

“Why is the Gospel Both Attractive and Offensive”

Acts 17:1-15; 1 Thes. 1-2

Remember when we were kids, especially those of us who grew up in the 50's/60's and 70's (possibly 80's too)? By the year 2000 what were we all supposed to be doing? Flying around in little space ships like George Jetson on The Jetsons. We see this in Star Wars and super hero shows, but not in real life. A lot of things they thought we would be doing never really happened – not yet anyway.

Yet there are other things that have happened that we would never have imagined 30, 40, 50 plus years ago. Who would have ever imagined that a family is no longer defined as a man (dad), woman (mom) and kids? Or that people could just say 'I'm female', or 'I'm a man now' but they are physically not, or to say they are both or neither? Who would have ever imagined we would have parades celebrating sexual lifestyles and TV shows promoting and accepting things we were discouraged from even talking about.

And of course who would have imagined children growing up who never even heard of Jesus? Or not aware of Bible stories like David & Goliath or Moses parting the Red Sea? Or who would have ever thought there would be more people in North America against God and the Bible than for it.

The Apostle Paul may have, because he saw it in his own day. Paul saw first hand how the gospel can be so attractive to some that they confess their sins and choose to follow Jesus knowing it may lead to suffering, while others get really angry and try to kill you for even talking about Jesus, God or the Scriptures. When it comes to the gospel, nothing has changed. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9).

If the gospel attracted and offended people in Paul's day as much as it does today, then in looking at passages like Acts 17, we can understand why it is both and to expect and be prepared to handle both reactions when we share Jesus with others.

Paul, Silas and Timothy leave Philippi and travel westward on the ancient 401 of the Roman world; the Egnatian Way. [see maps]. They end up in Thessalonica [Thessaloniki today] which was the largest city in Macedonia at the time, about 50,000. Obviously there would be a synagogue there. Paul spends 3 weekends at the synagogue before he's asked to leave. He may have been there a few more weeks after that. And we see how the gospel is attractive to some and offensive to others:

⁴ *Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. ⁵ But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd*

What did Paul, Silas and Timothy say that produced these opposing reactions?

² ... *he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.*

Paul used the Scriptures. Why?

The Gospel Claims the Bible as God's Absolute Truth

“Reasoned ... explained Proved” all from Scripture because the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah and Paul carefully explained – and not just on the Sabbaths because reasoned has the idea of mutual discussion. This was Paul's authority, the Bible. The Bible is the actual words of God. Paul was saying ‘Do you want to know what God says about life and hope? He made promises about a Messiah and he explained that Jesus is Him. In believing in Jesus you believe God's Word is telling the truth. There is a plan to life. It has a distinct beginning and end. God is the one behind it and he has revealed Himself in His Word. If this is all true then we must believe Him and submit to Him.

Some want that and believe it by faith (17:1-4, 10-12; 1 Thes. 1:6-8)

Some of the Jews were persuaded and believed as Paul did; that God's Word is the source for truth and Jesus is in fact the Messiah.

When Paul goes to Berea with the gospel we read in vv.11-12

¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Why did they examine the Bible? Because the Bible contains the answer to life's ultimate questions. They believed in the authority of God's Word and as God's primary source of revealing Himself to us.

1 Thessalonians adds some more detail to this visit in Acts 17. Listen to Paul's introductory words in 1:6-10,

⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

They believed God and His Word so much that they submitted to the authority of His Word and they changed the way they lived. They used to worship idols. They chucked all that to follow God and His Son Jesus. “You welcomed the message ... the Lord's message rang out from you ... your faith in God has become known everywhere ... you turned to God ...

Some choose to believe God is in control of the world and has a plan and it is through Jesus. The Word declares this.

Others reject it even though they use it (17:5, 13; 1 Thes. 2:14-16)

Why did Paul go to synagogues? Because Jews hold that the Bible is God's words too – at least they say that. But by their actions and failure to submit to what God says they show they don't really believe it. How do we know? Because they reject what it says about Jesus (which is a fair amount of the Bible). You can't pick and choose what you want to believe or obey.

“But the Jews” (v.5) didn’t like how Paul was explaining the Bible. It made them jealous. Jealous? Why jealousy? Because they weren’t really worshipping God by using the Scriptures, they were holding power over people by the way they misused the Bible. They were really worshipping power and the control they held over the people. They got jealous because these people turned from their teaching to Paul’s teaching and left to join Paul and the others.

The true teaching of the Bible offended them because it showed God was in control not them. Look at v.13,

¹³ *When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.*

And Paul brings this up in 1 Thes. 2:14-16;

¹⁴ *For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.*

Their own countrymen rejected Jesus because they rejected what God’s Word actually said about Him. And not just Jesus; other prophets who proclaimed what God’s Word actually says.

