

Acts 17:1-10 — When God Plants A Church

February 18, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds Church! If you are new this morning, we are glad to have you. For those who are new, you came on a great Sunday. Today, we begin a study of the book of 1 Thessalonians.

We will start 1 Thessalonians this morning. We will take a break from it next week, then return to it the following week. Why are we taking a break from it next week? This week, I will be in California meeting with other pastors. I won't be home until Wednesday evening. The office needs everything for a Sunday message done on Friday morning. That doesn't give much time to put together next weeks message. Rather than have a stressful Thursday, I thought it would be a good idea to take an old message and teach it again.

As a pastor, I know many people forget by Monday what was taught on Sunday. If I teach a message that is old enough, those who are new will not have heard it. Those who have been here for a while, probably forgot it.

I rummaged through my files looking at old messages. I whittled the list down to two, but I couldn't decide between them. This morning, you are going to help me decide.

Take out your phones. Yes, this is one of the only times you are allowed to text in church during a sermon. Text the word *customsunday* to our church texting number. 712-900-0109. That will bring up a survey on your phone. Reply with the number 1 if you would like to hear a sermon on what the Bible say about happiness. Reply with the number 2 if you want to hear a sermon on what the Bible say about forgiveness.

We will see what you decide and that will determine next week's message.

As we begin the study of 1 Thessalonians, you need to know that this church was a great church. They brought a lot of joy to the heart of the apostle Paul. That can't be said of every church. Paul was concerned with the church in Galatia because they left the gospel. Jesus was concerned with many of the churches in the letter of Revelation. The church of Ephesus was one of them because they drifted away from Jesus, their first love.

When it comes to the church in Thessalonica, Paul was thrilled with them. Listen to the joy he has for this church that we see in this letter.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

Paul loved the way this church treated their Bible. He loved the way they treated the gospel message. That didn't consider it human philosophy. They treated it like it was, the very Word of God. Paul was constantly thanking God for this church in his prayers. That is encouraging.

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,... 1 Thessalonians 2:17 (ESV)

These verses give us a window into Paul's feelings for the church. This church held a special place in his heart. The letter of 1 Thessalonians is not harsh. It was a letter written to encourage them. Since this was written as a letter of encouragement, I hope this series will encourage you.

This week, as I studied, I felt a little like Paul as he wrote this letter to the church he loved. CrossWinds is that way. I thankful we are a church that treats

the Bible as it is, the very words of God. Not many churches treat the Bible that way. I am also thankful for the relationships we have with one another and the love I have in my heart for you. This week, when I am in California, I can't wait to tell other pastors how proud I am of you.

This morning, we will examine three things to help us understand the book's background. First, the history of the city of Thessalonica. Second, how did the gospel come to Thessalonica? Third, what is the big picture of 1 Thessalonians?

What is the History of Thessalonica?

In the year 315 B.C., the city of Thessalonica was founded at a place called Therma. It began in the modern-day country of Greece. At that time, it was divided into two countries. The area to the north was known as Macedonia. The area to the south was known as Achaia.



The city was founded by a general who served under Alexander the Great. His name was Cassander. He chose this location for a city because of its hot springs, also known as thermal springs, which is why it was originally called Therma. He chose it because it was the northernmost port of the Aegean Sea. It was also along an east-west highway that stretched from the Orient to Rome known as the Via Egnatia. We will learn more about that in a moment.

Why did he call the city Thessalonica? General Cassander married Alexander the Great's half-sister. Her name was Thessalonica. He named the city

after his wife. Thessalonica became one of three important cities in Macedonia. The other two were Philippi and Berea. Paul visited both of those cities on his missionary journeys. The two important cities in the south, in Achaia, were Athens and Corinth. Paul also visited those cities on his missionary journeys.



When the Romans came in 168 B.C., they conquered the area and divided Macedonia into four parts. Thessalonica was the capital city of a quarter of Macedonia. Twenty years later, the Romans merged the four parts back into one, and Thessalonica became the capital city of all of Macedonia.

