

Lesson 5 - 26 August 2012

The Gospel Penetrates Macedonia and Achaia

Lesson Scope: [Acts 16:16-17:34](#)

Lesson Focus

The second missionary journey continued as the Gospel was carried into Macedonia and Achaia, the two provinces of Greece. This lesson records visits to four different cities—Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea in Macedonia; and Athens in Achaia. Philippi, a Roman colony and important trade center, became the home of the first Christian church in Europe. Thessalonica, the largest city of Macedonia, was a port on the Aegean Sea. The Martyrs Mirror records a faithful church there into Anabaptist times. Berea, a smaller city forty-six miles away on the route toward Achaia, demonstrated a noble response to the Gospel, but Athens, a center of Greek culture and philosophy, preferred to remain in idolatry.

The Holy Spirit faithfully assisted the preaching of the Gospel, but Satan opposed it through evil spirits and selfish men, causing constant conflict. As in all the world in all times, the truth forced men and women to a decision.

The Gospel message demands a response from its hearers. The many who reject it incur eternal damnation, but the few who believe and obey it receive eternal life.

This lesson illustrates several different responses to the Gospel, from indifference to active hostility. So today, the majority resist the Gospel because it requires them to give up control and submit to the teachings of Christ.

The fact is that there may be many wrong responses to the Gospel but only one right response—full surrender. Some day every knee shall bow, but only those who voluntarily surrendered by faith will be saved. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:44).\

Lesson Aim: To see principles concerning man's response to the Gospel.

Theme Verses: [2 Corinthians 2:15, 16](#). For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

Lesson Text:

Imprisoned at Philippi

[Acts 16:16-19](#) ¹⁶ And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: ¹⁷ The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. ¹⁸ And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. ¹⁹ And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the marketplace unto the rulers,

[Acts 16:23](#) ²³ And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

[Acts 16:25-33](#) ²⁵ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. ²⁶ And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. ²⁷ And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. ²⁹ Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ And brought

them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ³¹ And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. ³² And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

Troubled at Thessalonica

[Acts 17:1-5](#) ¹ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ² And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³ Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. ⁴ And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. ⁵ But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Tested at Berea

[Acts 17:10-12](#) ¹⁰ And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Mocked at Athens

[Acts 17:16-18](#) ¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. ¹⁷ Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. ¹⁸ Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be

a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

[Acts 17:32-34](#) ³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*. ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which *was* Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Questions for Study

Imprisoned at Philippi

1. Why did the message of the spirit-possessed damsel grieve Paul?
2. List the steps that took the jailer from despair to salvation.
3. How will materialism affect our evangelism?

Troubled at Thessalonica

4. What contributed to the spiritual growth of the new believers in Thessalonica?
5. Why does envy produce irrational behavior (Acts 17:5)?

Tested at Berea

6. What important steps did the Berean Jews take on their journey to truth?

Mocked at Athens

7. What traits predisposed the Athenians to reject the Gospel?
8. How can we avoid the snares of worldly philosophy and religious deception in our day?

Analyzing the Passage

The spirit-possessed damsel spoke the truth about Paul and Silas's identity and mission. But Satan would not be "divided against himself" (Matthew 12:26). As he does today, he was distorting truth to distract sincere seekers. Just as Christ cast out the demons who had acknowledged Him (Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:33-36), Paul invoked the power of Christ to cast the evil spirit out of this damsel.

She had "brought her masters much gain by soothsaying" (for-

tunetelling). The devil is not omniscient; he probably guesses at the future and then works to fulfill his predictions. When Paul cast out the damsel's spirit of divination, her "masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone."

The magistrates completely ignored due process and "laid many stripes upon them." Jewish law limited scourging to forty stripes, but a Roman scourging, known as the halfway death, often continued until the victim was nearly dead.

The keeper of the prison seems surprisingly knowledgeable in 16:30. His opening question and ready response suggest that perhaps he had heard Paul and Silas preach.

Two prominent schools of philosophy are mentioned in Acts 17:18. The Epicureans believed pleasure, not absolute truth, to be the supreme goal of life. The Stoics, from which our word stoic is derived, taught that man should be self-sufficient and indifferent to pleasure or pain.

Principles and Applications

Imprisoned at Philippi

1. Responding to the Gospel includes overcoming Satanic opposition (Acts 16:16-18). Satan knows that the Gospel reconciles man to God and delivers believers from his bondage. He uses any means—outright lies, half-truths, flattery, and false promises—to snatch away the seed before it bears fruit. We must imitate the behavior of Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, who stopped his ears and ran, crying, "Life! Life! Eternal Life!"

2. The carnal often respond to the Gospel according to materialistic values (Acts 16:19). The damsel's masters valued their gains above her welfare. The rich young ruler valued his possessions above the welfare of his own soul. Receiving the Gospel means adopting an eternal value system and rejecting the love of money. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

3. Those who reject the Gospel message often attack the messengers of the Gospel (Acts 16:19, 23). Men who hear the truth

may reject it and suppose that the matter is settled. But they discover that truth is persistent; their conscience continues to condemn them, and the matter is not settled after all. Godly men, Gospel signs and tracts, and church houses are reminders of truth and may become targets of their mistreatment. Such men fail to realize that they are fighting against God and cannot win.

