

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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## WHO WILL YOU FOLLOW?

Acts 17:1-15

August 15, 2021

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There are four points to today's message:

- Paul explained the gospel.
- Some Jews grew jealous.
- The Bereans investigated the message.
- The jealous Jews stirred up trouble.

## PAUL EXPLAINED THE GOSPEL

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 17:1-3

*When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. <sup>2</sup> As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he 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," he said.*

**EXPLANATION:** Thessalonica, the Roman capital of Macedonia, was in northern Greece, approximately 95 miles from Philippi. As usual, Paul presented the gospel in the synagogue. There, he used the Scriptures to reason with the listeners.

Luke's choice of words here is interesting. There were numerous other Greek words that Luke could have used to describe what Paul was doing. He could have used a word that means to preach (euēngelizeto). He could have used a word that meant to talk (lalēsai). He could have also used a word that meant to declare openly (katēngelē) or one that meant to proclaim divine truth (kēryssōn). Luke didn't use any of those words. Instead, he chose the Greek word for reason—dielexato. This word is similar to the word dialogue. It carries with it the idea of a discussion.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Before they have the ability to speak, many babies can actually communicate by signing. One set of parents decided to try this technique with their son. The mother diligently taught the baby the basic signs for words like “hungry,” “milk,” and “please.” One day, he was especially cranky. The mother suspected that he was ready for his next meal. She said, “Tell me that you’re hungry.” He cried louder. She said, “Come on, now. Tell me that you want some milk.” The baby screamed. She persisted, “Say please, and Momma will get you a bottle.” The baby yelled and shook his fists. Finally, the dad turned around and said to his wife, “Honey, if you can’t read those signs, you’re the one with the problem.”

**EXPLANATION:** Paul saw a pattern. Many of the Jews not only rejected the gospel, they were actually hostile towards it. Paul was well aware of the anger and brutality that the gospel could provoke, but he was also full of love and compassion for his people, the chosen people of God. He went to great lengths to help them understand.

The Bible says that Paul explained the scriptures. This word means “to open fully.” Through his words, he tried to lay the scriptures open for them, to tell them how the Old Testament, which they knew well, pointed to Christ and how Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. He tried to prove that Christianity was not a new religion but the completion of their current beliefs. One of the meanings of the word “proving” here is to deposit. Paul tried to deposit truth into the lives of these Jewish individuals. Like the hungry baby, Paul was making himself clear, but no matter how hard he tried to communicate, some of the people just refused to get it.

## **SOME JEWS GREW JEALOUS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 17:4-9

*Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. <sup>5</sup> But other 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. <sup>6</sup> But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees,*

*saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.<sup>9</sup> Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul took his time. He made his case. He presented the evidence. The problem was not Paul. The problem was not the Scriptures. The problem was in the hearts of the unbelieving listeners. The author doesn't say that they didn't understand or that the message didn't make sense. No, the people who rejected the gospel did so because they were jealous.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A couple bought a dog. The wife worked at home, so she was with the dog all day. Before long, the husband noticed that whenever he hugged his wife, the dog tried to press between them. If they ignored the dog and continued the embrace, the dog grew agitated and started to bark. I don't know exactly how animals process emotions, but the dog certainly appeared jealous.

Jealousy results from a desire to protect what we have or to get what does not belong to us. The dog was jealous of the wife's affection. The Jews were jealous because Paul stole their thunder. They no longer controlled the market on faith.

**EXPLANATION:** The gospel message proclaims that everyone can come to a saving faith in Christ. The family of faith wasn't just for the Jews anymore. Paul explained that Christ's death on the cross paid the price for our sins; therefore, salvation is by faith alone. There was no longer a need for circumcision and pharisaical rules. Because of Jesus, each believer has individual access to the Father through the Son. So, there would no longer be a need for priests and sacrifices.

Many Jews, especially Jewish religious leaders, saw Christianity not as a joyous spiritual liberation but rather as a mournful dirge. It threatened their individualism, their system of religion, and their power. They were desperate to protect what they had. So, when other people listened and converted to Christianity, it infuriated them. They grew agitated. They barked, and eventually, they showed their teeth.

