



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 17:1-15

“Great Lion of God - Paul and the Second Missionary Journey, Part IV”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Heavenly Father we approach Thee in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee and praise Thee for the power of the gospel. For the way in which that power was manifested through the life of the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee for the magnificent ministry that took place as he made his way into Europe. And we thank Thee for the issues of it which have reached to us here many hundreds of years later in the West.

We pray, Lord, that some of the same spirit of the apostle, the spirit that comes from the Holy Spirit, may be ours in our day and that we may have some of the impact that the apostle had. We thank Thee for the many who faithfully proclaim the word of God in spite of opposition, who did not really care about their own personal reputation or even their own personal safety, but gave themselves to the presentation of the Scriptures.

We pray that our devotion may be true, and full, and as complete as is possible and agreeable with Thy will. We ask that Thou will be with us in this hour as we consider the apostle's ministry in Macedonia. May we learn things, Lord, that will be

helpful to us in our personal testimony and in our personal lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We are looking at the apostle's ministry in Europe and particularly at the things that happened in his second missionary journey. And we have just finished the looking into the ministry in Philippi in Macedonia and now we look at the ministry which the apostle had in the remainder of the cities of Macedonia on this second missionary journey.

We're going to turn to Acts chapter 17 and the meditation will be on verses 1 through 15, and particularly the apostle's ministry to Thessalonica and then to Berea. Now we read in Acts chapter 17, in verse 1,

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out of the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the others, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by

night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of the honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

What we have here in this account of the apostle’s ministry in Thessalonica and in Berea is a very fine picture of apostolic ministry with its routing of riot. You can almost imagine Paul facing each day with a word to his friends, “Well I wonder what’s going to happen today. Probably another riot will take place today.”

When a man like Paul preaches the gospel in a place where the gospel is regarded as false teaching and particularly among people who are religiously oriented you can expect that there will be a response and a rejection. And that, of course, is what the apostle had to experience constantly in his ministry. Another way in which this particular section is useful to us is that it provides us with an interesting insight into what happened to the apostle during those gaps that we find in his letters. Many times in his letters we don’t have full information about things that happened and the Book of Acts, fortunately, gives us a number of times material that helps us to understand the things that the apostle speaks about in his letters.

His move from Philippi to Thessalonica illustrates the principle of action which guided him. And one of the principles is the desire to minister in the centers of population. One would not want to necessarily say that this is a divine principle but one

can see in the apostle’s ministry this particular principle being carried out, at least at the present time. He went to Philippi, which was a significant city, he passed by Apollonia, and Amphipolis, and came to Thessalonica, which also was an important city, then he came to Berea, an important city of a different kind, and then we next see him in Athens.

Alexander McLaren once said, “Conquer the cities, and the villages will fall of themselves.” Now we don’t have any indication, I say, that Paul really did this as a principle, that is a thought out principle, but at least one can see that he touches these major centers of population and perhaps that is the Spirit’s logic in the presentation of the gospel. As far as we can tell from Paul’s writing and from Luke’s description of their guidance it was largely personal guidance. The apostle received a vision to come over into the land of Europe and then later on the apostle will have a personal, again, a personal visit from the angel of the Lord and so in his ministry one can see a lot of personal intervention on the part of the Godhead directing him to go this way or do that. But as you look back over it it does appear that he has centered attention upon the centers of population.

It may be that he passed by Amphipolis and Apollonia because there were no synagogues there, but let’s remember that he did go to Philippi and there was no synagogue there. That was a well known shipping point and maybe that’s the reason he went to Philippi. At any rate, Amphipolis was thirty-three miles from Philippi and the apostle is making his way south now down through the land of Greece towards Athens and Corinth. Apollonia is another sixty-three miles. And then Thessalonica is about a hundred miles down south of Philippi. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It is, as you know, today the city of Salonicka. Or Salonicka is the ancient city of Thessalonica. It was on the road to Rome via the Agnation Way so it was a very important place.

