



Walking Through the Scripture Together

August 3 - 9, 2008

Acts 17:1-15

Troublemakers

Text Acts 17:1-15 (TNIV)

In Thessalonica

¹ When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," 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 other 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 believers 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.

In Berea

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, 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 them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Thought

Boxed.

That's the word that finally struck me as most fitting for the Christianity I had experienced. It was Jesus in a box – specifically the box of the church building I attended week after week. Our mission seemed to be to get as many other people into the box as possible. And when we couldn't get any more into the box, we'd make more boxes.

Boxes aren't bad. They contain things, organize things, and are very helpful when it comes to moving from one place to another.

They're just not optimum when you try to live out of them.

As I began waking up to the kingdom of God announced through and ushered in by Jesus, I was increasingly aware of the fact I had been living out of a box that, rather than being a structure that helps us to move from one place to another was more or less the final, enclosed destination. But the church is more like a beachhead than a box. The gospel is more than simply a dreamy hope to hold on to as the world burns. It is, as Paul said, the power of God to salvation. It is the dynamo of sweeping, worldwide, across the board, radical change in which all Jesus followers are active participants rather than spectators, or, perhaps even worse, passive commentators.

In a word, from the vantage point of the current world system, we are, and always will be, troublemakers in a revolution of scandalous grace it cannot fathom.

One author puts it well:

More and more of us are realizing something our best theologians have been saying for quite a while: Jesus' message is not actually about escaping this troubled world for heaven's blissful shores, as is popularly assumed, but instead is about God's will being done on this troubled earth as it is in heaven. So people interested in being a new kind of Christian will inevitably begin to care more and more about this world, and they'll want to better understand its most significant problems, and they'll want to find out how they can fit in with God's dreams actually coming true down here more often.

Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change*

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

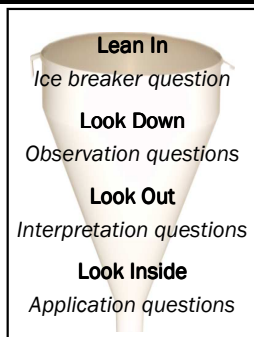
- Relate a time at work, at school, at home, at church when you faced the choice of either “rocking the boat” or just allowing the status quo to remain unchecked. What happened?

Look Down / Look Out

- What was Paul’s initial experience as he shared Jesus in the synagogue at Thessalonica? What was the focus of his message? How did he make his points? Who was listening?
- Who stirred up trouble in the city? What accusations were made by the mob before the city council? How did the council respond?
- What reception does Paul find in the synagogue at Berea? What did they do with Paul’s message? How does Luke account for their eagerness?
- What pattern repeats itself in Berea? How do you think Paul kept on going, running into the same walls of opposition over and over? How did he explain this opposition to the new believers in Thessalonica? How did he encourage them?

Look Inside

- Are Jesus followers peacemakers or troublemakers? Explain.
- How would you describe your own attitude towards the Bible? Is it an open or closed book to you? Is it intimidating or inspiring? Out-dated or highly relevant? Why?
- How do you typically respond to repeated opposition? What do you find helps you to keep on going in spite of it?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 17:1-4 & 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

What has persuaded you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God—or does something about Jesus still not make sense to you?

Day Two 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

What changes has knowing Jesus brought to your life? How well do you think others can see that change?

Day Three Acts 17:5-9

If Paul is a peacemaker for Jesus, then why does trouble seem to follow him everywhere? Is there a time, perhaps at school, when you had to deal with a lot of troublemakers ganging up on you? What happened?

Day Four Acts 17:10-12 & 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Do you find it hard to get into listening to sermons at church? Why or why not? Is Bible reading fun for you — or do you find you have a hard time understanding and enjoying it?

Day Five Acts 17:13-15 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

When you are trying to do something and you keep running into the same problems over and over again, what do you usually do? Do you give up, try something else, or just keep going? Why?

A Tale of Two Cities

Thessalonica / Salonika

Thessalonica — modern Salonika — was founded in 315 BC by King Cassander of Macedon, on or near the site of the ancient town of Therma. Cassander named the city after his wife *Thessalonike* (“victory of the Thessalians”), a half-sister of Alexander the Great. After the fall of the kingdom of Macedon in 168 BC, Thessalonica became a city of the Roman Republic. It grew to be an important trade center located on the *Via Egnatia*, facilitating trade between Europe and Asia. It became the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia.

In later history (between the 14th and 16th centuries AD), the Jewish population of Salonika swelled to over 15,000 — over half of the total city population at that time. For two centuries it remained the largest Jewish city in the world and was called “the mother of Israel.” By the 20th century the Jewish population had grown to nearly 50,000. When the Nazis invaded Greece and captured Salonika in 1941, they nearly exterminated the entire Jewish population of all ages. Today, out of a population of nearly 364,000, there remain only 1,000 Jews.

Berea / Veria

Berea — modern Veria in Greece — is first mentioned in the writings of Thucydides in 432 BC, although there is evidence the city was populated as early as 1000 BC. The city may have gotten its name from the daughter of the king of Veria (Verita) who is thought to be the son of Macedon. It was considerably smaller than nearby Thessalonica, and not being on the main trade route did not share in her sister city’s wealth and status.

During the first century it was a center of worship for Romans. The modern population of Veria is approximately 48,000.

Interesting note — today Veria is home to one of the largest and most complete libraries in all of Greece.



details, details...

He reasoned with them from the Scriptures

When writing to the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 15:1-8), Paul relates four fundamental facts of the gospel/good news of Jesus:

1. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;
2. He was buried;
3. He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures;
4. He appeared to many witnesses

Items one and three were his key talking points in the synagogue at Thessalonica. The classic KJV translation says Paul was “opening and alleging” that not only was this necessary for their Messiah, but that Jesus was in fact this very Messiah. The picture is that of Paul opening the Scriptures and prophecies and then placing the “goods” right in their hands. Once again he is quite effective on at least two levels — effective in persuading many and in really ticking off the rest.

Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort

KJV translation of the instigators of the mob, spurred on by unbelievers. The Greek just says they were evil men from the *agora* or marketplace. But you gotta love the King James here. Note: Thessalonica was declared a free city by Rome back in 42 BC which meant that a public assembly of its citizens functioned as a political decision making body. This is probably the “crowd” referred to by Luke. Several inscriptions dating to the first century indicate that five officials known as *politarchs* (same word used by Luke in Acts 17:8) presided over this public assembly or “crowd.”

They were “more noble” than those in Thessalonica

The Greek word literally means “well born.” “Open-minded” in the NLT misses the irony. The less wealthy and powerful and “noble” Berea was more “noble” where it mattered most — the nobility of honest truth seeking not limited or defined by political, cultural, religious or economic concerns.