So, Paul explained the gospel, and some Jews were jealous.

## THE BEREANS INVESTIGATED THE MESSAGE

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 17:10-12

*As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup> Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. <sup>12</sup> As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul and his team knew the drill. They left town under the cover of dark and traveled approximately 45 miles to reach Berea. The Bible describes the Bereans as noble characters. This may mean that they had a noble birth or had a higher-than-normal status in society. They may have been wealthier, more sophisticated, and more educated. This may explain why the people in Berea enthusiastically welcomed Paul.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Beth and Caleb (*names changed*) hosted a young Bible study in their home. Every week they assigned a portion of Scripture to read and think about the following week. Every week, Beth and Caleb read their lesson and prepared for their meeting. Unfortunately, it was obvious that no one else did. At a meeting, Caleb asked a question related to the material. No one answered. Caleb rephrased the question and asked again. With no answer, he tried a third time. There was only uncomfortable silence.

Finally, Beth said, “Caleb, I read the material that was assigned, and I studied for this week’s meeting. Did you?” The husband affirmed that he had prepared for the lesson. “Well,” said Beth. “Since the rest of you obviously have not, why don’t you do it now and quit wasting our time. I have other things that I should do besides sitting here looking at you not answering questions because you aren’t prepared.” Beth then went to the kitchen and did the dishes.

There are few things as frustrating to a teacher than to have an unreceptive and disengaged audience. The Bereans must have been such a welcome change for Paul. The Bereans didn’t just listen. Like a gift, they received the message. They unwrapped it. They participated in the learning process by examining the Scriptures

themselves. To discern the truth, they recognized the need to investigate. As a result, many of them believed.

Because it was off the beaten path, Berea was not a convenient or popular stopping point for travelers. Some scholars think that Paul was trying to find a nice, quiet place to hang out for a while, to let the upheaval of Thessalonica blow over before he continued on his journey. If that was the plan, it unfortunately did not work.

## **THE JEALOUS JEWS STIRRED UP TROUBLE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 17:13-15

*But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. <sup>14</sup> The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. <sup>15</sup> Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.*

**EXPLANATION:** There was no peace for Paul, not even in Berea. People who are bent on causing trouble will inevitably do just that. The jealous Jews from Thessalonica chased Paul down and once again tried to incite anger and violence against the preachers. The believers rushed him away to Athens, but Silas and Timothy stayed behind—most likely to disciple the new converts.

**APPLICATION:** Paul discovered that the world was not divided between the Jews and the Gentiles. The world is divided between those who follow God and those who don't. Everyone who heard the gospel message then and everyone who hears it now has to make a choice. Who will you follow?

A small-town Baptist preacher once said, “In my life, God’s voice must be the loudest and clearest thing of all. I have to have a heart that hears God’s voice.”

There is nothing wrong with emotions in and of themselves. In this story, I’m sure the new converts were happy about their salvation. I’m sure the believers were afraid of the violent crowds, but the Bible doesn’t tell us a lot about their feelings. Why? Because their feelings did not dictate their actions. The emotional responses we see in these verses are mostly from the jealous, angry Jews.

If, like those Jews, we allow our emotions to control us, our actions will also be inconsistent and irrational. Our actions should not play to the whims of our emotions or our circumstances. The Thessalonian believers were persuaded of the truth. The Berean believers investigated the truth for themselves.

- Will you follow the angry crowds?
- Will you be stirred up by the hard world that we live in?
- Will you allow Satan to deter you with your difficult emotions and draw you away from the truth?
- OR
- Will you believe God's Word?
- Will you follow Jesus?

Each of us must hear God's voice, receive the message, and carry out God's will in our lives. So, today, I challenge you to be like the Bereans. Don't take my word for it. Examine Scripture. Investigate it. Learn from it. Let God speak to you, and then choose. Who will you follow?

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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