A Strategic Location

In real estate, they say the three most important factors are location, location, and location. That isn't just true for the success in real estate. It is also true for the success of a city. Since location is so important, that is part of what made the city of Thessalonica such a success.

1. **Via Egnatia** — The Via Egnatia was a major east-west Roman highway. It was built in 200 B.C. The highway passed through the city



of Thessalonica.

If someone went 260 miles east, they ended up at the port of Dyrrhachium, which sailed

into Rome. If someone went 430 miles east, they ended up in the Orient. This brought money and goods to town and through town. How big was this highway? It was not as big as we expect. It ranged from 6 to 10 feet wide.

2. Deep Natural Harbor — Harbors around the Aegean Sea had a constant silting problem. Ephesus, which was the third or fourth largest city in the ancient world, died because its harbor silted over. Today, the ancient city of



Ephesus is four miles inland from the ocean. That is four miles of silt that built up over the years. Thessalonica was different. It enjoyed a deep and protected harbor that did not silt. Even today, over 2,000 years after the city began in 316 B.C., the harbor is operational and used for shipping.

3. Fertile Soil That Is Rich In Minerals — The soil in the area is very fertile. Even more valuable than the crops from the soil are the mineral deposits in the ground. The area around the city was mined for gold, silver, iron, lead, and copper. At one time, when the Romans tried to destroy the city, they tried to put the city out of business by shutting down the mines. That gives us a rough idea of how much gold, silver, and other precious metals were mined and shipped out of the city.

4. Large Population — The ancient writer Strabo claimed Thessalonica was more populous than any other city in Macedonia. An ancient writer named Lucien writing at the end of the first century claimed Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia and ranged between 65,000 to 100,000 people. That is a lot of

people! Especially for the first century. Thessalonica was one of the largest and most important cities in the Roman Empire.

A Favored Political Status

1. **Loyalty to Rome** — When Macedonians in the north rebelled against Rome, the Romans sent an army to crush the rebellion. The head of the army was a man general named Metellus. What did the Macedonians in the south living in Thessalonians do after the rebellious northern Macedonians were defeated? They didn't complain! Instead, they erected a statue in Metellus' honor and called him "Their Savior and Benefactor."



The people in the city tried very hard to portray themselves as loyal Roman citizens. Archaeological excavations reveal inscriptions on public buildings indicating they were paid for by wealthy Romans. By cozying up to Rome, many of the people grew wealthy.

The desire to please Rome and their willingness to call the Roman emperor their savior is important background information. Just imagine what happens when Paul comes into town talking about another king named Jesus and Jesus is the savior of the world. That will not go over well.

2. **Supported Marc Anthony and Octavian** — When Julius Caesar was assassinated, it led to a battle against the assassins who were Brutus and Cassius. The two Roman generals defending the honor of Caesar were Marc

Anthony, who was only 18 years old at the time, and Octavian. The decisive battle between these four generals occurred just down the road from Thessalonica outside of Philippi. The city had to choose whom they would support. I don't know if it was wisdom or luck, but they sided with Marc Anthony and Octavian, which was the winning side. As a result of their loyalty, Marc Anthony awarded the city of Thessalonica with the status of being a free city. That is important. The leaders in the city didn't want to do anything to jeopardize that status.

3. Free City Status — This was a big deal. It allowed the city to govern itself instead of a Roman ruler. They could mint their own coins. It dramatically reduced their taxes. Everybody likes reduced taxes. They were also free from military occupation.

4. Emperor Worship — To keep favor with Rome, they build a number of temples in honor of the Roman state and individual Roman emperors. In these temples, the Roman emperor was worshipped. You couldn't just build one of these. You needed permission from Rome to do this. It was considered an honor to have one. You had to compete with other cities to gain this right. Thessalonica had several of these temples.

Why is this background information important? When Paul pulled into town talking about another king named Jesus, who is the savior of the world, and people begin following Jesus, as you would expect, many people became concerned. It looked like disloyalty to Rome, even treason against Rome. This

could affect their free city status or even incur Rome's wrath. This frightened people.

