

Back to the Beginning

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In his letter to the saints at Corinth, Paul wrote that he had come to them in weakness (1 Cor. 2:1-4). Where had Paul been before he arrived at Corinth? Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. This was a most difficult time for Paul. From Corinth, Paul would write a letter to the saints at Thessalonica to encourage them to remain committed to the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter two, Paul takes the Thessalonians back to the beginning: *“For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict”* (1 Thess. 2:1-2).

While Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had success in persuading some to obey the Gospel in Philippi, they suffered persecution (Acts 16). Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten. After divine intervention, the Romans released Paul and Silas; however, Paul was adamant about some sort of acknowledgement on the part of the Romans be made for how they were unjustly treated.

Being Roman citizens, the legal rights of Paul and Silas had been violated. The Romans capitulated and apologized to them. Paul and Silas returned to the saints for a short time and then left town.

Next, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled southeast to Thessalonica. We do not know what happened to Luke. As he records these events in the Book of Acts, he stops using the term “we” when referencing Paul and his traveling companions. Nevertheless, Luke notes Paul teaching in the synagogue for three Sabbaths at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3).

Paul’s efforts showed signs of progress. Some of the Jews and many Gentiles were being persuaded by what Paul was teaching. Unfortunately, some of the unbelieving Jews became jealous. They took some wicked men and formed a mob. This angry mob went to the place where Paul, Silas, and Timothy were staying, the house of Jason. Upon their arrival, Paul was nowhere to be found. Instead, this angry mob took Jason and brought him to the Roman authorities.

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.” (Acts 17:6-7).

These accusations get to the heart of the Gospel. What does the news of what the Creator did through His Son mean? It means Jesus is king, not Caesar. Paul and the believers in Thessalonica were declaring Jesus was king. The consequence of this confession was beginning to evidence itself in town. The believers were beginning to live a new life.

The Roman officials did not know what to make of these accusations. Someone paid to have Jason released from custody. In the meantime, the brethren found Paul and Silas. They quickly and quietly got them out of town during the night. Paul and Silas went about fifty miles

southeast to the town of Berea.

Upon arrival, Paul, Silas, and Timothy collected themselves and got to the synagogue. This must have been a distressing time for them. They were worried about what was happening in Thessalonica. Their work was left unfinished. In a state of spiritual infancy, the saints were left to deal with Jewish persecution. What would become of them? Additionally, Paul, Silas, and Timothy must have been concerned for their own personal safety.

Surprisingly, these men and the message they brought were well received by the Jews in Berea. These Jews were willing to search the Scriptures with Paul. We can only imagine what these intense times of study must have been like with Paul. Paul was a Jewish scholar who believed Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Paul runs his theology through the cross and explains the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose. Jews and Gentiles were persuaded of the good news of God and obeyed (Acts 17:12).

As encouraging and hopeful as these studies were, they were short-lived. The angry Jews from Thessalonica learned Paul was teaching in Berea. They came and disturbed the progress of the Gospel. Paul was separated from Silas and Timothy. Some of the Bereans took Paul and sailed him to Athens, Greece. While this was done for the sake of his safety, this was another added hardship for Paul.

All alone, Paul would do some teaching in the marketplace at the epicenter of intellectual thought in the ancient Greek world: Athens. He was taken to the high court in Athens and essentially put on trial for the message He proclaimed. While a few were persuaded by the Gospel, the main point of this account documented by Luke seems to be that "*Paul went out of their midst*" (Acts 17:33). In other words, they let him go.

Finally, Paul left Athens and made the short trip to Corinth. He would take up residence and establish his trade. He found an unlikely Jewish couple who, like him, had made their way to Corinth in fear for their lives: Priscilla and Aquila. They became friends, co-workers, and fellow-helpers in the Gospel (Acts 18:1-4). No doubt, Paul arrived in Corinth in weakness; a weakness the saints at Thessalonica not only knew, but had experienced themselves.

While at Corinth, Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. They had good news concerning the faith and love of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:6-7). Upon hearing of their faithfulness, Paul, Silas, and Timothy composed a letter to sent it back to Thessalonica to encourage the brethren.

Motivations in Preaching

1 Thessalonians 2:1-10

Paul was concerned about the faithfulness of the saints in Thessalonica. As was too often the case, false teachers and or jealous brethren would undermine Paul's work after he left a town. Thessalonica was rife with a strong Jewish opposition to the message Paul taught. No doubt, this opposition would have been maligning Paul's character in an attempt to dissuade believers. If they treated the brethren like they treated Paul, violence would have been a real and present threat. To

address these concerns, Paul simply relies on his reputation.

Paul writes that his appeal to them did not come from error, impurity, or deception. Regarding error, the Gospel was accurate. In other words, the Gospel fit the context of the Old Testament. What the Creator did through the Messiah was in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant, the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets.

Regarding impurity, the Gospel was in stark contrast to the practices of pagan idolatry. The message of the Gospel called for an entirely different way of living. The Gospel brought a different moral and ethical standard than Greek philosophy espoused.

Lastly, regarding deception, Paul was not trying to fool anyone in order for him to take advantage of them. Paul wanted nothing from them. He only sought their salvation.

Paul's motivation in life was simply to please God. He was never swayed by the influence of anyone: Jews or Greeks. He did not alter his message according to his audience. He preached the same message wherever he went and to whomever he taught. His satisfaction came from knowing he had God's approval.

God had entrusted the message of the Gospel into the hands of Paul. He did not take this trust lightly. This was a humbling duty given to him. He would write how being given the Gospel was like putting treasure in weak, breakable clay jars (2 Cor. 4:7). This trust was why they were motivated only to please God, not anyone else. If there were ulterior motives, God would search their hearts. All of this begs to question what are our motivations as Christians? **DF**