

Acts 17: v 22-31

In our desire to complete our journey through Acts before the beginning of Advent, I am challenged with covering chapters 17 and 18. We could simply read them - it is a gripping story of Paul's second missionary journey. He visited Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus, then journeyed to Caesarea, Jerusalem and Antioch - a distance of some 1770 miles. The whole missionary trip was some 2,700 miles.

But, for brevity, I first want to home in on the recurrent themes for each of these places.

Thessalonica

17v 2 As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,"

5 But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters 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.

Berea

17v 10 On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

13 But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

Athens

17v **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Corinth

18v **4** Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

6 But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest.

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

Ephesus

18v **19** They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

What we see is that everywhere he went he first engaged with the Jewish community but he also faced opposition from the wider society, often initiated by jealous Jews. And right at the heart of this part of the story we have the record of what Paul preached to those in Athens.

To set the scene, we have Epicureans, who favoured sensual enjoyment, fine food and drink, arguing with Stoics, who were indifferent to pain, pleasure, grief, or joy. Both rounded on Paul saying, "What is this babbler trying to say?"

We're told they all met at the Areopagus, effectively the local council. And here Paul sought to draw on their history and religious inclination - in the midst of all the altars and places of worship there was an altar to the unknown god.

Paul brilliantly brings this unknown god into sharp focus. He doesn't deny the other gods, or get sidetracked by them. (And as an aside, sometimes we can get sidetracked by pulling up

weeds rather than planted roses. We speak against things, we pray against things rather than speaking truth into situations and praying for blessings on others.)

Paul homes in on God the creator, the one who doesn't need a temple for habitation, he is the Lord. He engages with the culture and quotes their philosophers: "we live and move and have our being" and but he adds "In Him". This brings us back to a living God.

And we're his offspring - we're not gold nor stone so neither should God be an image from such material. God is done with overlooking such error, now we are to repent. God's chosen man will bring justice and the proof is in his resurrection.

Nowhere does he mention Jesus or Christ but the message is clear. And the response? Some sneered, some wanted to hear Paul again and others believed there and then., including a member of the council and a woman named Damaris.

But, what can we learn? I think there are two things we can take to heart -

1. We can take the everyday things that we have in common with other people and we can use them to present the simple gospel. We can simply slip in words of encouragement or direction without getting all heavy and preachy.

2. We don't have to see everyone come to faith when we share the gospel. Some will sneer, some will want more but some may responded immediately.

In 2Tim 4v2 Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him to be ready to speak the word in season and out of season. We can see how Paul used this principle in Athens. He took the opportunity presented to him.

Why not look for such an opportunity this coming week?

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