

Episode 5: October 4/5

The Witness in Greece II: Thessalonica, Berea, Athens

Acts 17:1-34

Paul and Silas continue on their missionary journey.

1. Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (17:1–9).
   1. For three Sabbaths in a row, Paul preaches the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in the Jewish synagogues (17:1–3).
   2. Some Jews and many Gentile men and women are saved (17:4).
   3. Mob and the missionaries (17:5–9).
      1. A mob rushes into Jason’s house, where Paul and Silas are staying, in search of the missionaries (17:5).
      2. Unable to find Paul and Silas, the mob drags Jason before the city council (17:6a).
      3. *The accusations* (17:6b–9).
         1. Paul and Silas are charged with troublemaking, and Jason is charged with allowing them to stay in his home (17:6b–7a).
         2. Paul and Silas are charged with treason (17:7b–9): “They profess allegiance to another king, Jesus.”
2. Paul and Silas in Berea (17:10–15).
   1. Openness to God’s Word (17:10–12).
      1. They listen eagerly to the teaching and research it and check the Scriptures (17:10–11).
      2. Many Jews believe, as do some of the Greek men and women (17:12).
   2. Opposition to God’s Word (17:13–15).
      1. *The demonstration against Paul* (17:13): Some Jews from Thessalonica hear about Paul, come to Berea and instigate another riot.
      2. *Paul escapes to Athens* (17:14–15).
3. Paul in Athens (17:16–17).
   1. Once the center of the Civilized World.
   2. A city full of Idols.
   3. The Athenian Audience and Attitudes (17:18–21): Four Ways to Cope: These are sophisticated Philosophical doctrines- I am in danger of oversimplifying them.
      1. The Jews in the Synagogue (*safety in tradition, comfort in routine*): Represent cynical conservatism.
      2. The Epicureans: (*This life is all there is, so live it up. Don’t worry about sin or eternal consequences*).
         1. Represent coping through pleasure.
         2. Paul acknowledges this way of thinking: *1 Corinthians 15:32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*
      3. The Stoics (*grin and bear it*).
         1. Coping through *virtue*.
         2. “Don’t let it get to you”- either pain or pleasure. Ultra-disciplined.
         3. Control emotions and Passion.
         4. Marcus Aurelius (Roman Emperor):
            1. “When Forced, as it seems, by thine environment to be utterly disquieted, return with all speed into thyself, staying in discord no longer than thou must.”
            2. “There are many bitter pills, but we welcome them in hope of health.”
            3. “If it is good for the community, it cannot be evil for the individual.”
         5. Endurance without hope.
      4. The Aereopagite Philosohers (*try anything*).
         1. Philosopher: A Lover of Wisdom.
         2. V. 21 *(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)*
4. Paul’s Sermon (17:22–23): The Good news of the Unknown God.
   1. Paul does not use the “Pentecost” sermon style, preaching from the Jewish Scriptures. Instead he begins with the observation he has made about the city and its people.
   2. The Athenians are “very religious,” as evidenced by the presence of so many idols. The entire city is filled with shrines and temples (17:16–17).
   3. **Paul says “I’ve got something New, (at least new to you) but it has been here all along. Better yet, I’ve got something real.”**
   4. The Answer is not in false idols: *v.29 “we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-- an image made by man's design and skill.”*
   5. Unknown God- Right under your nose: *v. 22-23 “…Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious…. I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.”*
   6. He is a God you can’t contain: *v. 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.”*
   7. He is the one who has what you really need: *v.25 “because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”*
   8. He wants to be in a relationship with you.
      1. *“v.27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”*
      2. “*v.28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'”*
   9. The time for ignorance is over- the time for salvation is at hand. God will someday judge the world through Jesus Christ, whom he raised from the dead (17:31).
5. **The reaction to this sermon** (17:32–34).
   * 1. *Some mock* (17:32a).
     2. *Some delay* (17:32b): They want to hear more later.
     3. *Some believe* (17:33–34).