When he came to Thessalonica you notice that his ministry is first of all to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In fact, one could call the first four verses Operation Jews and then verses 5 through 10 Operation Gentiles. I like the description that is given here

of the apostle's ministry. As his manner was he went in unto the synagogue and for three Sabbath days, that means only two weeks, for three Sabbath days he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. So three Saturdays he had the opportunity to preach the word of God to them. Evidently he came in and just as in Antioch in Pasidia he was called upon to utter some words or he felt free to stand up in their meetings because they had freedom of discourse. And so he spoke and each of these three days he argued, as we read here, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you notice also the description that Luke gives of his way of preaching. We read here that he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. Originally this verb that is translated here “reasoned” was a word that was used of the Socratic method. One can think of a professor or a teacher throwing out certain questions and then receiving responses, and then responding again with further questions until finally the truth comes to the fore by virtue of elimination and attention given to the things that the teacher wanted to give.

But by the time of the New Testament that particular verb that is used here was not used of the Socratic method but came simply to refer finally to any kind of intellectual discourse. So one can think of the apostle as preaching biblical doctrine and here we have an account of what he was doing. So he reasoned with them. He expounded the Scriptures but he expounded them by way of an argument, by way of a form of logical reasoning, by means of tracing his line of thinking in a systematic way. Luke says opening and alleging. So this is the method of his reasoning. He was explaining the Old Testament prophecies and evidently setting alongside of them the New Testament facts. And that seems to be characteristic of his method of preaching.

In fact, it seems to be characteristic of our Lord's method on the Emmaus Road. They both turn to the Old Testament, they refer to the Old Testament prophecies, and then they show how they are fulfilled in the New Testament facts. Now the apostle no

doubt went back through the Old Testament prophecies and then as he would expound them he would set them alongside of the facts of our Lord's life and ministry.

Perhaps a lot of what we find in our gospels now is the same kind of teaching that the apostle was giving. You notice when you read the passion accounts, for example, in Matthew and Mark and Luke and even in John, but particularly in the synoptic gospels, how often the writers of the gospels when they are giving a certain event in our Lord's life, describing a fact, then they add something like, "That it might be fulfilled." Or sometimes they just link the Old Testament with it without even any word of introduction, showing by that that they regarded these events as fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Notice the use of the term "open" again. Now that's the same word that was used with Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened. That's the divine side of the work of God, through the preaching of the word. And here is the human side, the apostle opening and alleging. So it's perfectly all right to attempt to open the Scriptures to people, that's what I'm trying to do right now, but at the same time there must be a divine operation of the Holy Spirit in opening up or illuminating the things that are being said if we are to understand.

So it is the word plus the Spirit, remember. Not simply the Spirit, nor simply the word, but the word of God as used by the Holy Spirit. It is through the word and the Spirit that we come to the understanding of truth. Look at the message that the apostle gave. He said, Luke says, "That Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." So he has three points. First the Messiah must suffer. I imagine that the Jewish people listened to him with a great deal of attention. They did not feel any necessity of objecting at this point. This is a theory. They had ideas that the Messiah would be a king, royal king, who would rule upon the earth, and the apostle is saying the Old Testament teaches that the Messiah must also suffer. Well it may have been a new thought to them, at least it was something new in emphasis. And we remember that when the Lord Jesus on the Emmaus Road taught

the disciples there he said, “Oh fools and slow of heart to believe that the Messiah must suffer, and then to enter into his glory.”

So the idea of sufferings followed by glories was very important. The Lord laid stress upon it because they had not paid sufficient stress to it. When Peter wrote 1st Peter he said the same kind of thing. He talked about the sufferings and the glories that would follow in the 1st chapter of 1st Peter. So Paul is following a similar line. He is talking about the fact that the Messiah must suffer.

