

Paul Preaches In Thessalonica, Berea and Athens

Acts 17

Introduction:

1. In the next few months several of you are going to be presenting lessons that do not do this frequently.
2. Various questions arise. “How do I decide what I will talk about?” “How should I organize what I want to say?” “What would the Lord have me to do?”
3. We can’t answer all such questions in this study, but perhaps we can give thought to some general things that might help.
4. In Acts 17 Paul taught in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. What can we learn here from Luke’s description of what happened that may be helpful to us?
5. We will focus particularly on what he did in Athens and supplement it by looking back at Berea and Thessalonica.
6. Reading of Acts 17:16-20.

Discussion:

- I. The historical events leading up to what happened in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens.
 - A. Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first preaching trip and reported to the congregation at Antioch what the Lord had done through them. They continued on in Antioch for a long time with the disciples (Acts 14:27-28).
 - B. They became concerned about the brethren that they had taught earlier and sought to return to see how they were.
 1. Concern for the brethren is a key factor in teaching and preaching.
 2. Let this be key for you.
 3. Do not teach for personal benefit—praise, obligation, duty although these may be present. Let concern for the brethren motivate you.
 - C. In Troas, Paul saw a vision of a man of Macedonia appealing to him saying, “Come over to Macedonia to help us.” Paul concluded that God had called them to preach in Macedonia.
 1. It is important in preaching to recognize that you are on a mission from God.
 2. It is not your lesson, but God’s lesson.
 3. Sometimes we can become confused about this. When we are inexperienced we tend to talk a lot about ourselves. In the first five minutes we may apologize. Tell all about what we went through in preparing the lesson and talk about how nervous we are. We need to give less attention to ourselves and more to the accomplishment of the mission.
 - D. Even after God sent them to Macedonia it might seem that things were off to a bad

start.

1. Things started small in Philippi: Lydia and her household and the jailer and his household.
 2. Paul and Silas were imprisoned.
- E. This is the work.
1. It is about concern for the people.
 2. It is God's mission.
 3. The results may not be as great as you would like, but don't let that thwart your concern for the people, nor for the mission of God.

II. In Athens.

- A. Paul's spirit was provoked within him as he observed the city full of idols.
1. The city full of idols indicates that the people are looking for something.
 2. The fact that there are many idols indicates they have not found what they are looking for.
 3. Paul empathizes with their search and has an answer for them.
 4. Note that Paul's spirit, like God's is concerned for the people.
 5. We need to be provoked when we observe the "city full of idols."
 - a. One preacher observed that some people preach, "Because they have to preach a sermon and others preach because they have a sermon to preach."
 - b. We are not presenting lessons because we have to preach a sermon, but because we have a sermon to preach.
 - c. Paul had a sermon to preach.
 6. What provokes your spirit? Jesus was provoked by seeing the people like sheep without a shepherd. He felt compassion for them and began to teach them (Mk. 6:34).
- B. Paul reasoned in the synagogue and in the market place.
1. He reasoned with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles.
 2. He reasoned in the market place with those who happened to be present.
 3. Confusion existed in both areas: the synagogue and the market place.
 4. He had reasoned in the synagogue at Thessalonica (17:2) and Berea (17:10)
 - a. He reasoned from the Scriptures.
 - 1) Sometimes people say, "I don't know what to talk about. Where do I begin?"
 - 2) An old preacher was once asked, "Brother Floyd, how do you decide what you are going to preach?" "I read my Bible," was his sharp reply.
 - 3) If you are having problems deciding what to talk about "light on a passage." "But what if I don't know what it means?" Exactly! Go to work and when you know, you will have a sermon to preach! You can't wait until the night before and use this method. You may not have a sermon in time.
 - b. Explaining and giving evidence that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the

- dead. He proclaimed Jesus as the Christ (17:3).
- c. The people need answers and direction. You cannot give them what they need. Only the Lord can. You need to direct them to the Scriptures (17:11).
- C. In an upset world He was preaching the kingdom of God (17:7).
- 1. People look to their leaders as Savior. Note the inscription in Israel referring to Augustus Caesar as savior. Again it is reflective of people looking for something. They recognize a need for a savior. It is not a political leader.
 - 2. It is king, Jesus.
 - 3. Telling and hearing something new is reflective of their search for something. What you teach them about Jesus is going to sound strange to them.

III. Paul's sermon in Athens.

- A. These were not Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue.
- B. They were looking for something "religious."
 - 1. They were looking for God.
 - 2. Paul had a God to communicate.
 - 3. Notice he is being very fundamental here.
- C. He preaches God as Creator, Ruler and Revealer (17:22-31).
- D. Paul has analyzed his hearers and their needs. His answer is the Lord. He doesn't teach them a new political philosophy. He doesn't teach them how angry he is about his personal life. He doesn't borrow his sermon from the tent making business. He doesn't even tell them about his hardships: jailed at Philippi, unfair treatment at Thessalonica, leaving Berea early because of the Jews stirring up the crowds. These must have been emotional issues for him but his sermon is not about him. It is about them and their Lord.
- E. The response to Paul's sermon(s).
 - 1. At Athens.
 - a. Some began to sneer.
 - b. Others said, "We will hear you again."
 - c. Some joined him and believed.
 - 2. At Berea.
 - a. Some searched the Scriptures and believed.
 - b. Some were agitated by the Jews.
 - 3. At Thessalonica.
 - a. Some were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. Among these were God-fearing Greeks and leading women.
 - b. But the Jews took some wicked men and formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.
 - 4. Some may sneer at what you say. Some may say, "We will listen again." Some may be persuaded. You may hear, "Good job," as someone leaves the building.

Many times they mean you presented well. They want to encourage you. Other's may object to something you said. But don't take any of this too personally. It's not about you. What they say is more a reflection of them than it is you. And you didn't present for your benefit anyway. It was about you helping them to understand about their relationship to the Lord. You will do well to keep that as your focus.

Conclusion:

1. Be concerned for the people.
2. Help them to understand.
3. Persuade using the Scriptures.
4. Let the Lord meet their need.
5. Understand that you will be relatively successful.