A Unique Government Structure

As a free city, Thessalonica had self-governance. This made the city unique. Understanding their unique government structure will be important for us as we read about the beginning of the church in the city in Acts 17.

1. **Citizen Assembly** (*demos*) — This was the lowest form of government. It is where we get our word democracy. It was a public assembly that discussed general issues such as city festivals. City problems were decided in the assembly by the people. In Acts 17, when Paul and Silas were arrested, this was where the mob intended to bring them for trial.

2. **City Council** (*boule*) — This was one up from the city council. It was a smaller body that made some decisions more efficient.

3. **City Leaders** (*politarches*) — This was the highest office in the city. It replaced Roman rule. Some translations call this the city leaders or city rulers. They are mentioned twice in Acts 17. The job of these people was to insure a stable relationship with Rome. They were to stop anything that threatened this relationship and their free city status. Know of the group that was unique to this city will help us understand what happens in Acts 17.

Religiously Pluralistic Environment

This was not unique to Thessalonica. It was true of every major city in the ancient world. Archaeologists tell us there were over 25 God's worshipped in the city. With so many travelers passing through the city, this would be expected.

What were these God's like? What did their worship involve? Here are a few examples.

1. **Dionysius** — This god was also known as Bacchus. He was always pictured holding a cup because he was the wine god, the drinking god. His symbol was the male sex organ. He was a popular deity to worship because he was all about having a party and getting



drunk. Today, people still worship him except they hold a can of beer instead of a cup of wine when they get drunk.

2. **Anubis** — This god came from Egypt. He was a jackal-headed god. If you have seen Egyptian hieroglyphics, you will recognize him. He was connected with the afterlife. He is just one of the Egyptian deities worshipped in the city.



3. **Cabirus** — He was super popular. Little is known about him. He was always portrayed with a hammer in one hand and a drinking cup in the other. I call him the working-for-the-weekend god. Use the mallet for work during the week. Use the cup to drink on the weekend.

4. **Aphrodite** — She was also known as Venus. This was the goddess of love. In a city of sailors and travelers who were drinking, need I say more about why the goddess so popular. For obvious reason we won't be showing a picture of her on the screen.

5. **Emperor Worship** — We already mentioned that this was popular. People wanted to get as much favor and money from Rome as possible.

6. Judaism — We will read more about this in Acts 17. The large commercial profits in the city brought many Jewish businessmen to town. When Paul went to Philippi, there were not enough Jews in the city for a synagogue. There only needed to be 10 to start one. In Thessalonica, there was a large and established synagogue. Jews continued in the city throughout the centuries until Adolf Hitler. He took 60,000 Jews out of the city and eliminated them in concentration camps. The Jews have ceased in Thessalonica since that day.

A City Of Crime and Prostitution

One other things to know about the city is it was crime-ridden. Archaeological excavations tell us the houses of the city were built without windows because crime was so bad. It also had a large and well-organized prostitution business. Sex was big in the city, especially for the sailors and travelers. Babies were aborted or abandoned. It was a sexually depraved, crime-ridden city. Since many people in the church came out of that lifestyle, this is why Paul will spent part of this letter talking to the new Christian about sexual ethics.

How did the gospel come to Thessalonica?

Now that we have a flavor for the city, how did the good news of Jesus come to the city? The book of Acts describes Paul's missionary journeys as he shared the message of Jesus around the ancient world. On Paul's first missionary journey, it was two senior apostles and one man in training. Paul and Barnabas were the senior apostles. John-Mark was the young man in training on the trip. After Paul's first missionary journey, he decided to take on a second missionary journey. At that time, Paul and Barnabas ran into a disagreement

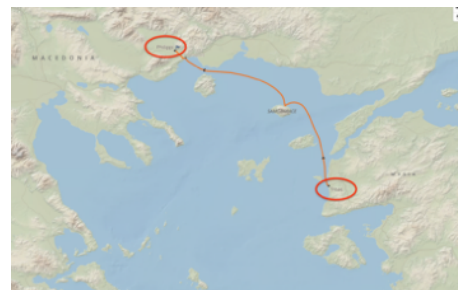
about bringing John Mark. That led to them going their own ways. For Paul's second missionary journey, he recruited Silas and Timothy. Silas was the seasoned Christian. Timothy was the young man in training.

