

# SHARING THE FAITH

## Acts 17:1-10

Paul was a man with a message. His message revolved around the person of Jesus. Paul had started out as the most anti-Christian person one could find and then he met the living Jesus. That changed his life forever. For Paul, knowing Jesus meant leaving the comfort of home and traveling throughout the world to introduce others to the One he had come to know. He lived to share his faith with others. That will be seen in this chapter.

17:1	17:5	17:10
Ministry of Sharing	Enemies of Sharing	Recipients of Sharing

Paul's first area of ministry since his arrival in Europe had been Philippi. There had been those who believed and there had been those who not only rejected the message, but who also sought to bring about opposition to that message. The same pattern is going to be seen in this passage.

## PRESENTING THE FAITH

*<sup>1</sup> Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.*

*<sup>2</sup> And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> 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."*

*<sup>4</sup> And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. (Acts 17:1-4).*

The province of Macedonia was spanned by a Roman road that ran from one end of the province to the other. This road was called the Via Ignatia -- the Ignatian Way. I've stood on that road and it isn't much compared to our modern superhighways. But it served to connect the cities of the land together. It would have been this path that Paul would have taken westward from Philippi, passing one town and then another until he finally came to Thessalonica.

1. The Place for Sharing: *Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews (17:1).*

Thessalonica continues to be one of the major cities of Greece. Sprawled along the sparkling waters of the Thermic Gulf, the seaside city is a center for commerce and trade.

Tracing the name of the city demands a little historical background. King Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great and the namesake of Philippi, fought a major battle against the city-state of Thessaly to the south. Following his victory, he found that one of his concubines had given birth to a daughter, so he named her Thessaloniki -- "victory of Thessaly" (today there is a sports company that calls itself Nike -- "victory").

Thessaloniki went on to marry Cassander who, following the death of Alexander, became the king of Macedon. He named this city after his wife and it became the major city of Macedonia.

Thessalonica has suffered the ravages of earthquakes over the years and a particularly bad one in the early 1900's resulted in heavy damage, some of which is still being repaired. One particular city block was due for renovation and the entire block was leveled so that a new building complex could be erected. As the construction workers were preparing the foundations, they came across some buried structures. It turned out to be the forum of the ancient city. The Greek government has since turned it into a protected site and has conducted extensive excavations there.

Paula and I visited Thessalonica in the summer of 2004. There is an old Crusader castle that overlooks the city and from which we were able to get a panoramic view of the harbor. The modern city generally has a layer of smog, thanks to the present industrialization. That night it rained and washed the smog away and, when we went down to the harbor on the following morning, we could see Mount Olympus in plain view across the gulf.

Paul's ministry in this city reflected that sort of diversity. This was a Greek city under the shadow of the paganism of Mount Olympus. It also had a significant Jewish element. Whereas there had been no Jewish synagogue in Philippi, there was a Jewish presence and a synagogue here in Thessalonica.

2. A Plan for Sharing: *And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for*

*three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures (17:2).*

Paul made it his regular practice to always begin his ministry in a city by starting with the synagogue. Why did he do this? It was because this was where he could find some who already had a knowledge of the Scriptures. It is a little like the bank robber who was interviewed and asked why he robbed banks. His reply was, “Because that is where the money is.” It was for the same reason that Paul would begin with the synagogue. This was where the people were who already had an interest in knowing God and knowing the Scriptures. Therefore Paul could come here and reason with them from the Scriptures.

Another reason Paul’s custom was to begin at the synagogue was that this was a place where he would have a ready hearing. It was customary for such synagogues to permit a visiting rabbi to come and to preach.

Notice that there is nothing wrong with having a strategy and a plan to ministry. How many times have I heard someone complain that they do not care for organized religion? The thought always comes to mind whether anyone would prefer disorganized religion.

Notice also that Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures. The term here for “reasoned” (aorist of διαλεγομαι) is that from which we get our English word “dialogue.” The term is used almost exclusively by Luke. The one exception is in Jude 1:9 -- *Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and **argued** about the body of Moses.*

3. Precepts of Sharing: *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.” (17:3).*

This was the message that Paul preached at the synagogue of Thessalonica. It was the message that the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied of a Messiah that had to suffer and rise again. It was the same message that Peter preached in Acts 2.

4. Persuaded by Sharing: *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women (17:4).*

Paul’s message resulted in a number of people being persuaded of the truth of the gospel. Some of these were Jews. Some are described as “leading women.” Furthermore, there was *a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks*. These were

Greeks who had been attending the synagogue, but who had not undertaken the rite of circumcision.

## FIGHTING THE FAITH

*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 coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.*

*6 And 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 And 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. 10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (Acts 17:5-10a).*

We are involved in a spiritual war. There is an enemy. The weapons of our warfare are not tanks and missiles. They are spiritual weapons. They are made up of things like righteousness and faith and the word of God. As people begin to come to Christ, it is not long before the enemy institutes a counter attack.