You notice, by the way, that this is nothing more than just biblical doctrine. He’s just going to the Scriptures and he’s setting out the things that the Bible teaches. Now of course, they recognize the Scriptures to be the word of God. He didn’t have the problem that some people have today, you have to convince people or to at least try to emphasize that the Scriptures are the word of God. They had common ground. The Scriptures were the word of God, so he simply said, “Look, these are the things that the Scriptures say about the Messiah and he must suffer.”

Philips Brooks who wasn’t a great doctrinal preacher himself once said, “The truth is no preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life that does not put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold a conscience. Preach doctrine, preach all the doctrine that you know, and learn forever, forever more and more, but preach it always not that men may believe it but that men may be saved by believing it.” Now those are great words of advice. And he gave those words in his lectures on preaching.

Well that’s what Paul was doing. He was preaching doctrine. And he was preaching doctrine that men may be saved by the preaching of doctrine. So his first point was a messiah must suffer. Now that may have puzzled some, and may have disturbed some, it may have illuminated some. His second point follows naturally, “Must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead.” So his second point is that the Messiah

must rise from the dead. Well I don't know what they thought about that, we don't have any words specifically about what they thought about the first point or what they thought about the second point. But when the apostle came to the third point that was more than they could stand, “And that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ,” or the Messiah.

So they listened to him, evidently, while he said, “Messiah must suffer,” they listened while he said, “Messiah must rise again from the dead,” but when he said, “This Jesus of Nazareth that you have put to death is the Messiah,” then they lost patience with the apostle. And we read,

“Some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.”

Now we know from other places in the Book of Acts who some of these people were. One of them was a man by the name of Aristarchus, another was a man by the name of Secundus. And I like this expression that is referred to here in verse 4, “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas.” Now my Bible has a little marginal note that says, “Joined Paul and Silas.” But this word is a word that means to “assign”, that's its essential meaning. It's the word that comes from the word “lot”, l-o-t; so to assign a person or place, or to assign a lot. It's almost as if these men were assigned by God to the Apostle Paul and to Silas. In other words, God has assigned them by lot to them. It's probably a reference to the prevenient grace of God in the salvation of these individuals. Put it in the words of our Lord in John 17 it is that they were given by God. Remember, that's our Lord's favorite word for divine election, “Those that the Father has given me,” and so here, assigned by lot.

Well just as is often the case when the word of God begins to operate and individuals come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and start talking about it, then the high adventure comes. And some of the hoods of Thessalonica, some of the teddy-boys as they like to say over in Britain, some of the yippies, gather for a demonstration. Now I don't know anything about these individuals. I don't know whether they were individuals who liked to hit the bottle or whether they liked to smoke the joints or whatnot but perhaps some of them had been playing around in Morty's fun garden and had managed to get hold of some things that were rather strange. At least they were men of the baser sort, certain lewd fellows, and you can always get them together to have a little fun and a riot and evidently that's what took place.

And so they, not being able to find Paul and Silas, “They came to the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people, and when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” Isn't that a testimony? Tremendous testimony.

If anyone could have this said of them what a magnificent testimony it would be. They have actually turned the world upside down. And if this is a true cry, and they probably exaggerated it a bit, but if it's a true cry it's a tremendous testimony to the power of the early church. Today the church can hardly upset a tea cup, much less turn the whole world upside down.

I don't remember who it was but some fellow said that he loved that reference of a child to the Book of Revelation. He said, “The Bible began with Genesis and ends with revolutions.” [Laughter] Well the Bible when it is preached as the word of God, and preached in power, does produce revolutions. And that was what was happening here. And you know, what is always so interesting when men who are unbelievers and are rejecters of the gospel, and rebellious against the gospel, when they argue their position they become the most illogical people, and furthermore, deny often things that they are

supposed to believe. That’s particularly true of the Jews. Remember what they said of the Lord Jesus? One of the ways they show that they were out of sympathy with him entirely was, “We have no king but Caesar.” Now can you imagine Jewish people who are taught by the Old Testament and by the prophets that their king is Yahweh? In other words, they claim to be the descendents of the prophets and Moses, and Moses and the prophets taught that Yahweh was the king. But in order to attack the gospel of the Lord Jesus they will say, denying their own faith in the process, “We have no king but Caesar.”