4. The way of faith becomes plain to those who open their hearts to the truth (Acts 16:30-33). "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). But those who open their hearts to truth discover unexpected answers and a growing illumination in their lives. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

Troubled at Thessalonica

5. Those who receive the Gospel eagerly identify and fellowship with other believers (Acts 17:4). When we learn to love Christ as our Head, we also love His body, the church. We recognize that we share a common salvation, a common goal, and a common enemy, and that we need the strength and support our brethren can give us.

We will not be primarily critical or fault-finding toward people we love. We will admit that they have faults, but those faults will cause us pain, not a malicious joy. We will defend them and hope for their best because "we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

Tested at Berea

6. A noble hunger for truth accompanies a genuine response to the Gospel (Acts 17:11). When we crucify our selfishness, our eyes are opened to a fascinating world of truth that we are eager to explore. The Anabaptists, eager to study the Bible, learned so quickly to read that they amazed their enemies.

We should also "[search] the scriptures daily" and develop a personal knowledge of truth. Thus we will become more firmly grounded and less vulnerable to deception.

Mocked at Athens

7. The worldly intellectual finds the simple truth of the Gospel hard to understand (Acts 17:18, 32). "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Learned men depend on their reasoning powers to solve problems. They tend to scorn faith in the unseen. But "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Hebrews 11:6). Because they reject the foundational fear of the Lord and belief in His Word, they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

8. The Gospel message draws a sharp line between believers and unbelievers (Acts 17:32-34). In eternity, a great gulf will be fixed between believers and unbelievers. But that separation begins here, as strangers and pilgrims live by different, seemingly upside-down values. But the few who enter the narrow way and become a "gazingstock" will spend eternity on God's side of that gulf.

Important Teachings

1. Responding to the Gospel includes overcoming Satanic opposition (Acts 16:16-18).
2. The carnal often respond to the Gospel according to materialistic values (Acts 16:19).
3. Those who reject the Gospel message often attack the messengers of the Gospel (Acts 16:19, 23).
4. The way of faith becomes plain to those who open their hearts to the truth (Acts 16:30-33).
5. Those who receive the Gospel eagerly identify and fellowship with other believers (Acts 17:4).
6. A noble hunger for truth accompanies a genuine response to the Gospel (Acts 17:11).
7. The worldly intellectual finds the simple truth of the Gospel hard to understand (Acts 17:18, 32).
8. The Gospel message draws a sharp line between believers and unbelievers (Acts 17:32-34).
9. Faithful messengers refuse to become discouraged by rejec-

tion and even physical abuse (Acts 16:25).

10. God moves in mysterious ways to touch those who will receive the Gospel message (Acts 16:25).

11. Those who reject the Gospel at times make concerted effort to oppose the truth (Acts 17:5).

Answers to Questions

I. Why did the message of the spirit-possessed damsel grieve Paul?

Even though she spoke the literal truth, her demon-inspired speech made a mockery of it. Just as with smooth-talking hypocrites today, the gap between her speech and her life confused sincere seekers.

2. List the steps that took the jailer from despair to salvation.

A. The apostle Paul held out truth and gave him hope. ("Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.")

B. He responded with a willingness to know more truth.

C. He obeyed the truth he was given.

D. Christ accepted his belief, and the truth set him free.

3. How will materialism affect our evangelism?

When we develop a love for earthly things, our love for souls will diminish proportionately. Unserved people will become annoyances instead of potential treasures. Because our priorities are backward, we will become too busy accumulating things to serve as laborers in the harvest.

4. What contributed to the spiritual growth of the new believers in Thessalonica?

They chose to fellowship with other believers who supported and taught them. They wisely sought Christlike friends and allowed themselves to be influenced in the right way.

5. Why does envy produce irrational behavior (Acts 17:5)?

Envy is motivated by the selfish desire to be number one. Any man thus filled with himself is blind to reason. His inflated ego dominates truth, decency, and common-sense, and he stoops to actions he would roundly condemn in others.

6. What important steps did the Berean Jews take on their journey to truth?

- A. They valued truth over their own ideas.
- B. They received truth with open minds.
- C. They pursued truth and worked to understand it.
- D. Many of them allowed it to change their lives.

7. What traits predisposed the Athenians to reject the Gospel?

Like humanists everywhere, they considered the human mind and sense of reason as the highest force in the universe, thus scorning faith in the unseen. They felt self-sufficient and were proud to be part of the Grecian center of culture. They enjoyed hearing or telling new things, but resisted allowing truth to change their lives.

8. How can we avoid the snares of worldly philosophy and religious deception in our day?

We must choose by faith to accept the Bible as God's Word. Like the Bereans, we must search it daily and "try the spirits whether they are of God." We must submit to the body of Christ and, keeping our flesh crucified, do our best to live by the truth we already know.

Summarizing the Lesson

What will you do with Jesus?

Neutral you cannot be;

Someday your heart will be asking,

"What will He do with me?"

Research Guide

1. Read 2 Peter 2, 3 and note the consequences of wrong responses to the Gospel.
2. Read Lessons 22 and 33 in 8th grade Flames of Truth Bible book by Eastern Mennonite Publications.