

- *We are in week 7 of the second great road trip of ancient Christianity- just spent 4 weeks in city of Philippi... good time to re-ask the question. WHY?*

✠ **Why are we on this road trip?**

- *Why are we so deeply considering these stories from the Book of Acts? What's the big deal?*
- *The BIG DEAL is that Acts is a historical treasure trove of stories revealing the purposes, priorities, and nature of God- as seen in how Christ- by the Holy Spirit- worked through this first generation of believers. People just like you and me.*
- *We've discussed how much of Acts is DESCRIPTIVE in nature, as opposed to being NORMATIVE. Description of HOW and WHAT God did then, not necessarily what God is doing today. THAT SAID...*
- *At times in Acts we do see CORE THEOLOGY. Direct truth that applies to all church for all time. One example is Acts 15:19- "Don't make it difficult for outsiders to turn to God." Some would call principle, but more than that. It is a revelation of God's heart for this world, profound calling for how we as church go about our lives, and a command underlying some of the broadest themes of the New Testament.*
- *But most of the time the power of Acts to us today is through PRINCIPLES. In a given story we will see principles of God's nature as expressed through the choices and actions of these first believers. 2000 years later our life circumstances may be very different, but these principles remain the same.*
- *Last week we explored the question WHY Paul didn't claim his rights as a Roman citizen, when to do so would have almost certainly protected him from injustice, abuse, and imprisonment.*
- *In his actions we saw the principle that rather than claiming our rights to benefit ourselves (or the church), the Spirit of CHRIST IN US will, at times, lead us to LAY DOWN our rights to benefit OTHERS, FURTHER the Gospel, and bring GLORY to God.*
- *Great conversations this week about that - it's a fundamental NT principle, intensely practical, and yet requires thought, prayer, wrestling in how applied in messy world far less black/white than we would like.*
- *TODAY, will see similar principle also requires great thought, prayer in how applied- Like last week, CORE principle to nature of God and how HE works through the community of believers - both THEN, and today.*
- *Today's story takes place at the next stop on Paul's journey, in the city of Thessalonica*

✠ **Next stop, Thessalonica**

Acts 17:1-9 *When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.*

- *Okay, little bit of background*
- *MAP in program. We just left Philippi- top of map- and moving southwest along the ancient VIA EGNACIA, through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, to arrive at Thess- about 75 miles and 5 day walk from Philippi.*

- **Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia. Like Philippi, It was highly Romanized, and located both on the Egnacian way AND a major port- which meant it was wealthy and influential. 25-75k residents.**
- **Holy Spirit is working strategically through Paul. Thessalonica would NOT be a friendly environment to the believers. BUT, if gospel could take hold here, would be place of great influence across Macedonia and the entire Mediterranean region.**
- **AND, unlike Philippi, was a larger Jewish population in Thessalonica, meaning there was a synagogue, where Paul went first.**

“²As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said.”

- **NOW, lots of people are about to get really upset about this. With Paul, another day, another riot. BUT WHY? What did Paul say that upset people so much? Let’s talk a bit about...**

✠ The message

- **First of all, Luke tells us Paul REASONED with people of Synagogue for at least three weeks. In other words, he engaged them where THEY WERE, on their turf.**
- **This is a picture of dialog, discussion, relationship. Listen to how Paul describes this time in letter he would write some years later- 1 Thessalonians 2:7ff**

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

- **Think of that statement- we didn’t just share the gospel, we shared our lives as well. PRINCIPLE!**
- **For his message, Paul used their Hebrew scriptures- what we call the OT, to demonstrate their messiah had to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. AND THIS HAS HAPPENED! This is the messiah YOU look forward to, and HE HAS COME. His name is Jesus.**
- **Think about this for a minute. For the people of Thessalonica, this was all brand new. Jesus who?**
- **Paul looking for a place of common understanding, which he finds in their community and scriptures.**
- **Paul doesn’t impose himself. He doesn’t just walk in and say “YOU ARE ALL SINNERS. You are WRONG, and here is how you need to change.”**
- **MAKE NO MISTAKE- message would undoubtedly include reality of sin, humanities separation from God, and need of repentance. THIS WOULD COME, but Paul STARTS by establishing a place of common understanding, relationship, and mutual respect.**
- **Do you know what that is? PRINCIPAL! THIS takes time, patience, humble heart, and a willingness to listen. To do this is difficult, but it is also POWERFUL- as we see from the RESPONSE...**

✠ The response

⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

- **Paul's reasoning w/Jews only marginally successful. However, many 'God fearing' Greeks believed. These were gentiles who were NOT Jewish converts, but believed in A God, and had developed an interest in God of Israel, and thus were part of broader community of the Synagogue... Lydia**
- **The 'Prominent women' who believed were likely wives or family members of the cities magistrates and political leaders. They would have been quite influential in their own right.**
- **BOTTOM LINE, the ministry was successful, and it led to a strong reaction.**

✚ The reaction

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters (evil rabble, thugs) from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