Now look at here, “Whom Jason,” verse 7, “hath received,” they’re talking now, these Jewish people, are talking, “and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar.” Now if any group of people should do contrary to the decrees of Caesar when spiritual matters are touched it is the Jewish people. But now, in order to condemn the Christian testimony, they’re willing to accuse them of doing contrary to the decrees of Caesar. Imagine, Jews jealous for the glory of Caesar. It’s an utter contradiction of their own spiritual position. Can you imagine communists complaining of conspiracies?

Well, we read that, “The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.” Evidently it was thought that things were getting a little too hot in Thessalonica and so now the apostle goes to Berea. And this is forty miles west now of Thessalonica. It was really an out of the way place. Livy calls it a noble town. And it is also a town where there were many honorable women. Notice verse 12, “Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.” In other words, in Berea we have the aristocracy of northern Greece, in Thessalonica noisy democracy.

In my own unprejudiced way, of course, I would call this the Charleston, South Carolina of Greece [Laughter]. So they came to Berea. Now I love this little incident. You know, I think this is one of the greatest parts of the Book of Acts. Listen to what Luke says, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica.”

Now I want you to turn with me over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 1 before we read any more here, because we must not think, of course, that the Thessalonians were not great believers and that they had not welcomed the word of God, for they did. But listen to what Paul says here in 1st Thessalonians in case we have any doubt. Verse 4, the apostle is describing now what happened,

“Knowing, brethren beloved, of God your election. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

Now that word translated “received” there is the word that means to welcome. “They welcomed the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.” So the apostle states here in 1st Thessalonians 1, and by the way he wrote this just a few weeks after he had been in Thessalonica and Berea so it’s fresh in his mind. He writes 1st Thessalonians just a few weeks afterwards and so he’s describing what happened in Thessalonica and he said, “The word of God came in great power and you welcome the word of God amidst much affliction. So much so that you became an example to all of Greece.”

But then when we turn to Luke’s account in Acts chapter 17, Luke says that the Bereans, “Were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word,” and that’s the same word. “They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Well these were more noble, evidently, in two ways but primarily in their attitude to the word of God. So far as reception is concerned in Thessalonica there was great reception. They welcomed the word, they became witnesses, but one little thing, which Luke makes a great deal over in Acts, was lacking. They did not search the Scriptures

daily to see whether these things were so. “They received the word with all readiness of mind and they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.”

Now I can think of the Thessalonians as being somewhat more gullible than those in Berea. That would fit the situation in the sense that we have the noisy democracy in Thessalonica and the intellectual believers in Charleston, I mean in Berea [Laughter]. I'm just kidding you.

Now it would seem that the thing that the apostle puts his finger upon is, “They searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” They were not gullible. They were not like mothers and fathers are when they feed their children. So they take their little can of whatever it may be, and I looked at a father feeding his child the other day, and he reached down into this and he took a little bit and put some in his mouth in order to, you know, make the child think it was really good. I asked him afterwards what it was because it looked so good I thought maybe I might order some myself [Laughter]. But he was obviously just acting up for his little boy and he did like this, and he ate it, and then he gave it to his young son. And so it's almost like open your mouth, close your eyes, swallow. And that's the way a lot of people like for the word of God to be received. In fact, believe it or not some preachers think that's what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to preach to the people's needs, give them something, a sermon, to which they are to respond. And that church is church when people listen to the preacher, and pay attention to what he says, and do what he says, and come back next Sunday for a little more.

Now of course that's better than nothing. But the best thing is to preach the word and to have the saints of God learn how to feed themselves. Sooner or later that little boy will learn how to feed himself, and then he may not want that that his father has been giving him all of this time. It may be the best thing for him but he may not want it. He may say, “Ice cream, ice cream,” which is bad. But nevertheless, we try to bring our children up to the place where they become adults and they are able to feed themselves.