Ever tried to talk with someone about God’s Word, thinking you shared a common bond only to find they didn’t accept it the way we do; as the ultimate authority for life? For some it’s a book with religious phrases that they use in their religious services but it doesn’t change their life. They don’t actually submit to it. Why some people even chant it over and over as if saying these words can manipulate God into giving you what you want. The Word is God’s ultimate and authoritative word. Some people accept that and want that for their life. Others want to make God do their bidding.

The main goal of the Bible is to show us Jesus.

The Gospel Reveals Jesus Truly Lived, Died and Rose

This is why Paul used the Scriptures so people could understand who Jesus truly was and what He came to do for them. So Paul *“Reasoned ... explained Proved that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ”*

And if Jesus truly lived and He is exactly who the Bible says He is, the Son of God and Saviour of the world, then

Some do confess Jesus suffered for their sins (17:3-4; 1 Thes. 1:2-5)

... because through the Spirit’s conviction they agree with God that they have sinned and are in need of forgiveness. And that the sinless God-man Jesus voluntarily sacrificed Himself and paid that price for us. Again, see how 1 Thes. 1:4-5 adds to this:

⁴ *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.*

Deep conviction of what? Their sinfulness and acceptance of God's grace. And yet we see how

Others refuse by deflecting from Jesus to discredit the messengers (17:5-9, 13; 1 Thes. 2:1-12)

How do people react when they are proven guilty of something? You accept it and own up or you deflect attention away from yourself and accuse the ones pointing out your wrongdoing, of wrongdoing themselves. Watch this in Acts 17:5-9

⁵ But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

See how they mixed lies and truth together? Did they really cause trouble all over the world? In a backwards way it was a compliment. Were they anti-government, defying Caesar's decrees? And which ones? Paul was not anti-government. We read in his letters our need to submit to the governing authorities. Government, Paul said in Romans 13 is from God. Rome believed the government was God.

Definitely Paul preached Jesus as Lord. So they used what Paul said as an attack on their way of life! And charged him with some other things which weren't necessarily true but you can see how people would believe it. And people who don't do fact-checking fall for the lies all the time.

These guys were so mad with jealousy over Paul that they walked two days to Berea and spread more false truths about Paul. Notice they don't challenge the message (while the Bereans were doing fact checking!); they just attacked Paul, Jason and others.

When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

1 Thes. 2, Paul defends his character because these are some of the things the Jews attacked him with. You can here the false accusations in Paul's defense,

2:1 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

And in vv.6-12 he reminds them of how they conducted themselves; with godliness and integrity. The claim that Jesus is a rival king to Caesar was not untrue but also not complete

The Gospel Proves Jesus is Lord

If the Scriptures proves who Jesus is – Saviour and King of the world, sadly

Many would rather submit to human masters (17:7; 1 Thes. 2:15-16)

The Jews stirred up the crowds by accusing Paul of treason and starting an insurrection against Caesar. The truth is that people who reject Jesus will be accused of insurrection and rebellion against God. People would rather submit to government than to God. Right now we have so many issues in our world; racism, violence, war, immorality; and the people keep looking to government for the answers. Why? Because like ancient Rome, they worship government over God. God and Jesus have the solutions for all these problems but most don't want that.

Paul says of these Jews who rejected Jesus as Lord and any biblical spokesperson who claimed God was all-authoritative in 1 Thes. 2:15-16 that *"the wrath of God has come upon them at last."* Paul said the same thing in Rom. 1:18,

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

How is the wrath of God being revealed now against godlessness? He explains further on that their deliberate rejection of God results in God withdrawing His grace from their lives and *'giving them over'* to the *'sinful desires of their heart'*. Why is their so much wickedness in the world? Because of people's deliberate rejection of God He has pulled the plug on His universal grace in their lives and letting them go and reap all that they sow. Which unfortunately affects all of us too because we are their target in their anger towards God. Yet

Some submit to Jesus knowing we may suffer like Jesus (17:5-9, 13; 1 Thes. 1:6-7; 2:1-2, 13-14)

We see the believers suffering because they chose to believe Jesus is Lord. Paul clearly shows this in 1 Thes. About them here;

^{1:6} You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

^{2:1} You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition:

¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.

Yes, many people will reject the gospel and all that it entails. Why? They don't want to admit God is absolutely authoritative and His Word ultimate truth. They don't want to admit their sinfulness and they don't want to submit to Jesus. So attack us, the messengers mostly and deny God and Jesus' existence or relevance. Or mix Him in with one more choice in the smorgasbord of religions.

But let's not forget that some will be convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sin; they will bow the knee to Jesus as Lord and they will strive to submit themselves to the authority of God's Word. So let's not give up sharing the only true message that can make eternal differences in people's lives; the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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