

The Pattern and Products of Gospel Proclamation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 December 2012

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now and to our reading this morning. You'll find it in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, chapter 17.

Paul Brennan, one of our Cornhill apprentices, is going to be preaching this morning from Acts 17, verses 1 to 9, and that's what I'm going to read. If you have one of our church Bibles, I think you'll find it on page 9 to 6, or thereabouts.

And you'll see the heading speaks of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. This is midway into what we sometimes call Paul's second missionary journey, which begins there just really at chapter 16. Paul and Barnabas have separated. Paul goes with Silas, his new partner, and there's all the drama in Macedonia when they arrive there and put in prison and are then released.

And chapter 17 then takes up the journey. Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

[1 : 2 2] And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

And saying, this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ. 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.

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.

When they couldn't 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. The people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.

[2 : 3 7] When they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Amen.

May God bless us. This is his word. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[3 : 3 6] Amen. should look like? What should successful Christianity look like? If you're a Christian here this morning, what should successful Christianity look like to you? More specifically, what do we expect to see when the gospel is proclaimed? That's what Christians are about, isn't it? Telling people the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel message. What does successful spreading of the good news look like? Deep down, Christians quantify success in purely human terms a lot of the time. Even if you're hesitant to admit it to yourself, we frequently think in such terms. And more often we act like we judge gospel ministry in human success terms.

If we're doing it right, we think we'll see hundreds coming to Christ. If we're doing it right, we'll have a smooth ride. Everyone will love us and think that we're great. But quite often that is not our experience, is it? Many people react with disinterest or maybe even hostility. Is there something wrong with our message? No doubt there'll be many people here today or listening to this who do not describe themselves as followers of Christ. Perhaps you're looking into the claims of Christianity. How might you judge the success of the Christian faith? And thinking along the lines that we tend to operate in, in terms of judging success in the 21st century, we might give Paul the Apostle here five out of ten. He's arrived in Thessalonica, just out of prison in Philippi. He wins a

few converts, but is quickly hounded out of town.

Surely this is not what could be described as successful Christianity. However, our passage this morning corrects us of any false notions of what we might think about successful Christianity. The Bible is utterly realistic and doesn't seek to hide any unpleasanties or disappointments. Luke has recorded the events here in Thessalonica for a reason.

And it's so that we might see the pattern of proclaiming the gospel and the products of proclaiming the gospel. In the first three verses of our passage, we see the pattern of gospel proclamation. And then in verses four to nine, we see the products. So we'll think first about the pattern of gospel proclamation, verses one to three. We find ourselves at the start of chapter 17, arriving in Thessalonica.

[6 : 53] This is Paul's second missionary journey. And we are witnessing the westward expansion of the gospel into Europe. God led Paul and Silas to Thessalonica, the principal city of Macedonia. And Paul heads straight to the synagogue.

Notice verse two of our chapter. There was a synagogue of the Jews in Thessalonica. This is a pattern in Paul's ministry.

We see it in Berea, just a few verses down. If you look at verse 10 of our chapter. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. And when they arrived there, they went into the Jewish synagogue. And we see it again in Corinth, chapter 18.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath. And tried to preach Jews and Greeks. Paul is addressing those in the synagogue following the pattern he refers to in Romans, chapter one.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also to the Greek. It was, verse two, his custom.

[8 : 22] What specifically was Paul reasoning when he went to the synagogue? Well, we see in verse three that Paul explained and proved that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

Paul is proving that what Christ did was exactly what was meant to happen, as set out in the Old Testament. He goes on to say that the Christ is, in fact, the man Jesus.

The man who was crucified less than 20 years beforehand in Jerusalem and who rose again. Why, you may be asking, did Paul focus on Christ's suffering and his rising from the dead?

This may be your first time in church. What is all this about? Is it really necessary to focus on his suffering, his death?

It seems a bit odd. Could we not focus more on his life, his teaching, his example? Well, you see, Christ's suffering, his death on the cross and his resurrection is at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

[9 : 42] The death and resurrection of Jesus was what Paul spoke about. Again and again, he deals with Jesus' death and its significance.

The Jews, who Paul was addressing here in the synagogue, strongly resisted the idea that the promised Christ, the promised Messiah, would have to suffer.

The Christ they were looking for and hoping for was a political revolutionary who would restore Israel to its full glory. This Christ, who Paul spoke of, the one who died, was surely not the promised one, they thought.

It couldn't be. But Paul reasons and persuades from the Old Testament that he had to suffer.