So these Bereans here, they were believers who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. I have a quotation or two there that I thought I might mention to you. A. T. Robertson who has written a short commentary on the Greek text of the New Testament says, “The Bereans were eagerly interested in the new message of Paul and Silas, but they wanted to see it for themselves. What a noble attitude. Paul’s preaching made Bible students of them. The duty of private interpretation is thus made plain.”

Some people have doubts about that. Is it proper for us to study the Bible for ourselves? Can we be relied upon to find truth of ourselves? Maybe the church should tell us what the Scriptures mean. Or perhaps some preacher should tell us what the Scripture means. Now I would be the last to deemphasize the importance of the ministry of the word of God through gifted men, but even though we have gifted men in the church of Christ who are teaching us we are expected to test the things that we hear through private interpretation. And the apostle’s preaching made Bible students of the Bereans.

To my mind that would be the greatest thing that should ever happen in Believers Chapel. If everybody should become a Bible student, a student themselves rather than coming to hear us preach and teach who teach and preach. Now of course it’s good to have both and it should be an encouragement. But ultimately we must be students of the word ourselves. We ought to ask ourselves personally, “Is that true of us?” If it’s not there’s a whole lot of land to be possessed by us.

So they searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Now, did you notice the 12th verse and the way it begins? “Therefore many of them believed.” When you search the Scriptures daily, when you see if the Bible really teaches this, then you will have some results. “Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.” I consider that to be very important. Become a Bible student, therefore many of them believed. And the honorable women are

singled out for attention. Women, so far as we can tell, did have more liberty in Macedonia than in other parts of the ancient world and in this instance it is reflected in the words of Luke the historian. Many of the believers were Grecian women and of men, not a few.

But then the trouble comes and we read in verse 13, “But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.” Now I’d like to just, in the five minutes that is left of us, ask you to turn again to 1st Thessalonians chapter 1 and let’s look at it from the standpoint of the letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. He didn’t write any letters to the Bereans, I wonder why.

Well I suggest to you, only as a suggestion, I cannot know this; you don’t have to write letters to people who are students of the word of God. The letters he wrote were letters to churches as a general rule who had difficulties and problems. But the Bereans, they are the one group of believers in the New Testament who are definitely said to be students of the word of God, searching the Scriptures daily. We don’t have any letters written to them. It just may be it’s because they are students of the word of God and therefore they have less need of counsel even from apostles.

Well 1st and 2nd Thessalonians give us details of the second phase of the apostle’s ministry. He had gone to Thessalonica, preached the word in the synagogue. Remember there had been an uproar and he was run out of the city. But that doesn’t stop his ministry to Thessalonica. So when he gets down to Athens he writes back to the Thessalonians and this is what he says to them, “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father,” and mind you, this is just a few weeks after he had preached there, for two weeks. Well really fifteen days so far as we know, three Sabbath days he had reasoned. So he is addressing them now. I wonder what he has taught them. Well he says, “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making

mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith.” That’s the ministry of the gospel to them. In verse 9 he says, “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” That was their work of faith. That was the work that faith did, they turned from idols to serve the living and true God.

Then in verse 3 he says, “And labour of love.” Well in verse 9 he says, “And how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” That’s the labor of love, to serve the living and true God. And then in verse 3 he adds, “And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in verse 10 he says, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

That is the patience of hope, the expectation of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you can see that in the early church they had a definite and strong conviction that conversion was a turning to God from idols. Now I’m not going to make any big point over turning to God from idols because in the Book of Acts it is stated in one place that people turn from idols to the Lord God. The second thing that characterized them was the labor of love. And the third thing that characterized them was a vivid, vital hope in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that’s a rather beautiful picture of what Paul preached to them. He preached the gospel to them, he inculcated Christian love to them, and he also gave them lectures on prophecy. In fact, just a few weeks after this he wrote 2nd Thessalonians and in 2nd Thessalonians he told them about the man of sin. Look at 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2, and verse 1. I’ll just read two or three verses,