There is an application for us in this. Paul didn't do things alone. HE brought another mature Christian with him to divide the load. In addition, he always brought a younger Christian with him to train them. What a great reminder for us. As Christians in the church, instead of doing everything alone, we need to share the load with other mature Christians and do things together. If we teach a class, have another mature Christian teach the class with us. If we are leading a life group, share the load with another mature Christian instead of carrying all of it ourselves. In addition, have a younger Christian with us so they can learn how to lead.

Let's turn to the story of how the gospel came to Thessalonica. It begins in Acts 16.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:6–10 (ESV)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were moving around and wherever they went, God kept shutting doors. When God shuts doors, that feels like a bad thing. It is actually a good thing. He is steering us where he wants us to go in life. That eventually led the three of



them to the port city of Troas where Paul had a vision at night. It was a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come and help us.” Paul concluded they were to head to Macedonia. This may not sound significant, but it is important. This was the Holy Spirit directing Paul to Europe. This was the first time the good news of Jesus was heard on European soil.

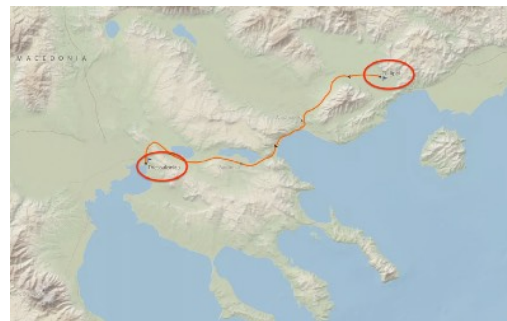
They went to Philippi, where they ended up in jail. There we had the conversion of the Philippian jailer. They left Philippi heading for Thessalonica. That is where we pick up the story in Acts 17.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Acts 17:1–10 (ESV)

The trip from Philippi to Thessalonica would have been a five or six-day journey. Let’s work through the text.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Acts 17:1 (ESV)

The smaller cities mentioned in this



verse are stopover cities for those traveling the Via Egnatia highway. It was a 92-mile journey from Philippi to Thessalonica.

Unlike Philippi, which didn't have enough Jews for a synagogue, there was a large synagogue in Thessalonica. This is not surprising given the size and commercial importance of the city.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, Acts 17:2 (ESV)

Why did Paul go to the synagogue first? He had credentials as a Jewish teacher. He was a Pharisee who studied under Gamaliel. That was the Harvard education of his day. When he pulled into town and showed his credentials, people were eager to have him speak in their synagogue.

In the synagogue, he reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths.

...explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." Acts 17:3 (ESV)

Paul was a hard preaching topic. People didn't want to hear about the messiah coming in the middle of history to suffer and die. They wanted to hear about the messiah coming at the end of history in victory and triumph. Paul probably showed them Isaiah 52 and 53, which talk about Jesus coming to suffer and die for our sins. which was to prove the Jewish Messiah had to come, suffer, die on the cross for our sins,

How long was Paul in Thessalonica? It tells us he reasoned with the Jews in their synagogue for three Sabbaths. Many people think Paul was only in

this city for three weeks. I think he was in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, but I believe he stayed for city longer. How long? I don't know. Let me tell you why.

1. The church was made up mostly of Gentiles, not Jews — Later, we will see the church in Thessalonica was made up of mostly Gentiles, not Jews. After getting kicked out of the synagogue, Paul needed time to develop relationships with the Gentiles.

