

## Passionate Response To Jesus Acts 17:4-5

Well, we have started this chapter in the Macedonian city of Thessalonica, and we see Paul does what he usually does when he comes to a new area to preach Christ — he enters into the synagogue and he makes known Jesus Christ. He spent three Sabbaths there. And we see there were three key words — “reason, explained and proved” that Jesus not only died but he rose from the grave. And this all aligned with what God had said and predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures. No doubt there were public and more private opportunities to share Christ. And I love this because, if someone comes to any other understanding from the Scriptures about Jesus that he somehow not the Christ and the Saviour of the world, then they are in error. And that error can be shown because the Scriptures are truth and there is only one truth. Paul reasoned and explained from the Word of God.

And think of why we preach, teach, and even talk about Christ with others — not just those outside of Christ but also to those who are inside. The whole goal is we want some kind of response. We are not just going through the motions, but we want others to see something of Christ, something of his saving efficacy, something of his glory so much so that it changes who they are, how they think about life, what they hope in, and changes what and who they are trusting. Every single sermon is seeking some sort of end — some sort of response which will ultimately glorify God. God has chosen to use through the power of the Spirit his Word. It truly can open up the heart of individuals. It is these logical truths about our condition and our need of his mercy and grace that change us. And that mercy and grace is not found in a set of rules or standards but found in a person.

And what we see in verses 4 and following is the response to the teaching and preaching of Paul. And I do find it incredible that when you have the gospel announced that it always elicits a strong and very emotional responses. You cannot stay neutral to this message. There is always a response. You have felt it in your own soul. Not only when you came to Christ, but over and over. You hear the word preached or taught, and the Spirit might bring you low when you see your sin, but at the same time thrill you with the glory and grace and forgiveness of Christ. We want to praise and sing and celebrate this one we call Christ. What is that? That is an emotional response to knowing and loving and believing the truths about Jesus. This is a message that is so glorious and profound that you cannot remain neutral or silent. For us as believers we really do celebrate all that Jesus is for us.

But with that celebration of Christ there is always another strong and passionate response to the preaching of Christ. And we also see that in our text also. We see emotions and jealousy come to the surface and spill out among those who reject the message. And it is amazing that the more this message, the true message of Christ is known and proclaimed and heralded, the more staunch and aggressive the unbelief of many become. We in our passion want everyone to know Christ. They in their passion want the name of Christ to be obliterated, and if it is by laws or punishment or force they are willing to hand it out. And it is amazing how many have tried to use the laws of the land or through public shaming stifle and eliminate the message today. And why do they have that hatred and response? It is because the gospel always elicits a strong

and passionate response one way or another. Even us being here this morning, and desiring to listen to the Scriptures preached are proof of that.

So there are two challenges here for us as the people of God. One is to ask what is your response? If the message of Christ is meant to have a strong impact in our lives, we can let other things in life get in the way of the glory and beauty and awesomeness of the message of Christ. We can let other things captivate our hearts. What is captivating your heart right now and thrilling your soul? What really is taking the place of Christ? We really cannot serve two masters. You will begin to hate one and love the other. And the second is — do we love Christ so much that we are willing to be rejected and even passionately ridiculed and condemned for our trust and believing and worshiping of Christ? God creates a passion through the knowledge of this Christ that is even willing to suffer for him, and suffer in a godly way. And these passages show us the passionate response for and also against the gospel. May God give us the grace to stand fast in his truth and at the same time delight in the One we call Lord and keep and even grow in our delight of him. Let's look at both of those responses this morning.

1. We need to see the positive response to the gospel. V.4.

Now this is all done through the power of God's Spirit working through the proclamation. Often we concentrate on the instrument. Look at how great he is or look at how powerfully or clearly he makes known Jesus Christ. But the instrument has been changed out time and time again, whether it was Paul, Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, John MacArthur who all heralded the gospel strongly, passionately and clearly, but it was the Spirit who took these living words and made them active and effective in the hearts and lives of his people. So when we look at the response, we realize that Jesus here is actively building his church. He is adding another brick in this Temple called the church of Christ in which he is going to be known and glorified for all of eternity. And it should always amaze us when we see people respond to Christ because it is not natural. It should amaze us when we come to times like these that we have brothers and sisters in Christ. The gospel truly is the power of God working in all who believe.

