

PRAYER FOCUS: *Pray for Receptive Soil in Our Community*

HIDE IT IN OUR HEARTS: *Linger in the Text and Let it Dwell Richly*

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

—1 Thessalonians 2:13



Turning the World Right Side Up

Come Over and Help Us: A Story of Changed Places

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HEAR IT: Listen to the Text and Discover the Truth

Introduction:

Paul's second missionary journey that began in Acts 16 leads him to Macedonia. It is a story of changed **plans**, changed **people**, and changed **places**. [This morning's notes provides a short summary of the previous two weeks should you wish to discuss them.] Our focus today in Acts 17, is the story of **the impact of the gospel on two places** specifically: **Thessalonica**, the capital of Macedonia, and **Berea**, a city off the beaten path.

READ OR REVIEW THE PASSAGE: ACTS 17:1-15.

HASH IT OUT: Look into the Text and Develop the Truth

As Paul enters these two cities, he follows the pattern that we observed in his first missionary journey, preaching the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. One reason is very **practical**, for the synagogue provides a natural and convenient starting point for this former Pharisee. The second reason is very **theological** as expressed in Romans 1:16.

But in the city from which Paul had just departed, Philippi, **his strategy was different**. Do you remember **why**? And do you recall **how Paul implemented this principle of Jewish priority in the city of Philippi**?

The **Point** that the Passage **Illustrates**:

As we come to the cities of Thessalonica and Berea, the primary focus is on **how each city responded to the gospel**, while also reminding us as a church what **our primary task** is in regard to the communities in which we live.

We are not called to **reformation** of culture, but to the **proclamation** of the gospel. For only the preaching of the gospel can bring about the type of genuine **transformation** that has both **immediate** and **eternal fruit**.

1. As you consider this truth and review the main point below, discuss how easy it can be for the church to get side-tracked and off mission, including what might even be good pursuits.

If the gospel is consistently, clearly and courageously proclaimed,... then hearts and minds can be genuinely converted,... and homes and communities can be radically transformed."

2. Paul was clearly confident in the power of the gospel (**the Seed**). Identify in the text (Acts 17:2 ,3) how that confidence was manifested and how this should shape our approach to both Scripture and evangelism.

*"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 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.'*

—Acts 17:2, 3

3. The **Parable of the Sower, the Seed and the Soils** (Matthew 8:3-23; Luke 8:4-15) is illustrated not only in how Paul carries out his ministry, but how the two communities respond (**the Soil**). The response in both Thessalonica and Berea were similar and yet different. There is both **Receptive Soil** and **Resistant Soil**.

- a. Compare and contrast the varied responses in each place.

Receptive: Soil: Thessalonica

*"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.*

—Acts 17:4

Receptive: Soil: Berea

*"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for **they received the word with great eagerness**, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."*

—Acts 17:11

Resistant: Soil: Thessalonica

*"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...**"*

—Acts 17:5

- b. How should **the condition of the soil** impact our understanding of and approach to our own community?

The **Principles** that we should **Imitate**:

1. While the soil in our community may be different than that of Thessalonica or Berea, we can still follow Paul's example of proclaiming the gospel, **consistently, clearly** and **courageously**. And because it is God who opens hearts (see Acts 16:14), we should do so **prayerfully** and **expectantly**. Imagine the impact if we would embrace this mission with greater passion and priority? Could the description of the Thessalonians be repeated today?

"...You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 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,..." (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8)