*DEVOTIONAL*

February 26 – March 3

The Philosophers’ Witness

**Monday, February 26 Acts 17:1-9**

*“They came to Thessalonica”*

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke left Philippi and made their way to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. They began ministry in the synagogue and the opponents of the itinerant evangelists declared, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Paul turned the world upside down because people responded and turned to the Lord. The preaching of the Gospel does stir up, excite, and unsettle old values and securities demanding a decision, a turn around.

Paul reached the deepest needs of people in Thessalonica with the preaching of Jesus Christ as the only basis of abundant life now and eternal life forever. Paul’s message brought conversion, but it also brought hostility. Again, envy among the Jews in the synagogue was the cause. They gathered a mob from the marketplace and set the city in an uproar. Since the evangelists had been sent on their way by the believers, the authorities were left to threaten Jason whose home had become a base of operations for the newly founded church.

*You have turned my life upside down, Lord, and I am forever grateful. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 27 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

*“We pray for you constantly”*

The prayer that opens Paul’s letter to the Christians in Thessalonica gives us the opportunity to observe several things about this early church. First, it was a community rooted in God’s grace, love and mercy. Their existence was not predicated on anything they had done, but on God’s favor toward them. Second, they were a community committed to Jesus Christ. Jesus’ death and resurrection was the foundation upon which the church was based; he was the focus of their faith; his life was the model by which the church lived; and his coming from heaven defined the future for which they waited.

Third, they were a fellowship empowered by the Holy Spirit. It was because of the evident power of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and lives of the missionaries that the Thessalonians became convinced that the Gospel was not merely a human message. In turn, the same Spirit was at work in the Thessalonians, giving them (even in the midst of difficult circumstances) joy and empowering their own witness to others.

*Our pray for our church, Lord, is that you be at our center. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 28 Acts 17:10-15**

*“On arriving in Berea . . .”*

Sixty miles from Thessalonica, a receptive city awaited the Gospel. There the evangelists found fair-minded people with a readiness to receive the good news, described as being “noble,” “generous,” and “free from prejudice.” This was expressed in a readiness to listen and search the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true. The Spirit touched hearts, and many Jews as well as Greeks believed.

Paul’s pleasant experience with the Bereans was short-lived. The envious Jewish leaders from Thessalonica dogged his steps and disrupted receptivity. The brief respite before they came gave Paul time to collect his strength and be ready for the vigorous demands of the challenge of his next stop in Athens, then the intellectual capital of the world. He went on with Luke, while Timothy and Silas remained in Berea for a time and then went back to Thessalonica to strengthen the church there. It is interesting that a strong church grew in Thessalonica, a city in which there was great resistance. A sign of the Holy Spirit’s influence is not ease and lack of conflict.

*May we all be like the Bereans, Lord, ready to hear and study your word. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

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The Philosophers’ Witness

**Thursday, March 1 Acts 17:16-21**

*“What is this new teaching you are presenting?”*

In Athens, the center of culture, religion, and philosophy, Paul was not troubled by the leaders of the Jews. He did, however, discover the difficulties of confronting the intellectual community with the Gospel, and in particular, the resurrection. Two philosophical schools dominated the city’s thought. The Epicureans asserted that happiness and pleasure were the two principal aims of a well-lived life, epitomized by the three-fold desire to eat, drink, and be merry. The Stoics could not have been more opposite. For them, all of life was determined by the gods and was to be lived free of sensual attachment.

Paul was brought before the Areopagus, the same court that had tried and condemned Socrates to death centuries before. Now in democratic Athens, the power of the courts was limited to being a sort of philosophical review board for the intellectual and moral life of the city. It had the authority to control who lectured in the city and to bring any lecturer before the philosophers to pass on his credentials and content.

*We share your Gospel, Lord, with those who lack a biblical background. Amen.*

**Friday, March 2 Acts 17:22-34**

*“To an Unknown God”*

Taking the altar to the Unknown God as his starting point, Paul proceeded to tell the intellectuals who this God really is: He is the creator and source of all life – the one who guides all history and on whom all life depends. By grace he is not the object of humankind’s search but the one in search of his people. Paul showed his classical training by quoting from one of their own poets, a phrase from Minos’ address to his father Zeus: “Thou art risen and alive for ever, *for* *in thee we live and move and have our being.*”

With these references as his background, he moved on to his target – Jesus Christ in whom the living God has been revealed. Through him the world will be judged, and his authority has been validated in having been raised from the dead. Paul got as far as the resurrection, but that was more than some of his hearers were willing to consider. This talk of judgment and resurrection was too new and too specific for them, and they mocked him. Others, however, were interested and wanted to hear more.

*In spite of the skepticism and mockery, Lord, we preach your resurrection. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 3 1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

*“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”*

In Paul’s day, people with a Greek background were reared in a world of thought and reason, without any hint of faith in God at work in their history. The Greeks were thinkers who loved to speculate on ideas and who needed rational evidence for anything they believed. It is this philosophy that gave birth to so much of the thought and scientific methodology that characterizes the Western world today.

In these verses, Paul reminds the church for all times that while the Gospel does not measure up to worldly standards, it is the only word of salvation to those who believe. The church in every century has had to resist, sometimes not too successfully, the temptation to try to augment the Gospel. Paul was very reluctant to adorn or dress up the basic facts of the Gospel message he preached even though he knew it would be considered a scandal to some of his listeners and readers, while others would think of it as foolishness. To the mind unaided by the Holy Spirit, the Gospel does not make sense; on the contrary it seems to be nonsense.

*What others call “foolish,” Lord, we know to be your wisdom. Amen.*