

Intro. When I was growing up, we would visit my grandmother’s house in a small town a couple of times each week. In the summer time, we would call all our friends in the town & get them to play baseball with us (we were like “The Sandlot” bunch with kids of every shape & size & skill level). We found one of several empty lots to play in & if we had to ask permission, we would. When that lot was no longer available, we simply found another. We used at least 5 spots within a couple of blocks of each other. If we couldn’t get ahold of our friends, they always knew where they could find us & if we were there, we would always be playing next door. We are tracing Paul’s 2nd & 3rd missionary journeys, which I’ve entitled “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth.” Today, we look at the first half of Acts 17 on “Reaching More Next Door.”

Theme: Apologetics & discipleship

Background: About 100 miles southwest of Philippi on the Via Egnatia (road connecting Rome with Byzantium) lie Thessalonica (show pic of Thessaloniki), the capital of Macedonia and a free city since 42 BC. It was a major commercial center of trade with road & sea & was the 2nd largest city in Greece with some 200,000 people. One poet called it “the mother of all Macedonia.” Unlike Philippi, it had a synagogue where Paul went to meet people studying the Scriptures & looking for the Messiah. While 3 Sabbaths are mentioned, they may not have been consecutive, for Paul’s correspondence to the Thessalonians & Philippians indicate he was there a bit longer. Once Paul was chased from Thessalonica, he traveled 50 miles southwest to Berea (show pic of Berea), where he also went into the synagogue & found greater reception, coming together not just weekly but daily to hear him.

➤ **What are some preparations you can make to develop a plan for “Reaching More Next Door?”**

1. Study the Scriptures to defend the Christian faith (17:2-3)

- While there are Bible scholars who make their living studying the Scriptures, every Christian should seek to know their Bibles enough to defend the basic tenets of the Christian faith
- Texts that Paul probably used to defend the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering & resurrection include Psalms 2:1-7; 16:8-11; 110:1; 118:22; Isaiah 52-53; Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Illus: There are few joys I have as a pastor when I have people call me or email questions about their Bible reading because they are wanting to know more—keep studying the Scriptures!

2. When you defend the faith, don’t forget to declare Jesus Christ (17:3-4, 12-13)

- Some apologists are great at defending the basics of the Christian faith but they fail to declare Christ as the One in Whom we must place our trust. Others are good at declaring Christ but fail to defend the faith, giving little or no reason why someone must trust in Christ—both defending the faith & declaring Christ should go hand-in-hand in the Christian witness
- Proclaiming Jesus probably covered His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, exaltation, reign, offer of salvation & judgment
- The word for “proving” means to “place beside”—Paul set the fulfillment alongside the predictions
- Just as Paul began where the people were, we should begin where people are—belief in God or sin or some knowledge of Jesus—and connect the whole gospel to them

Illus: When he was the pastor of the Methodist church in Scarborough, William Sangster had an eccentric member who tried to be a zealous Christian. Unfortunately, the man was mentally deficient and usually did the wrong thing. While working as a barber the man lathered up a customer for a shave, came at him with the poised razor, and asked, “Are you prepared to meet your God?” The frightened man fled with the lather on his face! (W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, 215). One woman approached D. L. Moody after a sermon

& criticized his way of evangelism. He said, “You’re right, my way is not very good. How do you do it?” She replied, “I don’t.” He responded, “I like my way better than your way!”

- When you declare Jesus Christ, some will join the faith (17:4, 12)—Jews, Greeks (God-fearing Gentiles) & leading women (those of high regard)—not everyone you ever meet will become a Christian, but some will—Scripture, at times, records “a few,” “some,” “many”—the point is there are people who will receive Jesus if we declare Him to them

3. When you stand for King Jesus, don’t be surprised by persecution from those outside the faith (17:5-9, 13-14)

- The Jews were jealous, probably because certain Jews & God-fearing Gentiles were converting
- When they couldn’t get their hands on Paul, they grabbed the one who had housed him
- They accused them of “turning the world upside down”—the grace of God drastically changes things
- They charged them with promoting another King, Jesus, instead of Caesar (the same charge made against Jesus, Luke 23:2)—while that was true, they went too far in implying that Christians would be revolutionaries

Illus: Christians are persecuted for their faith every day around the world & the vast majority of them are not caught off guard by it, except in America, because we don’t expect it on our soil

- It seems they required a pledge from Jason that Paul & Silas would leave town & not return (17:9)—that may have been what Paul meant when he wrote how Satan blocked him from returning there (1 Thessalonians 2:18)

4. Search the Scriptures to prove or disprove a message on key doctrines (17:11)

- The Bereans “searched” or “examined” the Scriptures, a term used for judicial investigations—it was in-depth Bible study—Bereans were open-minded, eager listeners, Scripture searchers, truth seekers—they were probably note-takers—oh, that Sweetwater people would be like these Bereans

Illus: Recently, we had to take our youngest daughter to get some x-rays of her heart to see how she’s doing & we should get those results soon—“The Christian life is an examined life, where one employs the Scripture like an X-ray to ascertain the nature of religious truth, life and one’s heart” (Bock, 557)

- Christians for hundreds of years have disagreed on some of the spiritual gifts, ordaining women, end-times events, baptism & more—but as important as those are, they are not primary doctrines which affect someone’s salvation. Primary doctrines include One God, God as Trinity, One way of salvation (via Christ’s death & resurrection), biblical authority & the like—if you ever hear a preacher offer something other than the biblical view, write them off as a heretic

Conc. Today, when people travel to Thessaloniki, they encounter several old, beautiful church buildings—St. George, St. Demetrius, St. Sophia—these are all living testaments to the faithfulness of Paul in taking the gospel to them, even in the face of persecution. He was willing to “Reach More Next Door.” You lived next door to me for years, We shared our dreams, our joys, our tears. A friend to me you were indeed... A friend who helped me when in need. My faith in you was strong and sure We had such trust as should endure. No spats between us ever arose; Our friends were like... and so our foes. What sadness then, my friend, to find That after all you weren’t so kind. The day my life on earth did end I found you weren’t a faithful friend. For all those years we spent on earth You never talked of second birth. You never spoke of my lost soul And of the Messiah Who’d make me whole. I plead today from Hell’s cruel fire And tell you now my last desire. You cannot do a thing for me... No words today my bonds will free. But do not err, my friend, again; Do all you can for souls of men. Plead with them now quite earnestly, Lest they be cast in Hell with me. (sermonillustrations.com). Will you “Reach More Next Door?” Will you surrender your life to Jesus?