

60. The Development of the Church in Thessalonica

In our last topic, we saw that we want to encourage our physical and spiritual children so that they know that they are loved. We also saw that such encouragement is a blessing to all Christians. Paul and Silas took time to encourage the new Christians in Philippi before they left the city, because they wanted them to know that they were greatly loved. When Paul and Silas left Philippi, they took the road that led to the next large city in the region of Macedonia.

Acts 17:1-4 says, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, *and saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” The largest city in the region of Macedonia was the city of Thessalonica with a population of almost two hundred thousand. That was the city to which Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke headed when they left Philippi.

The city of Amphipolis was about 30 miles from Philippi, so that was probably where they stayed for a night. Then, the city of Apollonia was about 30 miles further, so they probably also stayed in that city for a night. However, their goal was to go to the city of Thessalonica which was about 40 miles further. This city had a larger Jewish population than Philippi so when they reached Thessalonica they immediately located the synagogue of the Jews. In every city where he went, Paul always began with the Jews. Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Paul and the team with him always began at the synagogue for two reasons. First, they wanted to give the Jews the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Second, in every synagogue there were God fearing Gentiles who wanted to learn more about God that attended the synagogue to hear the Old Testament read and explained.

We see in these verses, exactly how Paul presented the Gospel to the Jews in the synagogues. The word translated “reasoned” means *to discuss, speak or reason with*. Paul reasoned with the Jews by showing them what the Old Testament Scriptures had to say about the Christ. The word translated “Christ” means *the Anointed One* and was used by the Jews to speak about the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Here, we see that Paul used the Old Testament to explain and demonstrate what the Old Testament taught about the fact that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Once he had shown them what the Old Testament said about the Christ then he explained to them that Jesus is the Christ.

This gives us a real key for working with the Trinity in evangelism. We are to discuss or explain what the Bible teaches about the death and resurrection of Christ. Then, we discuss the various questions that people have. We also show from the Bible what it says about the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who fulfills the promises that God gave in the Old Testament. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” John 16:8-11 says

that the Holy Spirit convicts or convinces of the sin of unbelief, the fact that Christ is the Righteous One, the fact that Satan has already been judged by the resurrection and that those who continue to follow him will share in his judgment. John 6:44 says that the Father is the One who draws people to Christ. Then, in Luke 19:10 Christ said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” We read and explain the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit convicts. The Father draws and the Son seeks and saves. We work with the Trinity as we read and explain the Scriptures and each member of the Trinity also does His work.

After three weeks of Paul explaining what the Scriptures taught about the death and resurrection of the Christ, we see that the Scriptures were doing exactly what God says that His Word will do. Isaiah 55:11 says, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.” We see that some of the Jews were persuaded by the Word of God that Jesus is the Christ. However, we see that a great multitude of the devout Greeks were persuaded. In addition, many of the women of influence also believed and joined with Paul and Silas. Here, we see that when the Word of God is clearly explained, the Lord works in the hearts of those who hear and can draw many to Himself.

However, Acts 17:5 says, “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.” The word translated “envious” can mean *to be zealous* when it is used in a good sense or it can mean *to boil with anger or envy* when used in an evil sense. Here, we see that the word is used in an evil sense. The Jews who did not believe burned with envy, because so many people were following Christ.

As a result of their envy, these angry Jews went to the marketplace. There they found some men who were looking for an opportunity to do evil. These men gathered a mob and set the whole city in an uproar. This mob then went and attacked the house of Jason. They wanted to find Paul and Silas and bring them out so that the mob could do evil to them. However, they did not find Paul and Silas in the house.

Acts 17:6-9 says, “But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.” When the leaders of this mob did not find Paul and Silas in the house, they dragged Jason and some of the others who had become Christians to the rulers of the city.

Then, the mob cried to the rulers of the city, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” The word translated “that have turned upside down” means *to stir up rebellion or tumult*. Acts 21:38 says, “‘Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?’” Here, the word is translated “stirred up a rebellion”. This means that the mob was accusing Paul and Silas of stirring up rebellion all

over the world. Then, the mob said that Jason had harbored them by allowing them to stay at his home. We see that the mob was trying to make a charge against Paul and Silas that would cause the rulers to arrest and imprison Paul and Silas.

We see that in the next charge the mob made against Paul and Silas. Their next accusation was, “These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus.” Although this mob had been recruited by the Jews, the mob accused Paul and Silas of breaking the decrees that Caesar had made. Here, we see that these Jews did the same thing the Jews in Jerusalem had years earlier done to Christ. John 18:33-35 says, “Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’” Here, we see that the Jews accused Christ of claiming to be the King of the Jews.

The answer of Christ is important to understand, because we need to help every Christian understand what Christ said. In John 18:36-38, Christ answered, “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all.’” We need to help every Christian understand that we are not talking about the kingdoms of this world. Instead, we are talking about the kingdom of God and the battle is a battle for truth and not a battle for power. That is a very different kind of battle.

Both the rulers of the city of Thessalonica and the crowd gathered that day were troubled by the accusations the mob brought against Paul and Silas. The word translated “troubled” means *to agitate or stir up*. The rulers of the city did not investigate the charges. Instead, they required Jason and the rest of the Christians to provide a bond (taken security) to guarantee that Paul and Silas would leave the city. This meant that Jason and the other Christians had to make Paul and Silas leave the city or the bond (money) that they had given to the rulers would be forfeited.

This put the new Christians in a similar situation to those in Philippi. Paul and Silas had to leave the city even though the new Christians wanted to learn more about Christ. The Lord allowed this to happen so that Paul would write 1 and 2 Thessalonians to answer the questions of these new Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord worked to get Paul to write 1 and 2 Thessalonians.