So let's read this verse with those thoughts in mind, this is what God is doing, this is Jesus building his church, **“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.”** Now we to see who responded to the message positively. First we see “some of them were persuaded.” Who are the some of them? And that would be the Jews in the synagogue. How many? We are not told. Some. It might be a dozen or so or less, but not many. The next category is more and that is “a great many of the devout Greeks.” Now the meaning of devout is that they had leanings toward the God of the Old Testament and the Jewish teachings about God. These would have been individuals who were still or formerly following the idols of the Roman Empire. They might have look at Jehovah as one of many different deities. When Paul wrote to this church and the reception the gospel had in their hearts and lives in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, **“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.”** This seems to be the majority of the church. It is made up of former idolaters, non-Jews or Gentiles that have come to share in the hope of Jesus Christ.

The third category is “not a few of the leading women.” maybe they came as a group, but they saw in the Christ who was preached exactly what they were looking for. They realized their position and wealth could not remove the stain of sin, but there is one of such glory who truly could, and they believed in him. And this is quite a cross section of society. God truly is no respecter of persons, and any can come. Doesn't matter their background. And it should amaze us the various backgrounds that our God calls people from, whether it is religious, or from a sinful past full of idolatry in one way or another, or whether it is the educated or the wealthy. There is only one way and this Gospel truly is for all sinners.

Now there are two words that describe their coming to Christ. One is they were “persuaded.” And we realize the necessity of the arguments and the reasoning and the exhortation that the missionaries engaged in. We realize in the end there is that element of persuasion. And the meaning here is to convince of change someone's mind. And here it is that Jesus really is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He really is the hope of humanity. You need to recognize your need of him for forgiveness of sins and believe on him. That is what they were persuaded with. And certainly there is that human element, but persuaded here is passive meaning that it is not first and foremost the activity of the person coming to Christ, but he or she is being acted on. It is God the Spirit that is truly doing the persuading. We know we are graced when we see our sin.

Think how Paul came preaching to Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, “**And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**” He came — presented Christ — but it is the power of the Spirit that caused this message, this Jesus to be trusted and cherished in our hearts and in our lives. Not only is the gospel rational, logical, and reasonable, but here is the thing that should amaze us when you consider how hard our hearts — we actually believe it. We actually see the power of God and the glory and goodness of God in the message. We trust Christ. God cuts through all the excuses to show us our sin and we come to the conclusion that there is no other way to God than through Christ. We believe! We are persuaded, but it is never because of our superior rational powers. Believing in Christ, trusting in him seems so natural but it is anything but. It is the supernatural work of our great God in the depths of your soul. We are saved by grace alone. If we add anything than it is not grace.

Now here is the question: how do we know that work of God has gone on in our lives? How do we know that he has persuaded us and we believe? Well, you see this over and over through the Book of Acts. Once individuals believe and trust in Christ, they openly align and associate with the people of God. Look at the second key word that describes their response, “**And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.**” Notice what they did. They joined Paul and Silas. The word means to align with or associate with in the closest and strongest bond. And think of it, because for some of the Jews that meant going away from the majority to cleave and identify with the minority. It was public. Jesus is my Lord, Messiah, and Saviour. And then there

were the Greeks. In the city there were various different gods and goddesses that people worshiped. They would worship one over another. And they formed little communities with their loyalty to a particular deity. You were only in if you worship that particular god or goddess. By aligning with Paul and Silas and joining with them, they would have been thrown out of these little fellowship groups. And think of it because that is all they knew. All those close friendships, family members or whatever were gone. And it should amazed us what God had done in these individuals lives in this church. No wonder Paul said when he wrote to them in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, **“For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”** This believing on Christ was not something just internal but so glorious and persuasive that it was transforming and public and costly. No wonder everyone was talking about it. Can you see something of the passionate and life altering response here?

And this testimony of the Thessalonians is not just them but it is repeated in every believer. We see it in our own lives. God has done a work of grace. The gospel came forth through the preaching and testifying of Christ, and just seemed to make so much sense. It just seemed to bring so much conviction. We came not against our wills but God transformed our wills to want to come. And the outcome is we are here this morning. We are identifying with a new group of people — people who truly trust and believe and love and cherish Christ. Old associations are now gone. Some of you have suffered through rejection from family, closest friends, others that you used to hang out with — why because our faith cannot remain silent. Our trust in this glorious Jesus must be lived out and celebrated. Have you seen both halves of this response in your own life? One is internal and the other is external. Do you see that public living and celebrating of Christ because of this work that is gone on in our hearts through the Holy Spirit? Romans 10:10, **“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”**

Here is the amazing thing, we can become cold, but there is so much more to learn of this Christ and the glories of our hope to thrill our souls. These truths are meant to change us and keep changing us. So we see the positive response.

