

What's the Message – Lesson 119

Continue along with us as we rejoin Paul for the last two years of his second missionary journey.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we pray that as You were with Paul, strengthening him in the face of trials and danger, You would arm us with the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us tell others who do not yet know Jesus, of the love our savior has for all. Amen.

Last time we saw Paul beaten and jailed in Philippi, then miraculously freed, his jailor converted, and his family baptized. To top it off, the city officials humbly apologized for the mistreatment of Paul and Silas, but nevertheless urged them to leave their city. After stopping to give encouragement to Lydia and the new congregation that met in her home, they moved on to the next city, Thessalonica.

Since there was a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica, Paul – as was his custom – went to it first, and for three Sabbath days showed them from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Just as before, some Jews and “many of the devout Greeks” believed and rejoiced, but others not only rejected the news, they stirred up mobs and went to the city authorities for action. This time they shouted, *These men, who have turned the world upside down, have come here also . . .*

For their safety, Paul and Silas were slipped out of town that night, and sent on to Berea, where the cycle was again repeated. But there was a difference here. As Acts chapter 17, beginning at verse 11, tells us: *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.*

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and

stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the Sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens . . . Now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.

But rather than turn Paul off and reject him outright, these philosophers invited Paul to come to the Areopagus, the public meeting place where the sophisticated men gathered to discuss new matters of interest. They wanted to hear more about this claim of resurrection from the dead. So Paul went, and delivered a powerful proclamation of the truths of Jesus to this ancient heathen center of culture, knowledge, and art. He began by noting that they were very religious, with many idols, including one "To the Unknown god" . . . just in case they had missed one. And Paul proclaimed, this unknown God, the creator of the universe and everything in it, is the very one he speaks of. And this was his conclusion: *but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead* (Acts 17:30-31).

The idea of someone rising from the dead was ridiculous to a sophisticated Greek, so many mocked, but some believed and joined Paul. After this, Paul left Athens and went on to Corinth.

Corinth was the most commercial of the cities of ancient Greece. It was located on a narrow strip of land between the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, so it had commercial control in all four directions, either by land or by water. In prior centuries it had been known for its temple to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and the reputation of its temple prostitutes and the city's moral standards remained. This pagan city might not seem like a choice site to start a Christian church, but it

turned out to be the most successful of the churches Paul started in Europe. Paul remained there for 18 months, gaining a sizeable number of converts, some Jews, but mostly Gentiles drawn largely from the lower classes and slaves. But he continued to be concerned about the small congregation that had been planted in Thessalonica. It was from Corinth that he wrote the letters we know as the Epistles to the Thessalonians

Paul's ministry was not only aided by the arrival of Silas and Timothy, but also by a couple of Jews who – like Paul – were tent-makers, Aquila and Priscilla. They had come from Rome, were converted, and became a part of Paul's inner-circle of coworkers. Paul's ministry in Corinth followed the same pattern he had used previously. First, he went to the local synagogue and tried to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. As happened before, some believed, this time including the ruler of the synagogue, a man named Crispus, and another named Titus Justus, who owned a house located right next door to the synagogue.

But there was also a large number of Jews who opposed and reviled Paul, leading him to declare: *Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles* (Acts 18:6).

And this he did, with great effect. But after 18 months he determined it was time to return to his home base of Antioch, and the team of Silas, Timothy, Aquila, and Priscilla boarded a ship headed east, and landed in Ephesus. There he left Aquila and Priscilla, saying, *I will return to you if God wills*, and sailed on to the port of Caesarea that Herod the Great had built. From there he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the Disciples who remained there, and returned to Antioch. Officially this closes what we refer to as "Paul's Second Missionary Journey." He had traveled over 2800 miles, twice the distance of his first journey, and had firmly planted the growing church in Europe. It was a tremendous labor, but it was a labor of love, a labor of which we are today the beneficiaries.

And what can we learn from this example of Paul? Jesus, the Christ, was first and foremost in Paul's priorities. Now, each of us must ask ourselves the question, "What priority does Jesus have in my life?"

Next time we will join Paul on his Third Missionary Journey.