

May 22, 2011
Easter 5

"The Word of God Still Has Tremendous 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.

Don Gorske made the news again this past week. On Tuesday May 17th he ate his 25,000th Big Mac Hamburger. He ate his first Big Mac in 1972, actually eight of them in one day. He admits to being OC (Obsessive Compulsive) over Big Macs. He keeps some frozen in the freezer. He collects the cartons and saves the receipts. If he travels, he takes Big Mac's with him. Big Macs make up 90% of his daily food intake. At the age of 58 he has maintained the same weight he had at 21, 185 pounds. He has a combined cholesterol rating of 158 much better than most for his age and better than most of his sitting here this morning.

We are not here this morning to encourage you to go on a diet of Big Mac's to loose weight or lower your cholesterol, but we are here to encourage each other to feed ourselves on God's Word. If you take some time each day to read the Bible, the Lord your God will feed you in your faith. You will grow in your appreciation for how much he loves you and cares for you. There is nothing wrong with being OC about not making it through your day without spending some time in God's Word.

The daily grind of life has a way of breaking us down and taking our eyes off of how much the Lord loves us and cares for us. The daily grind of life can take the spring out of our steps, the song from our hearts and the smiles from our faces. In the 23rd Psalm we speak about the Lord leading us like sheep to green pastures and quiet cool waters. In the words just read to you we see the tremendous power in God's Word to bring people to faith in Jesus and then strengthen them in that faith.

God's Word has the power to bring people to faith

Whenever you open the Bible and read from the book of Acts you are awed and amazed at the power of God's Word to take people living in darkness and bring them to the light of God's love in Jesus' the Savior. Paul and Silas came to the prominent Greek city of Thessalonika. "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." Can't you see the Jewish people gathering on the Sabbath Day to hear this man Paul who had studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel? He needs no scrolls. He knows the Scriptures from memory. He is privileged to take these people into the prophet Isaiah and show them the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death with words such as these, "He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." "The punishment for our peace was upon him."

Because he loved these people in darkness Paul had to show them that they needed the Christ to suffer and die for them. There was no way they could ever save themselves. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all?" The people listen in rapt attention. They are stunned by what Paul tells them about failing to live up to what God expects of them and how they will perish forever without believing in God's plan to remove our sin through Jesus. Love demands that we share with people what God's Word says about trying to get along in life without Jesus.

Have you ever been to the dentist and received some bad news? The pictures are taken of your teeth. He shows you a cavity that could cause you to lose your tooth. That's the bad news. Then the dentist says that he can drill out the bad part of the tooth and replace it with a filling that will make it as good as new.

When you share God's Word with people you need to tell them the truth. They have cavities, huge cavities, huge holes, huge failures and sins that make them unacceptable to God. That's the bad news. The good news is that God takes away our sin. He offers this removal of sin through Jesus his Son. He offers it free of charge. All the pain and suffering was placed on Jesus. Paul was privileged to open Scriptures that said "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed."

Did this Word of God that Paul shared with people have power to change their lives? It sure did. We are told, "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." The Word of God even brought Greeks to faith and even some of the prominent women in the city became Christians. Later Paul wrote a letter to these Christians in Thessalonika and here is what he said in that letter: "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." And then he wrote, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord...you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

God's Word has tremendous power. Listen to these words about the power of the Word from Isaiah 55: "As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." God's Word always produces results. One result is that people believe, but it also produces the opposite result. It creates anger and hostility in people towards the message of the gospel.

We see that in what happened in Thessalonika. Some of the Jewish people believed, but others want to drive Paul and Silas out of the city. It says they rounded up so bad characters from the

marketplace. You can always find some bad characters in the marketplace even today. You can always find people who are ready to join a mob and get in on the action. This mob rushes down the street to Jason's house where Paul and Silas had been staying. They grab Jason and some other believers and haul them before the city officials. Here is what they say about them: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

What you believe about Jesus will put in you in direct conflict with what the world believes about Jesus. The world says there are many ways to be saved. We say there is no one who can save us except Jesus. We believe that Jesus is King, King of kings and Lord of lords. I like the old King James Version that said, "They have turned the world upside down." The Christians turn the world upside down with their teachings about Jesus. What we believe about Jesus and his death on the cross is in total conflict with all other religions.

How radical is your belief about Jesus? You believe with all your heart that nothing makes you acceptable to God and gives you eternal life except Jesus. Here is what Paul wrote in Galatians 6:14, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Where do you seek your validation or importance? It is not in who you are. It is not in your things. It is not in your job. It is not even in how well you live your daily life. You seek your validation in Jesus. Paul said, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

God's word has such power that it can lead you to see that your ultimate validation in life is not in how much money you have, or clothes you wear, or friends, or family, or whether you own an iPad or iPod, or even how well you live your life. Your ultimate validation and value and acceptance before God comes in Jesus. Such belief turns the world upside down. It creates people who passionately love Jesus and people who passionately hate him and despise him.

God's word also strengthens faith

The world did not come to an end yesterday as some were predicting. Jesus may continue to delay his coming again in glory. That means we have some tough work ahead of us as we try to bring more of God's Word to more people more often before the end comes. Thank God we have his Word to sustain and strengthen us for all the challenges that are ahead of us.

Notice how the Christians in Berea depended on the Word of the Lord to strengthen them for all the tasks they faced. "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." It is such a beautiful and noble thing when Christians follow along in the Bible and check out what is being said to make sure that it is true. These believers did not just take Paul's word at face value. They wanted to be sure that what he was telling could be found in the Scriptures. They wanted him to show them from the Old Testament that what he said to them about Jesus was actually true.

God's Word has tremendous power to strengthen us in our faith. Some years ago, I was counseling with someone who was going through problems in her marriage. We reminded her that the Lord would be with her and then quoted from Isaiah 41 where the Lord says, "So do not fear, for I am

with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Later she said how that verse guided her through the hard times. She clung to that verse and said it over and over again. The Lord even gave her a good marriage, after some tough times.

Cling to God’s Word. Read a little each day. Underline and mark verses, especially where the Lord tells you how much he loves you. I cannot recommend eating two Big Macs a day to supply food for your body, but I can whole heartedly recommend reading the Bible every day. It has not lost its power. Amen.