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

If the church were made up mostly of Jews, Paul wouldn't need to congratulate them for turning from idols. That would be only true of Gentiles.

2. The Philippians sent Paul financial help two or more times.

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Philippians 4:15–16 (ESV)

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he received financial help from the Philippians at least twice, possibly more. If it was around 100 miles to travel from Philippi to Thessalonica, two round trips would be 400 miles on foot. It is unlikely a messenger from Philippi brought Paul financial support twice in under three weeks and walked 400 miles in less than three weeks to do that. Probably more time was involved.

3. Paul had enough time to develop a business. — A minor problem in 1 Thessalonians, which will become a major problem Paul addresses in 2 Thessalonians, was people not wanting to work. They were lazy. They were sponging off the generosity of wealthy Christians in the city. Paul will tell the

Thessalonians he wanted to provide them an example of not being a financial burden to others, so he worked with his own hands while in the city. He made tents and sold them in the markets. It is unlikely that Paul set up a tent-making business where he made and sold tents in the market for three weeks or less, all while receiving financial help from the Philippians twice. It is likely more than three weeks were involved.

Let's see how Paul's Bible study in the synagogue turned out.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. Acts 17:4 (ESV)

There were three kinds of people who believed and were persuaded to follow Jesus.

1. **Jews** — Some Jews trusted in Jesus. We know the name of one of them. It was Jason. The church met in his house. Jason was a wealthy guy. He was wealthy because he had a house. Not everyone had a house in those days. He didn't just have a house, but his house was big enough to host the entire church. Be thankful for wealthy Christians with big homes. It is a free space for the church to meet.

2. **Devout Greeks** — These were Greeks who were attracted to Judaism. They loved the Bible. They loved God. They attended synagogue, but they were not Jews simply because they were unwilling to be circumcised. That is understandable. Remember, this was before Novocain. This was before they gave you knock-out gas. This was before antibiotics. It is understandable that these men were Jewish, but not all the way.

3. Prominent Women — These were wealthy and influential women in the synagogue. Maybe their husbands were deceased and left them a fortune. Maybe their husbands traveled on business and left them in charge of a wealthy estate. We don't know. We only know these were wealthy, powerful, and influential women.

After these wealthy and influential people left the synagogue to join Paul and the newly planted church, do you think this made the Jews upset? You bet it did. We will learn more about that in a moment.

The Divine Passive

Before we go further, I want to point out something that is subtle but important. The text does not say, "Paul persuaded some of the Jews." It says, "Some of the Jews were persuaded." This is a subtle but important difference. The first way would credit Paul and his persuasive powers to lead people to faith in Jesus. The second way credits God, not Paul. God is the unspoken agent at work behind the scenes in the lives of these people. All Paul did was reason from the Scriptures. It was the Holy Spirit that changed people's hearts after they encountered Jesus through the Scriptures.

This applies to us. When it comes to telling people about Jesus, it is not our job to change anyone's mind. All we can do is reason from the Scriptures. All we can do is help get people into the Bible and invite them to trust in Jesus. It is not our job to change a heart. That is God's job. He does that, and we leave the results with him.

In a moment, we will see that Paul was kicked out of the synagogue.

Where did he go when he was kicked out?

Where did Paul go after being kicked out of the synagogue?

1. **Street Corner Evangelism** — We don't know for sure, but I think Paul may have engaged in street corner evangelism. In Corinth and Ephesus, he talked about Jesus to people on the street. We also see him doing this in Athens.

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. Acts 17:17 (ESV)

2. Workshop Evangelism

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 (ESV)

The Greek can give this verse a different nuance. It reads, "...working day and night, we preach the gospel of God."

While Paul was working, he was preaching the good news of Jesus. Thessalonica had a large public market where merchants could set up shop to sell their goods. In the market, as Paul sewed tents in his shop,



he talked to people about Jesus when they came into his shop.