## 2. We see the negative response V.5.

Now why does the Word of God show us these negative responses? And there a number of reasons. One is the Scriptures are honest about the world we live in. It never sugarcoats the response of sin loving sinners. The second reason is to prepare our hearts. There is nothing wrong with the message. God is present and we can truly trust him in the midst of opposition. In fact, in many ways this is a sign that we have gotten the message right. But a third reason we have these responses recorded in the Scripture is because every kind of passion that we see in others, we are to have just as passionate response to Jesus in the opposite direction. it is too our shame when we see people so filled with hatred and animosity and are moved to action that we are unmoved by the glory of what our God has done to save such wretched sinners like us. Every passionate negative response should be a rebuke to our apathy to these very glorious truths of Jesus Christ. So how are you responding to our Jesus today? God

uses even the opposition of others to expose our hearts, and reveal that he truly is worthy not only living for but even suffering for. His sacrifice is really this glorious!

So look at verse 5 again, and try to think of why this is talking place, **“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.”** Amazing isn’t it? We have these contrasts all the way through the Book of Acts. We are never to think of serving and savour Jesus and labouring for him is just going to be a problem free affair with no trials or tribulation. But it is as Paul said earlier — it is through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. There is a need to go through these things and they should be expected. And it is incredible to see that the main instigators in this opposition is the unbelieving Jews. And like in Pisidian Antioch we see what drove these men was an internal response to the preaching and teaching about Jesus. Both those who believe and those who oppose have an internal response. But here it is jealousy. And jealousy is something emotional. We look at what others have or whatever and think it is not right they have it or you deserve it and should have it. And think of it — whoever you are jealous of you can never rejoice in the blessing of God in their lives.

Their jealousy would have been over what they have. They love their traditions. They love how they make them feel and they are the ones right with God and not others. They love their position and their influence in the Roman cities. And it was not only concerning that some were coming to Christ but also these influential women who were attending synagogue services were now believing. Would they lose their influence and their stature? And they loved something more than they loved God or the truth of God. It didn’t matter how clear the evidence of Christ being the Messiah, they loved their position. They loved their stature more than God and his truth. And think of it because jealousy when your idol is threatened — the thing or person you hold most dear — there is a strong and passionate internal response.

And that leads to an external response. They could not remain silent. Same thing with the positive response. When the gospel is preached and what you do with it will always somehow work its way out in public. You cannot remain silent about these truth and the implications of these truths. For some eternity lies in the balance. For others everything they hold dear in this life hangs in the balance. For these Jews any testifying or preaching of Jesus Christ must be eliminated. Well, that sounds all too familiar in our world today. There really is a push to silence the church of Jesus Christ. How these Jews went about doing this is going was going to the agora or the market place where the rabble or people who had nothing else to do hung out. And there would have been a number of bad characters here. They took them and formed a mob, how they incited them so quickly we are not told. But you can imagine when some started chanting and marching through the streets others joined in. And it became bigger and bigger. And isn’t it true that many times people just parrot their opposition to Christianity without much thought but just because others are doing it? It just seems to be the popular sentiment.

But their is a goal is intimidation and destruction. Look at the end of the verse, **“and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.”** The whole goal was the silence the main messengers. And if they could silence them then

they could silence them all. They attacked this house of one whom it seems where the church might be meeting and the missionaries were staying. Maybe they threw stones and just surrounded the house, but the whole goal was to bring them out. And the “them” in this verse is Paul and Silas. Now what action would have been taken we are not told in the passage. It could be mob justice which really is not justice at all. It could be that they would haul them off to the authorities that they might beat them or even have them executed. But the whole goal was to have the elimination of Jesus Christ being preached and believed in.

But here is the thing: you cannot stop what has already taken place. God through his Spirit has already created new life in Christ through the many. And I will say more about this next time we are together, but that life cannot be snuffed out. The goal of these Jews is realized. Paul and Silas will leave no doubt out of concern for Jason and the other believers. And in the minds of these Jews that is the end of the story. But it is not. Why? Because of the persuasive and strong response of those who believe. They cannot help but follow Christ. Jesus is building his church through them. Paul is forced out and writes to this church because he is so concerned about their welfare, and the report that comes back is a strong and vibrant church that is reaching out with the gospel to the community.

Listen again what Paul writes to these believers in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8, **“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”** The work that God does in the heart is greater and more impassioned than any impassioned opposition. This is not a war of impassioned responses, but Christ in us the hope of glory just cannot be stopped. My hope for all of us is that we will keep seeing and keep revelling in this God of all grace. There is still so much about our Lord to thrill and captivate our hearts and cause us to be his radical witnesses in this dying world.