Notice where this attack originated. You would have thought that it would have come from the Greek pagans. They were idol worshippers. They practiced all sorts of immorality. They were without God. But that is not where the attack started. It came, instead, from the Jews. It came from the very people who ought to have known better. It came from the people who already had the Old Testament Scriptures and who were already worshiping the One God.

What accounted for such a thing? We are not left to speculate. The passage itself tells us that they were motivated by jealousy.

1. The Attitude of the Enemy: *But the Jews, becoming jealous...(17:5).*

When we read this, we should realize that this does not mean that every Jew in the synagogue became jealous. After all, there were some of the Jews who heard the gospel and who believed. But the leaders of the Jewish synagogue were moved by jealousy.

Jealousy on the part of a Christian leader is a terrible thing. It is indicative of a deeper and an underlying issue. When a Christian leader is jealous of another Christian leader, it is because he is intent upon building up his own kingdom rather than building up the kingdom of God.

Such an attitude is not limited to leaders. The same holds true for all Christians. You are building a kingdom. The question is whether you are building your own kingdom or are you building God's kingdom? If you look into your heart and see jealousy there, then you have the answer.

2. The Assistants to the Enemy: *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 (17:5).*

What we see here is a repetition of what took place in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. The jealous Jewish leaders do not have the authority to take action against Paul. They do not run the city. But they manage to stir up a mob.

This is significant to one of Luke's purposes in writing the book of Acts. This book is written as a legal and judicial defense of the Christian faith. As Paul was taken before the Roman Emperor, Christianity itself was going on trial. Luke adds this observation to show that while Christianity was law-abiding, the enemies of Christianity had gone out of their way to stir up riots and mobs.

We are called to do things decently and in order and to obey the laws of the land in which we live as long as those laws do not conflict with God's commands and only then in the area in which they conflict with God's commands.

3. The Accusation of the Enemy: *And 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." (17:6-7).*

Notice the shouting that took place. When you have to shout to make your case, that is evidence that you don't have much of a case.

The message of the cross will always bring one of two responses. Either you will believe or you will get angry. One thing that message will not allow you to do is to ignore it.

The accusation does not fit with the motives of the accusers. The reason the Jews had fomented a riot was because of their jealousy. But the accusation that they make is a smoke screen.

What about this accusation? We must admit that there is a certain level of truth to the charges.

- We DO seek to upset the world. We are seeking to turn the world back to God. Our means for such a task is the sharing of the story of Jesus. We are seeking to upset the world, not because we like upsetness, but because the world is already upset that we hold to a message that can set it aright.

The world has been upside down since the day that Adam and Eve ate a forbidden fruit. People have gotten used to it. They think it is right side up. Jesus came to set the world right.

- We DO have another king. His name is Jesus. He does not tell us to rebel against local governors or presidents or emperors. His kingdom is not of this world. But He demands our complete and overriding loyalty.

## FINDING THE FAITH

*10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 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.*

*12 Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. (Acts 17:10-14).*

The believers secretly slipped Paul and Silas out of town and sent them on their way to Berea. Berea was and continues to be a small town on the edge of the hills overlooking the Macedonian plains. It would have taken Paul and Silas several days to walk there as it was not on the Ignatian Way.

Berea also hosted a Jewish Synagogue. It was located near the top of the hill on which

the city is built. Once again, Paul and Silas came to the synagogue and began to share with them the message of Jesus. Their reception here was a study of contrasts with that which they had received at Thessalonica.

<b>Thessalonica</b>	<b>Berea</b>
Large coastal city	Small inland town
The synagogue leaders had an attitude of jealousy	Those in the synagogue were noble-minded.
They searched for a way to discredit Paul and Silas and their ministry, even if it involved given false witness.	They searched the Scriptures to see if the message of Paul and Silas was true.

There is something delightfully winsome about the Bereans. They did not blindly accept the preaching of Paul. Instead, they sought to go back to the Scriptures and to check out his message against the Word of God. Is that bad? No, it is a good thing. May we always be so noble-minded!

There is a lesson here. It is that we ought to learn to check things out for ourselves. That is increasingly true in this day and age where urban legends are the rule of the day and when they have moved up to light speed via their proliferation on the Internet. Make it a point to check things out, whether they are spiritual or political or social or otherwise. We ought to be known as truth-tellers and we can only do that as we take a lesson from the Bereans and take the time to see whether these things are true.

Unfortunately, the nobility of the situation did not remain that way. It was not too long before some from Thessalonica arrived with the deliberate agenda of stirring up trouble for Paul and his team. Since Paul seems to have been the focus of these complaints, they sent Paul out of town while Timothy and Silas remained to continue the work.