



St James Woodley - Resources for Journey through Acts (Part 2)

Chapters 13-21 May – July 2020



Week 6: t. b. a.

“And now at last this Good News has been plainly **announced** to all of us.”

1 Peter 1 vs 12



SETTLING

“The thing about evangelism is, we in the church don’t like doing it and those outside the church don’t like having it done to them!” (attributed to Clive Calver referring to some traditional methods of evangelism)

Under what circumstances might this be a true reflection of how the church relates to the wider society with whom it seeks to share the good news of Jesus?

Take a few moments to reflect upon your own experience of evangelism. What approaches work or make sense and what makes you cringe with embarrassment or discomfort?

FOCUSING

One Sabbath day, back in about 30 A.D. in the little synagogue in Nazareth, Galilee, the meeting was in progress when it came to the time for the reading from the scriptures. Jesus was either invited to read, or offered, and he was handed the scroll of the book of Isaiah. He then found the place and read:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted and to **announce** that captives shall be released and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him.”*

He then sat down and, as the silence prevailed, he calmly announced:

‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’

As announcements go, this must rank as one of the most extraordinary. Try to imagine yourself sat in that synagogue as a witness of what just happened. Why might you be outraged by it all? Why might you be bemused? Why might your imagination be fired with excitement?



Acts Chapter 17 – The Second Missionary Journey Pt. 2

In this chapter Paul’s adventures continue as Luke relates events that saw Paul and Co. sharing the gospel in three very different settings. They adopt quite different approaches to “announcing” the Good News of Jesus in each location.

Thessalonica: Read Acts 17 vs 1 – 10a. After their mixed reception in Philippi, Paul and Silas are requested to “leave” and so move on to the large Roman city, and port town, of Thessalonica. **(t)** Here there is a relatively large Jewish population and so, as usual, Paul and Silas head for the synagogue. Things appear to go well as they return to speak more, over the coming three weeks. Have a read of the same passage from the Message version:

*He opened up the texts **so they understood what they'd been reading all their lives**: that the Messiah absolutely had to be put to death and raised from the dead—there were no other options—and that “this Jesus I'm introducing you to is that Messiah.”*

This wording is quite insightful, in that Paul is essentially seeking to explain to Jews how Jesus fits in to what they already know; all they needed to do was “open their eyes” – which clearly some did, especially gentiles who attended the synagogue meetings.

Many, today, who become Christians, can identify with “**understanding what they'd been reading all their lives**”. Some spend years coming to church, listening to sermons and prayers and testimonies yet failing to make the connection to themselves. Perhaps you have experienced this or know someone who currently is? How might St James best address such “in reach” evangelism?

Berea: Read Acts 17 vs 10 – 15: Once again the missionary team have to leave town under the cover of darkness, having inadvertently caused another riot. This time they head off the beaten track a bit, and cover the 50 or so miles to Berea. **(b)** Berea is clearly not Thessalonica! Here are a very different class of Jew and Paul recognises the need for a different approach. While he sets out again the arguments for Jesus being the long-promised Messiah, his listeners are of a mind to do their own bible study and check out what they are being told against their knowledge and understanding of the ancient Jewish scriptures. The outcome is that “**A lot of them became believers, including many Greeks who were prominent in the community, women and men of influence.**” This must have been a great encouragement to Paul as having said his piece he allowed his hearers to explore the ideas and weigh them against what they already knew. Perhaps too he realised how much he needed to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of the Bereans as they opened themselves up to the scriptures, in the light of what Paul had said.

Sometimes we also need to resist the temptation to “drive home our message” and just allow God to get on with it! Do you agree or not?

Athens: Read Acts 17 vs 16-34: Having left Silas and Timothy in Berea, Paul catches a ship to the cruise terminal in Piraeus, the harbour for Athens. **(a)** For a Syrian Jew, from small town Tarsus, Athens presented a very different and rather alien environment. There is a synagogue and naturally he starts things off here but aware of the need to somehow connect with the locals he also starts speaking in the open market place. Rather appalled by the plethora of temples and idols in the city, he manages to find a way to open up conversation with those who are willing to listen and engage with him. Interestingly, in this context, Luke includes no direct quote of Paul specifically using the name of Jesus. However, it must have been at least slightly frustrating that some of his listeners just liked to talk and argue about new ideas rather than take them to heart. In the end some became believers while others simply sneered their rejection.

Paul's tactics of establishing a link with his audience by not only affirming them (even in their unbelief) but also then finding a natural “way in” to talking about Jesus, are good examples of “appropriate” evangelism. Are there parallels for us as we seek to engage with those outside Christian culture today?



Following on from “Thy Kingdom Come” - continue to pray for your “5” friends who as yet do not know Jesus. Ask God to inspire your thinking as you seek to share the good news of the gospel with others in ways that are appropriate to their circumstances. Take time to do this, opening your heart to what God has to say.