

## St James by the Park Reflections on Acts 17:1-15

### The proclamation, the receiving and the rejection of the Gospel

#### Read Acts 17:1-9 aloud:

##### 1. Introduction:

Do you ever read the bible missiologically – with mission as a central theme? Do you think reading the same bible passages daily as a church is helpful?

What do you think is a main theme of Acts?

Share a comment or two, if anyone is reading Phil Moore's book "Straight to the Heart of Acts" or is doing the Acts reading plan or has joined the Adventure through Acts Whatsapp group.

##### 2. Sharing the gospel:

In Acts 17:1 why do you think Paul went first to the synagogue and not to the public square?

Acts 17:2 says that Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah"

In Paul's day the scriptures were essentially most of the Old Testament – which scriptural passages do you think Paul may have referred to?

In what ways do you think the Old Testament explain why Jesus has to suffer and rise from the dead?

How important is it for Christians to know the Old Testament and the broader biblical story?

How do you go about explaining why you believe and follow Jesus to other Christians? To non-Christians?

#### Read Acts 17:10-15 aloud

##### 3. Receiving the gospel: Read Acts 17:4,12

In what ways did some Thessalonians and Bereans receive the gospel?

What type of people received the gospel? Do you think it is easier for some people to receive the gospel than others?

What happened do you think happened in the synagogue as a consequence of these "conversions."

Consider those Jews who "defected" to Paul and Silas, and those God-fearers/Gentiles who switched allegiances.

Also consider the key role of women in the new movement. The emerging church transformed the role of women in the faith community (see also references to women in

Acts 1:14, 2:28, 5:14,8:3,8:12,9:2, 13:50,16:13. The study of women in Luke and Acts is worth a full study in its own right!

What do you think of the quote from the Mission Shaped Church Report 2004 –

“at a time of substantive change the Church of England needs to learn to be more an anticipation of God’s future than a society for the preservation of the past. Perhaps our greatest need is of a baptism of imagination of the forms of church.”

Traditional ways of understanding and practising religious/spiritual life were being challenged by the nature of this gospel. In what ways did early believers have to plot a new communal course together? In what ways do you think that the church today is too traditional in how it does things? In what ways is the church still relevant to the culture we live in and the people we live amongst? What would you keep and what would you change?

What do you think about the notions of revival and reformation? What is in our power to change?

#### **4. Rejecting the gospel:**

What do you think Acts 17:11 means - <sup>11</sup> Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica?

Do you think Paul was insensitive to the Jewish people and God-fearers at Thessalonica and Berea?

How do you think the synagogue leaders felt at Paul’s behaviour?

What do you think about this accusation levelled at Paul and Silas? Acts 17: 7 “They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” (cf. Luke 23:2)

The opposition to the gospel had numerous features such as jealousy, mob protest, exaggerated threats, and half-truths. Where in the world today are you aware of that Christians face such challenges today?

Have you ever experienced opposition to your Christian views or practice? What did you do?

#### **5. Pragmatism not triumphalism?**

What do you think about this phrase as a description of the Christian response to opposition?

Consider the pragmatism of the emerging church’s response. Read also 1 Thess 4:11, Rom 12:17-21, Heb 10:32-34

The persecuted church often seems more beleaguered than triumphalistic. Suffering is just that – a hard horrible place to be.

What is missing from this perspective? Is there a difference between victoriousness and triumphalism?

In what ways does opposition create new opportunities for the gospel to be shared?

## 6. Prayer

You may wish to conclude the evening with pray for each other and for our witness of the gospel.

Then you could join with many churches in the Anglican Communion by praying for Myanmar:

Lord of the heavens and the earth,  
we give you thanks and praise  
for the rising from the dead of your Son Jesus Christ  
and for the never-ending love he offers us all.  
Grant, we pray, resurrection life to the nation and people of Myanmar,  
that sadness may turn into joy,  
aggression into amity,  
despair into hope,  
and anxiety into calm,  
that the people may be reconciled.  
This we ask in the Name of the Risen Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
One God, now and for ever. Amen.

Paul Thaxter 8/06/24