-9,

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.

Where were Paul and Silas in all this? Evidently being protected, for we read in verse 10, **“The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.”** Concerned for their well-being, the brethren sent Paul and Silas on to Berea. I cannot begin to imagine the heartache of Paul who only wanted to proclaim the truth about Jesus, life and salvation.

In verse 9 we are told that a pledge was received from Jason and the others. In today's language, we would say that they posted bond. The reason it appears that Paul had to leave so quickly was that the city authorities put Jason and the church under some kind of monetary bond, a bond the believers would lose if Paul was seen again in Thessalonica. It is one thing to continue preaching after being beaten or stone, as Paul had; but it is a more difficult matter to see your friends and host suffer for one's boldness. So Paul had to leave Thessalonica.

How did Paul see this situation? It would seem that Paul saw all this hostility as satanic opposition. We read in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18,

17 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. 18 For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us.

Paul considered the pledge imposed on Jason as a devise of Satan to stop the spread of the gospel. Did it work? No! Paul reported this 1 Thess. 1:6-8...

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.

I love this because it reminds us that the message of the gospel is not dependent upon “Paul-like” people to spread. No, beloved, it is spread as the people of God, people like you and me, proclaim the gospel of God. We are the imitators of Paul, Silas and of our Lord. So, one of the reactions to the gospel is hostility, which starts as a sin of the heart and leads to the sins of reaction. But what does all this have to do with us? What does this mean for us? Beloved, we have to make a resolve...

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C. We must be resolved (17:10)

If we are resolved to proclaim Jesus in a pagan culture; if we are determined to see men and women, boys and girls, rich and poor come to Christ, then know this; we will have to contend with slander and misrepresentation. It is already around us. We hear things more and more like, “Evangelical Christians are bigots. They are so narrow as to believe their way is the only way. They send their missionaries to other countries who then disrupt the lives of good and happy people. They even go to Muslim countries and force sincere individuals to go against their family and culture. They coerce good people, who simply choose to live life differently than the Bible, to change their ways. These radicals have not learned their lesson from the Crusades, choosing rather to do their work of proselyting, thus causing families to be torn apart. They claim to be doing God’s work, but those evangelicals are a dangerous threat to society.”

Am I making this up? Consider the content of a military training briefing dated in April of this year. Soldiers in the U.S. military have been told in a training briefing that evangelical Christians are the No. 1 extremist threat to America – ahead of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, KKK, Nation of Islam, al-Qaida, Hamas and others. (WND) Are we an extremist threat? Is Christianity *disrupting, forcing, and coercing* people? But how are we to respond to such things? We have two choices.

1. We can run and hide.

How tempting it might be to lay low and tone it down. Maybe we should not offend people with the truth. Beloved, the gospel is offense. There is no way around it. If people are not offended when proclaim Christ then I would venture to say that we have not shared Christ. When I say offended, I do not mean that we are being so obnoxious and harsh with our words that people take offense to us; no, the offense comes as people come face to face with the truth that Jesus came to save sinners and we are sinners in need of saving.

When Paul was faced with such oppositions, did he retreat? May it never be! Our orders are simply and clear. You know them. Acts 1:8, “**but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.**” Let me remind you that we are about as remote from Jerusalem as anyone could be. Shall we retreat and hide? No...so what is our second choice of action?

2. We must be resolved and proclaim the gospel (17:10)

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Looking again at verse 10, we find that Paul and Silas, in order not to bring harm to Jason and the others, did move on to Berea; not to lay low; not to stop proclaiming Jesus, but simply to find yet another venue; another means to preach Christ. In verse 11 it is clear that Paul and Silas were as determined as ever to make Christ known. Sometimes we have to rethink our approach. Sometimes we have to leave one area, or one place and try another; but the goal is always the same. Preach Christ; make Christ known. It will not generally be easy. It might cost something. But oh, to see people saved; to see disciples of Christ be made. That is why we are here, is it not? Is this not the reason Christ has called us together? Has this become your personal

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mandate; that wherever you find yourself, your intent is to make learners of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20).

As I close, let me give you some ideas on how to accomplish this resolve to proclaim Christ in our culture.

1. *Identify an unsaved person in your life, maybe two or three for whom you have a burden to see come to Christ.*

Please, I urge you write down their names; allow your eyes to see that name burned into your mind.

2. *Identify any reasons or hindrances in your life right now that keep you from fulfilling a resolve to make Christ known.*

Do you have a pet sin that keeps you from serving God in this way? Are you a judgmental person that has forgotten that you were one like every other sinner, separated from God, hostile in mind toward God; and engaged in evil deeds. For many of you, what keeps you from proclaiming Christ is your schedule and if you were honest with yourself, your schedule is most likely filled with a number of trivial pursuits. If you are too busy to make Christ known on a regular basis, then you are too busy. Whatever your reason or hindrance, ask the Lord to remove those today!

Response: Four practical steps to make evangelism real in your life...

3. *Be resolved to ask at least one person a day if he or she has heard the truth about Christ.*

That will open the door of opportunity to proclaim Christ, and...

4. *Be ready for a response.*

Remember that our God is the business of saving people; so, some will be saved; there is a harvest to be had; but you might also run into hostility, in which you can rejoice because we have been promised that as well. In Luke 6:22-23 Jesus said, **22 Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.**

While temporarily uncomfortable, there is a joy to be had in sharing Christ, whether it brings a harvest or hostility, the blessing is obedience to Christ command to be His witnesses, making followers of Him to the glory of God. Would you resolve to be involved in this with us?

Soli Deo Gloria

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