This is another great application for us. Sometimes, we think the only place we can talk about Jesus is in church. A great place to talk about Jesus is at work. It doesn't need to be strange. It can be natural. For example, many young adults have come to CrossWinds from AGCO. How did they hear about

CrossWinds? People they met at work talked about Jesus at work. Workplace evangelism is a great place to tell people about Jesus. It worked for Paul. It can work for us.

Opposition to Paul's Ministry

But the Jews were jealous, ... Acts 17:5a (ESV)

This shouldn't surprise us. Imagine if a traveling rabbi showed up in our church. We let him teach for three Sundays. After he was done, half of the church left with him to start a new church. That would get people angry. That is what happened to the synagogue in Thessalonica. They kicked Paul out of the synagogue because they were jealous.

...and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. Acts 17:5b (ESV)

It says they took wicked men of the rabble. The Greek word behind the English word rabble is *agora*. That means marketplace. They recruited wicked men from the marketplace to create societal unrest. The Greek word for wicked is a pejorative term. It means loafers or lowlifes. They are defined as troublemakers who add no value to society but love to create hostility and social unrest.

Plutarch, the Roman writer, uses these same Greek terms to describe men who hung around the markets in cities and caused trouble. He says these characters forced societal issues by shouting and creating civil unrest.

Nothing is new under the sun. Do you remember the social unrest in our country that took place a few summers ago, especially in Minneapolis? People were breaking windows, burning down businesses, and torching police stations.

We wonder how these things get started. Who pays for them? Who are the people who love to create societal unrest? What happens now is the same thing that was happening then. The Jews paid these people to create hostility against Paul and Silas. They were paid to create mob a rowdy mob.

...they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. Acts 17:5c (ESV)

Here is where our background helps us. It says they set the entire city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas were staying, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. It is the word *demos*. It was the lowest government structure in the city. The public forum to decide their fate. Their hope was the rioting crowd would make a quick decision to do away with Paul and Silas.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, Acts 17:6 (ESV)

Paul and Silas were not home. They dragged Jason and other Christians before the city authorities. Jason was a wealthy, respected Jewish man in the community. They couldn't try lynch-mob justice on him, so they brought Jason and other Christians to the city authorities. Remember the background information we learned about this city's government? City authorities is the Greek word *politarch*. It is the highest level of authority in the self-governing city. Their job was to keep peace with Rome and to make sure everything in the city was pleasing to Rome.

Look at the charges they level against Paul Silas, and Jason.

...“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” Acts 17:6b–7 (ESV)

This doesn't sound significant, but if you know the background we learned earlier, you will recognize this as very dangerous. There were two charges.

1. Disturbing the Peace — This was serious. Rome marketed itself as providing peace, the Pax Romana. The city of Thessalonica spent plenty of time and energy on its relationship with Rome, ensuring it was a city of peace that didn't draw the attention of Rome. They accused Paul and Silas of disturbing the peace and putting the entire city into an uproar. The truth is Paul and Silas had not disturbed the peace. It was the Jews and the Lynch mob they paid to create unrest that disturbed the peace. It is a common political practice to accuse people of what you are doing yourself.

2. Proposing A King That Was Not Caesar — They accused Paul and Silas of violating Caesar's decrees. They accused Paul and Silas of treason. The gospel message about another Lord and Savior named Jesus was heard as an attempt to overthrow the emperor. When this took place, Caesar Augustus was 74. There was much speculation about who would replace him and if he could function in his old age. The Romans created laws against circulating rumors or prophecies about a change of the Roman ruler. They accused Paul and Silas of treason!

It is not surprising we read the next words.

And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. Acts 17:8 (ESV)

The *politarches*, who knew nothing about Paul, Silas, and Christians, believed the agitators and thought this was about overthrowing Rome. It says they were disturbed. The Greek word means they were in a panic. They wanted to get Paul and Silas out of town as fast as they could. ,

Paul and Silas were forced to leave.

And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Acts 17:9 (ESV)

When Jason gave money as a financial promise that they would leave town, they let them leave.