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as at the day of the Lord is present. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a

falling away first, (the apostasy) and that man of sin (the antichrist) be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (Now notice this 5th verse. Now mind you, these are Christians who've been Christians only a very, very short few weeks, maybe six weeks. Not much more. And listen to what he says in the 5th verse,) Remember ye not, that, when I was still with you, I told you these things?”

He told them about the man of sin. He told them about the apostasy that should take place. He told them about advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave them instruction an eschatology that people today might say, “That’s very deep.” But that’s what the apostle taught them. That’s part of what it is to preach the gospel and to teach the word of God. So we must not think that the apostle gave them a few little simple, sweet, messages, little sermonettes, having preached the gospel of the sufferings of Christ to them; he launched into a full fledged discussion of the great biblical truths of the word of God, but these people were so moved by the Holy Spirit and the tremendous change that had occurred in them, turning from idols to serve the living and true God, that they were interested in the great things that the apostle was talking about.

Well one can conclude with when you do the Lord’s work you can be sure of both triumph and travail, and that’s evidenced in Paul’s life. He had certainly a lot of travail but he nevertheless gave himself to faithful presentation of the word of God amid all of his troubles and trials.

This, of course, lays stress upon then value of an open mind, and a cautious mind like the Bereans had. In verse 4 of Acts chapter 17, Luke describes what happened as persuasion, “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief witnesses not a few.” And one might want to ask the question, “Yes it’s nice to see that these people were brought to faith in

Christ but what about us?” They found no salvation in Athens, in Zeus, in Plato, in Aristotle. They were wearied in mind and heart and they turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the reasons, of course, that we have so much difficulty preaching the gospel today is that there are very few people who are really wearied with this life. So many people are really in love with this kind of life that we have.

Yesterday I went up to Nashville, a quick trip, to see my two granddaughters, twin granddaughters, graduate from Harper Hall School in Nashville. And I listened to the testimonies that were the prayer that was given by one of the students and then the commencement address and a number of other things that were said in the program. And I must confess, I mentioned this to Martha today, I was very, very discouraged from the things that I heard. It's a lovely school, it's an outstanding education that you get there. But there was not anything in that entire commencement program that suggested any other thing than a completely secular approach to life. It was your typical boot strap theology.

Now my son told me that in the baccalaureate they had invited Minnie Pearl to be the speaker [Laughter]. Now I know you're laughing about this but listen to what happened. They told the girl who sang the solo, “You must not mention the name of the Lord. You must not mention anything that might be construed to be a religious position.” They mentioned to others in the program that they should not say anything that might be an offense to people of differing viewpoints. But they forgot to say anything to Minnie Pearl [Laughter]. And so Sam, my son, said she just preached a sermon [Laughter]. She is a Christian woman. And she preached about believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and being born again, he said it was the best sermon I've heard in a long time given as the baccalaureate message at the closing exercises of the school.

I think the Lord must have smiled at that. They've done everything they possibly could but they never thought of telling Minnie Pearl to keep quiet. And she hadn't heard their advice and so of all people, perhaps, of all people, she's the one that comes out with

what Sam called just nothing but her own Christian testimony. So often the Lord breaks down all of our attempts to prevent the word from getting through. It's important that like the apostle, we faithfully present the word of God and be Bereans, become Bereans. There'd be no need for apostolic letters to be written to you if you keep studying the word of God.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of reading and studying the apostle's life and the experiences that he and Silas and Timothy and others had. Oh God, how exciting that kind of life appears to us today but we know that it cost them many pains and trouble and trials. Oh God, enable us to be willing to suffer if need be, to face the trials if need be, that we may faithfully represent...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]