Paul goes back to the Old Testament, showing again and again why he had to suffer. Now, we don't know exactly where Paul referred to, but he may well have looked at passages like Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22, looking at the suffering servants.

[11 : 01] Now, while Jesus' suffering must have been a stumbling block or belief in his Messiahship, Paul actually uses Jesus' suffering as evidence for his Messiahship.

Why was his Messiahship? Why was his suffering necessary? Well, it's because of the human condition. Humanity has a relationship problem with God.

It's called sin. You, if you haven't trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you have a relationship problem with God.

Sin is our rejection of God as rightful king of our lives. And it comes with a penalty.

And the penalty is serious. The penalty is death. But God is full of mercy.

[12:03] And he has provided a way, one way, in which our sin problem can be dealt with. And it's Christ's suffering. Jesus Christ, who Paul is speaking about here in these verses, died the death that we deserve to die.

He died in our place for our sin. He paid the penalty so that we don't have to. Do you believe that? Yes. Only did he die, but he rose from the dead. This is hugely significant. He proved his godness by rising from the dead.

Who else could do that apart from God? These truths about Christ's suffering and resurrection are at the core of Paul's message in Thessalonica.

This isn't a message Paul has made up to further his own agenda. Paul is preaching the gospel right here in one of the significant cities of Europe, following the commands of the Lord Jesus, given to Paul in chapter 9 of Acts.

[13:27] It is the message Christ himself instructed his disciples to proclaim. Towards the end of Luke's gospel, we get a very helpful summary verse, which sums up both Luke's gospel and the book of Acts.

And it reads, Then he, that is Jesus, opened the minds of his disciples to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from And the second of this verse, that is what Acts records, and is this that Paul is undertaking, the proclamation in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The contents of Paul's message is the exact same message which Jesus instructs his disciples to spread to all nations.

It's the same message. And this begs two questions as we consider the pattern of gospel proclamation. Firstly, the what.

What is the content of the message we proclaim? Is the content of our message the exact same message as Paul's? The message Jesus instructs his disciples to spread to all nations.

[15:15] Is our message Christ crucified? Is our message that he rose from the dead on the third day? It is remarkably easy to be ashamed of these basic facts.

Are we bringing the message of repentance and forgiveness of sin? It's easy to leave out these uncomfortable truths and speak instead of a man-centered gospel in which Christ simply exists to make us happy and meet our needs.

What is the message we proclaim? That's the first question, the what. How are we proclaiming it? How are we proclaiming it?

Paul, for several weeks, reasoned and explained and proved. We have no excuse to be lazy when it comes to proclaiming the gospel.

We will need, as Paul does, to work hard at explaining and proving and reasoning. Whether that be from the pulpit, in the lecture hall, or in Starbucks with the friends.

[16:36] So we see here, in these first three verses, the pattern of gospel proclamation. The second half of our passage, from verses four to nine, we see here the products of gospel proclamation.

What then are the products? And we have two here in Acts 17. And the first is belief. The first product is belief.

We see in verse four that some of them, that is the Jews, were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. So too were a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

We are seeing here the gospel reaching a number of the Jews and a great number of Gentiles too. They were persuaded and joined.

Persuaded they came to see and understand that what Paul was saying was indeed true. It wasn't blind faith, they are being persuaded.

[17:52] Not only were they persuaded, but they joined Paul and Silas. The Christian life is not intended to be solitary, but rather one of joining to each other.

The product of gospel proclamation is persuasion of the truth and joining and affiliation with other believers.

However, that is not all. That is not the only product of gospel proclamation. The emphasis in the second half of our passage is on quite a different product and its opposition.

opposition. It's opposition. Verses 5 to 9. Why is this product, this passage, this paragraph here in our Bibles?

Why is it here? It may perhaps surprise us that such an episode of opposition and harsh treatment is included in Luke's account.

[18 : 59] Surely he would want to make out the spread of the gospel to be seamless and unceasing, sweeping all before it. Why did Luke include these verses?

Well, I think one of the reasons is to reveal the reality of the impact of faithful gospel preaching. Things have been going really rather well in Thessalonica up to this point.

Paul has been busy in the synagogue. Jews and Gentiles are being transformed from a life of darkness to light through trust in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 5 starts with a shuddering but. But, verse 5, the Jews were jealous and taking some of the wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason who had been hosting Paul and Silas.

The first question that comes to mind is why did they oppose Paul and Silas? Jews and the Jews were jealous.

