

April 24, 2005
Easter 5

"The Word of God Still Has Power"

ACTS 17:1-12

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ {³ Or Messiah} had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 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. 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. ¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 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.

I am holding in my hand a light bulb. Light bulbs such as these have not changed much since Thomas Edison invented them a hundred years ago. Now that is about to change. Within ten years most light bulbs will be made from light emitting diodes and produce more light with less electricity. Even though we are able to produce a better light bulb, faster computers and more efficient cars, the world in which are living is not getting better.

Lots of changes are taking place around us but one thing never changes and that is power of God's Word. The Word of God that brought people to faith in Jesus and strengthened them in that faith first century cities such as Berea and Thessalonica is just as powerful today as it was in the time of the Apostles. Whether we read and discuss the Bible under the light of an olive oil lamp or new LED light bulbs, the word of God will still have all the power it needs to change our lives and the lives of those who do not believe. Let's turn our close attention to the words just read to you to see how **"God's Word Still Has Power."**

1) The Word still creates faith

Paul knew exactly where he wanted to go when he came into a new city with the powerful Word of God. "When they first passed through Amphipolis and Appollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into

the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead."

Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. Imagine the excitement when two visitors came to the synagogue, especially a man like Paul who had studied under Gamaliel the renowned Rabbi of first century Jewish people. Here was someone who probably knew most of the Old Testament by memory. What a privilege it was to have this man present and invite him to join in the open discussion at the synagogue that Sabbath morning.

Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures to reason with the people and show them that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. How do you think that Paul did that? He had to start by showing these people they were in were not going to escape the judgment to come by trying to keep Old Testament laws and all the extra rules and regulations of the rabbis. The people in the synagogue looked at the laws of the Old Testament similar to the way you might use the recipes in this cookbook that I am holding in my hand. They believed that following kosher laws and Sabbath laws and extra traditions from the rabbis made them God's children.

Paul used the Old Testament to show these people how far they had fallen from God's glory and how much they needed the Messiah. He showed them their need similar to the way a dentist shows you an x-ray of a cavity in your tooth. You can almost hear him speaking about the words from Isaiah "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." He showed the need, gaping holes in their lives that made them unacceptable to their God. Then he pointed them to Messiah whom the Old Testament said would be "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities."

Paul first spoke about the Messiah, the Yishua, the Deliver, the Savior, who was to come. Then he spoke about Jesus the Messiah who had come, whom he had seen personally. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." Paul proclaimed Jesus. He simply told the story of Jesus' life the way we might confess our faith with the words of the Apostle Creed, not just to each other but to people who are not Christian. According to 2 Corinthians 4 we bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. We live on this earth with the hope that the Lord will give us opportunities to proclaim Jesus as the Christ the way Paul did.

When you see Paul travel through ancient Greek cities with the Word of God in his heart and on his lips, you really see a picture of your own life here on this earth. Paul was a chosen instrument of the Lord to bring his name to the Jews and the Gentiles, people of every race and culture. The Lord has called you and me to carry his Word and hold it out to the people around us who do not believe so they can share in what we have. As we heard read from 1 Peter 2, "You are a chosen people, royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who has called you out darkness into his wonderful light."

Did the words Paul brought to the people in Thessalonica have power? Listen to how powerful the words were that Paul spoke about Jesus. It says, "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." When you plant the truth of God's Word into the lives of people

it does produce results, because the word of the Lord has not lost its power, even for the age in which we are living. Jews from the synagogue became Christians, and even some of the Greeks in Thessalonica including some prominent women turned to the Lord and believed.

Let me ask you a personal question. If you had the opportunity this week to win a contest that gave you three free weeks of a vacation in Hawaii or an opportunity to share God's Word as Paul did with just one person and see God's Word work in the life of just one person, which would you choose? I know what you answer be and what mine would be, because we bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus and we are not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

Wherever God's word goes it produces results and some of the results are stirring up trouble in the community and the hearts of people who do not believe. Some of the Jewish people were so upset they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace. Every market place has its share of bad characters ready to join in heckling and harming those who believe in Jesus. They even accused these new Christians of causing trouble all over the world and defying the decrees of Caesar. The KJV of the Bible translates this as "turning the world upside down." How ironic it is that we are born into a world that is turned upside down similar to this cup I have in my hand. It wants nothing to do with God's blessings in Jesus. The Word of God takes a person's life and turns it up to receive God's blessings. When this happens the unbelieving world accuses the Christians of turning the world upside down, when actually we are turning the world up to God's mercy and love.

The mission statement for this congregation is "Holding Out the Word of Life." We love that Word that Jesus has entrusted to us and we know how much power is found in this book. This week I hope to plant some seeds in the small garden alongside of the house, trusting that the rain we had yesterday and the sunshine that is coming this week will cause the seed to grow into plants. We have confidence in the power of seeds to grow into plants, and even greater confidence that as much as our world is changing, the word of God will still turn the world upside down and change the hearts of people as happened in the city of Thessalonica.

2) The Word still strengthens faith

The word of the Lord that brings us to faith also strengthens us in our faith. The power of the Word that we see unleashed in the lives of the Christians in Berea is a power that we want to see unleashed in our lives as well. Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica by night. It was too dangerous for them. An even greater surprise was waiting for them in Berea. "On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 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."

God's Word showed its power again in the way it took a hold of the Berean Christians. When they started seeing how the Old Testament predicted the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus for their hope of peace with God and eternal life, they wanted to see more and more and more. They did not just take Paul's Word about Jesus the Messiah.

They wanted to see for themselves how these things were actually written about Jesus in the scrolls of the Old Testament. Can't you hear someone saying to Paul, "Now where did you say that verse was found in Isaiah?" Can't you see them unrolling the scrolls, talking to each other, pointing a finger at the actual verses and then sharing them with each other and commenting on them even more?

It is such a beautiful and noble thing when Christians follow along in the Bible as the Word of God is taught and preached. It is so beautiful when they use their finger to point to a verse and read it through carefully for themselves and even underline it. It is OK to write in your Bible, underline verses, make notes in the margin, and follow along as the Scriptures are being opened and explained. Remember what the disciples said to each other after Jesus talked with them on the way to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures to them. "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the way?"

I am holding in my hand a light, a headlamp, that is small, uses very little electricity and puts out a bright LED light. I am sure that in the future they will even have better lights to light our path when we are walking at night, or light our rooms at night. I am holding in this hand another light, the light of God's Word, described in the psalms as lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Some of the best moments of your life are waiting for you in your future every time you open the Bible, spend time with the Lord, and have him shine a light on the love that he has for you. The Word of God still has power to strengthen your life and create faith in the hearts of people. Amen.