- **The Jews were jealous. I guess they were! They felt threatened, deeply angry, and they lost it!**
- **REACTION took a bit of planning. Basically, they put together a goon squad (princess bride reference), couldn't find Paul and Silas (probably hidden for safety), and so they drag Jason before authorities.**
- **This is only place we hear about Jason. He was most likely a gentile believer – common Greek name- who like Lydia opened his home to Paul and his team.**
- **Luke tells us accusations hurled at Paul/ believers**
- **First, that they were trouble makers. Seeking to disturb the peace, cause social unrest. This was an old charge commonly levied against the young church, and it was patently false. Trouble and controversy often surrounded the community of believers, but they were never the instigators. The trouble came from those seeking to prevent the spread of the Gospel, not from the church itself. What do you call that? PRINCIPLE.**
- **The second charge was far more serious, that Paul was seeking to subvert the authority of Caesar, by claiming there was another king, namely, Jesus.**
- **NOW, this was true in a sense. The gospel, and broader teaching Paul brought, absolutely claimed that Christ was God, was King, and as such was the authority in all of life.**
- **HOWEVER, and this is important, neither Paul nor any early teaching of church sought to undermine political authority of Caesar. Quite the opposite.**
- **Church doctrine, from the jump, taught followers of Christ to respect and obey the government authorities, with the only exception being any law or command contrary to the gospel and the nature of God. You may recall the apostle's response to the Sanhedrin's demand they stop speaking of Jesus... "Who do you think we should obey? God, or you?"**
- **And yet, we find this recurring principle in scripture**

1 Peter 2:13-14 *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

- **Of course, not all political authorities do this. Sometimes the opposite. Not all are just. This was the case for Paul and Peter. And therein lies the rub- these dynamics can be difficult to navigate, things are rarely black and white, and honest people often disagree about how to respond to the injustice and overreach- perceived or real- of the authorities in our lives. The NT writers knew this when they wrote.**
- **That said, when wrestling with these issues, there is a reality- lens- we must consider.**

Reality! The 1st century church did not seek to bring about social and moral change through POLITICAL power. Rather, the gospel and community of disciples spread throughout the Roman world as lives were transformed by the Grace, truth, and New Life of JESUS CHRIST.

- **Example. Criticism leveled at New Testament, specifically Paul, is that he did not specifically denounce and fight against slavery. This ignores fact that slavery is absolutely incompatible with the value of Human Life inherent to a NT worldview**
- **But, it is true that Paul's focus is not condemning the institution of slavery, or, for that matter, other social injustices of his day. We see this in letter to Titus...**

Titus 2:9-14 *Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted,*

- **WHY would Paul say this? Why teach people to be model citizens when they are living in an unjust situation?**

so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

- **Perhaps greatest example is Jesus himself. His disciples- as well as all of Israel- expected messiah to restore Israel through political power. BUT that was not God's plan, and Jesus demonstrated this on the cross, when He gave his life for everyone, including those abusing political power.**
- **DON'T HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING. Across Church history God has raised up and used disciples in places of leadership and political influence to bring important change to society. We NEED wise, Spirit filled believers who reflect the integrity and character of God- who express the fruit of the spirit in places of leadership in our communities.**
- **POLITICAL CHANGE is important. AND YET, as the CHURCH- if we agree God calls us to bring transformation to our societies and advance the goodness, values, and nature of God in our communities, the ESSENTIAL MEANS of this happening is NOT political change. It is the witness of the Gospel bringing hope and transformation to individual lives.**
- **And so, Paul was not seeking to challenge authority of Caesar or even the local officials. AND, the people who resisted him KNEW THIS. SO, what was big deal? When it came to message Paul proclaimed...**

✠ **Just what was so offensive?**

- **Truth of Resurrection. This is truly the great offense, and we will discuss this in greater depth later.**

- **Message of Grace. That we are NOT saved by keeping the law. As we've already seen before, this was a direct affront to the believers and power of the Jewish leadership.**
- **Scriptural evidence that Jesus WAS the messiah, that the messiah they claimed to be waiting for HAS come, that GOD has done this- and Jesus was NOT who they expected the Messiah to be.**
- **BUT BOTTOM LINE...**

The big offense wasn't what Paul and his companions said, it was how people RECIEVED what was said. The big offense was the evidence of CHANGED lives.

- **Paul could have talked for a month of Sabbaths, but if no one received this, if no lives were changed, then let him keep talking. But people DID receive the message, and their lives WERE CHANGED. Paul writes about this in the letter he sent to the church...**

1 Thessalonians 2:13-14 *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews*

- **In the midst of injustice and suffering, the message of the Gospel grew- this is what could not be tolerated. YOU SEE...**

☩ Reality! When it comes down to it, the people who resisted the gospel were not offended by Paul and his companions. They were offended by GOD.

Likewise, the New Testament cries out for Jesus' disciples to live in such a way that people will not be offended by US, but by the GOSPEL.

1 Peter 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

1 Peter 4:15-16 *If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

1 Peter 3:15-17 *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

- **As we continue to navigate the challenges of our times, may we be known as people who do GOOD- who love and care about our community- and if offense is taken, let it be because of the Gospel, not because of us.**
- **Something to think about, to wrestle with. May it be said of us.**