[20 : 26] This is something we've come across before in Acts. In chapter 13 when Paul is in Antioch we read this. The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

But when the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by reviling him. The Jews in Antioch and indeed in Thessalonica are jealous of the success of Paul's gospel ministry.

They feel threatened and sense that they might be losing power. Let's note the strength and extent of the opposition.

The Jews form a rabble raising an uproar in the city and they head for Jason's house. Paul and Silas Jason was Paul and Silas' host while they're staying in Thessalonica and it seems that Paul wasn't in.

So they're content to take the next best thing. They take Jason and his companions. Dragging them before the city authorities bring spurious accusations against Paul, Silas and Jason.

[21 : 51] Trumped up charges. Remember the real reason for their opposition was jealousy. Whilst to the city authorities they give the name of being defiance of Caesar's decree.

there is a big unruly crowd whipped up by the Jews bringing men innocent of the charges brought against them to the city authorities who placate the crowd even though there is little evidence against them.

Reminiscent is it not of another trial scene where an innocent man is unfairly charged with crimes he didn't commit in the presence of an unruly crowd whipped up by the Jewish authorities.

For the Christians in Thessalonica the similarities with the opposition faced by the Lord Jesus Christ our penny.

Listen to the charge made against Jesus as recorded in Luke 23. We found this man speaking about Jesus misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ a king.

[23 : 24] Startling similarities to our passage here verse 7. As Christians we are called by Christ himself to take up our crosses and follow him.

Opposition and gospel proclamation are never too far apart. Are you prepared to face such opposition for being a Christian and speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ?

the opposition is unfair and ungrounded in anything of substance. It created an uproar and brought false allegations.

We too should not be surprised if we are faced with similar unfairness, jealousy and false allegations. notice too the length to which the Jews were willing to go in their opposition.

Paul and Silas flee to Thessalonica. We see that in verse 10. In view of the opposition they flee and they go to Berea which is some 50 miles away.

[24 : 43] If you look down with me to verse 13 of our chapter we pick up the word of God but when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also they came there too agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Such was the opposition to Paul and the message he proclaimed that these Jews from Thessalonica were willing to travel 50 miles in order to oppose Paul that's a good 13 17 hour walk depending how fit you are often those who oppose the gospel will be willing to go to extraordinary lengths to make their opposition known not satisfied with driving Paul out of Thessalonica his opponents went to Berea and drove him away from there too belief and opposition these were the

products of Paul's gospel ministry in Thessalonica three words of application as we close firstly I want to turn to those who have not made a commitment to the Lord Jesus know this that the products of the gospel are belief or opposition the same gospel brings both responses you may be here in church for the first time perhaps you're investigating this passage highlights the two responses to the gospel to the good news that Jesus Christ had to suffer to the point of death that he rose on the third day and he did this for you that you might repent of your rejection of God as king and no forgiveness of your sin the two responses to Jesus to the gospel are the ones we see in this short passage belief or opposition the question is how will you respond there isn't a third way there's no third option there's no fence sitting how will you respond second point of application for those who are Christians here this morning know this that the products of the gospel are belief and opposition Paul and Silas saw both of these products in Thessalonica before coming to Thessalonica Paul had just come from prison in Philippi the temptation to water down the gospel must have been significant but Paul does not do this instead he heads straight for the synagogue where he reasons and explains and proved the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as he had done before so if we have faced opposition because of our proclamation of the gospel we are not to water it down we're not to stop proclaiming we're to remember that whilst the gospel will bring belief it will also bring opposition as a fellowship of the Tron church we can look back over a year in which we have seen both belief and opposition we can clearly recognise the pattern great encouragements but also great opposition and we're not to be surprised that having faced opposition once we face it again and again and again remember where Paul has come from prison in Philippi and where he is going Berea opposition opposition opposition having faced a round of opposition we're not to put our feet up and relax no we proclaim the gospel and we do so not afraid of possible opposition nor surprised when it comes third and final point of application don't be surprised when people lie about you remember the real reason for the [29 : 57] Jewish opposition and the stated reason the real reason was jealousy the stated reason was some form of civic disobedience we should not be surprised if we are opposed on fictitious or untrue grounds the real reason for opposition is rarely given what should successful gospel ministry look like we have a realistic account here in act 17 yes the product of the gospel is belief the product of the gospel is also opposition but we're not to judge the success of gospel ministry in terms of belief or in terms of opposition successful gospel ministry is this proclaiming that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations the and and him to to