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Acts 17:10 (ESV)

That night, Paul, Silas, and Timothy immediately left and traveled the 45 miles down the road to Berea on the Via Egnatia road. Things went a little better in Berea.



Paul, Silas, and Timothy went to Berea.

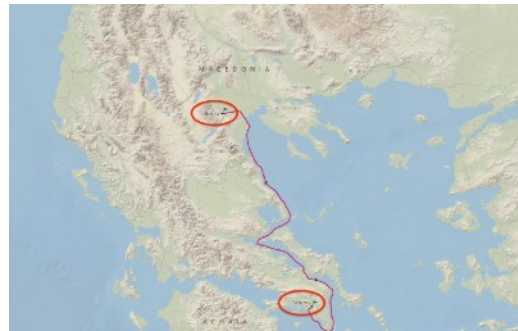
Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned 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. Acts 17:11–14 (ESV)

Things were going well. People were turning to Jesus until the jealous Jews from Thessalonica heard what was happening down the road. They sent

the agitators to Berea and formed another mob. That led to Paul leaving town. He went to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained behind. At this time, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to find out how the church was doing. While Paul and Silas were kicked out of town, Timothy was under the radar and could still return.

Paul went to Athens and Corinth.

After Athens, Paul went to Corinth, where he stayed for a year and a half. While in Corinth, Silas and Timothy showed up. Timothy gave a report to Paul about the new church in Thessalonica and how they were doing in a hostile city with so much opposition from the Jews. Paul immediately sets down to write the letter of 1 Thessalonians that we have in our Bible.



Look what he says in the letter.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 1 Thessalonians 3:6 (ESV)

Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians from the city of Corinth after he heard Timothy's good report that despite all the opposition this church was facing from the city officials and the Jewish synagogue, the church was doing well. They had questions about a few things, so Paul wrote this letter to encourage them and help them in the year A.D. 51.

We have covered the history of this city and how the gospel came to the city. There is one more thing I want to look at, which is the big picture of this book.

The Big Picture of 1 Thessalonians

This letter breaks down into two parts. In the first half of the book, Paul defends how he acted in Thessalonica. He did not create riots or show disloyalty to Rome. Then Paul explains why he can't return to Thessalonica with the charges against him. Then, he encourages the Thessalonians to stay faithful as they go through persecution.

The Big Picture of 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 — Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:13 — Paul Defends Himself.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 — Paul Defends how he acted while in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 — Paul defends why he cannot return.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 — Paul encourages faithfulness in persecution.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 — Transitional Prayer

1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:2 — Paul Answers Their Questions.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 — What is proper Christian sexual conduct?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 — What happens to Christians when they die?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 — What will happen when Jesus returns?

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 — How should Christians be different in the world?

In the second half of the book, he answers the question they sent to Paul through Timothy. What is proper Christian sexual conduct? That is an important question in a sexually loose city like Thessalonica. What happens to Christians when they die? What will happen when Jesus returns? How should Christians be different in a crazy world?

Those topics fit well with the background of the city and how the gospel came to the city.

Conclusion

We covered a lot of ground this morning. How does this apply to us? The church in Thessalonica was in a dark city. It was also difficult for them as they were hit with false accusations of creating social unrest and a powerful Jewish synagogue working against them. Yet, despite all that difficulty, the church turned out to be one of the best. It was a faithful church with growing Christians that Paul loved.

It struck me that what was true of the church in Thessalonica is true today. In some of the hardest soils God grows some of his best Christians. Many times, adversity grows Christians better than prosperity. That is true today, just as it was in the days of Paul.

When you walked in this morning, I don't know what struggles are in your life. Maybe your marriage is on the rocks. Maybe you are struggling with a child. Maybe you are facing trouble at work. Maybe you were diagnosed with a disease. In those times, we get on our knees and call out to God for mercy and help. Difficult times are hard, but many times, they are what is spiritually best for us to draw us closer to Jesus.

This morning, I don't know what you are facing, but know God intends to use it to draw you close to him so you grow strong in him, just like he did the Thessalonians.



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