

# QUIET COURAGE

ACTS 17:1-15    SEPTEMBER 2, 2020

The last time we were in Acts, it had been quite a ride. Paul and Silas had faced down a demon, a riot and a brutal beating. But that was only the opening act. That night was the main event: their stay in the Philippian jail. Songs at midnight. Earthquake. Souls saved. Lives changed. And finally, Paul secures a thrilling victory, revealing their Roman citizenship, which left the fledgling church protected (at least for a time) from the meddling of unfriendly officials.

In modern times, this would have been a good opportunity for Paul to head home, secure a book deal and write a best-selling memoir. But, of course, that's not what happens. For Paul, there were still *other* roads to take, other cities to visit, other crowds that needed the Gospel.

Already in his life as a missionary he's been beaten severely, stoned to death, maligned and run out of various towns. And yet, on he goes, with his friends, convincing all kinds of people everywhere he goes to *join* him in this life of faith.

Tonight, with the drama of Philippi in his rearview, Paul continues on, knowing that he could expect the same violent opposition to be waiting for him in the next town, and then the next town and the town after that. But on they go, in quiet courage. Not parading themselves, not capitalizing on their exploits for personal gain, but driving deeper and deeper behind enemy lines in their mission to seek and to save those who were lost. As he goes, we see his companions also live out a strong but quiet courage, as do the new Christians that are made as they move through city after city.

We begin in verse 1 of chapter 17.

**Acts 17:1-2 - After they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. <sup>2</sup> As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures,**

Despite all that Paul suffered at the hands of his countrymen, he never lost hope that they might have their eyes opened. While the Gentiles didn't treat him much better, when going to these Jewish communities he knew that there would be very strong reactions to his message. Some *would* believe and receive Christ, others would actively reject what he was saying and that rejection often included violent outbursts. But still, in place after place, he took courage and walked through the doors.

When I come here on Wednesday nights I don't usually find myself thinking, "They might kill me for what I'm going to say today." But Paul did. Each Sabbath was like being landed on the beach at Normandy.

In this case, the city was Thessalonica. His first letter to them would be the earliest of his epistles that we have preserved in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Though his visit with them will be brief, the impact was great. In First Thessalonians, Paul describes the believers there as being full of work and faith, motivated by love, showing endurance and hope in spite of suffering. He says that the Gospel came to them in *power*, which suggests there were some remarkable things happening in those 3 weeks that he and the team were there.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible Project

One quick note about the team: We see that Dr. Luke no longer includes himself in the narrative, so it seems he stayed back in Philippi to continue the work there. He'll join back up with the guys in chapter 20, but for now he is willing to man the fort as they press on.

Sometimes spiritual courage means doing something that isn't your job. We can't even imagine Luke saying, "I'm a doctor, not a babysitter!" Remember: We can do *all things* through Christ who gives us strength. So, in a situation like that, we aren't to think of ourselves as a "doctor" or whatever else. We're to think of ourselves as "God's man" or "God's woman" in the situation and make ourselves available to whatever needs doing.

We notice, also, that Paul's appeal was made *from the Scriptures*. He came with God's eternal, revealed truth and appealed from *it*, not from trends or what would sound most pleasing.

Sometimes in discussions on evangelism or apologetics you might hear the question: "How do you prove the existence of God to an atheist *not* using the Bible?" Or, "how can I preach to a Mormon using their *own* books?" Those questions are understandable and aren't necessarily wrong, however they move us down the line toward the idea that it's *intellect and reason* that will convert a person. Intellect and reason are important and significant, but Paul would later explain (very clearly) that it is the *Gospel* that is the power of God that brings salvation. Not simply airtight arguments or human logic, but God's revealed truth, contained in His word. And we need not be ashamed of it.

Of course, Paul met people where they were at. Mars Hill is a wonderful example of that. When the Jehovah's Witness comes to the door, it will help to know a thing or two about how their translation works so that we can bridge *to* the unadulterated truth of Scripture. But, while we do want to meet people where they're at, we want to be sure not to *leave* them there in their ignorance.

Now here was the main thrust of Paul's message:

**Acts 17:3 - <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah."**

Very clear, very plain. Jesus is the Messiah. He said the name. In the pop culture of social media right now you'll often see people talking about someone who has been killed and they'll say, "Say his name," or "Say her name." Paul knew that it would be very controversial for him to speak this way to these devout Jews, but he was not willing to leave them with some ambiguous message, like: "Let go and let God." Rather, he explained again and again, "*Jesus* is the Messiah."

And, we're told, he *proved* the necessity and reality of His sufferings and resurrection. What a comfort to know that what God has revealed is *objective* truth. The resurrection is one of the most provable events in human history. And the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the long-expected Jewish Messiah, is objectively provable. We can look into the infallible word of God and decode who that Anointed One was. We know when He would come. We know from where He would come. We know what His works would be. Christ Jesus was that One. He alone fits the list.

If you are someone who feels like you have a good handle on how to tell the story of Jesus but would like more help with the "proving" part, there are a number of helpful books that can get you started and show just how rock solid our faith is. Three books that will get you on your way are: *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *The Case For Christ* by Lee Strobel and *God's Not Dead* by Rice Brooks. There are many more, but those are a good place to start.

Why was it ‘necessary’ for the Messiah to suffer and rise again? This idea of a slain Savior was really difficult for even thoughtful spiritual seekers to grasp. Think of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Couldn’t the Messiah come and fix everything by executive order, as it were? No, the Christ had to suffer and rise. It had to happen because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. And without the resurrection we are hopeless and of all people more pitiable. There are essentials in the Christian faith. The death and resurrection of Jesus are two of them.

**Acts 17:4 - <sup>4</sup>Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.**

Proof alone can not turn a human heart. There has to be a surrender in the will. Happily, in this case, many *did* surrender and acknowledge Christ as Savior and King.

Interestingly, in describing the conversions here, Luke says they “*joined*” Paul and Silas. There was an immediate coming together. The founding of a community. They were knit together into a local church body, all united, despite their differences in class or status or nationality.

**Acts 17:5-8 - <sup>5</sup>But the Jews became jealous, and they brought together some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Attacking Jason’s house, they searched for them to bring them out to the public assembly. <sup>6</sup>When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too, <sup>7</sup>and Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king— Jesus.” <sup>8</sup>The crowd and city officials who heard these things were upset.**

There was a time when a riot like this seemed like a strange and antiquated thing. Not so much anymore. Of course, this *is* still what many of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world deal with on a regular basis.

Paul and Silas were the targets here, but if *they* couldn’t be found, any Christian would do. Jason, for his part, wasn’t some sort of powerful, influential person, he wasn’t an apostle. But he was a Christian and that was enough. Sometimes in life we’re presented with out of the blue difficulty, whether it’s in the form of persecution or other suffering. We can take courage and know that God has not left us, even when something as unpredictable as this happens.

There in verse 6 they utter the incredible line: “These men...have turned the world upside down.” What a great thing to have said. Ironically, if these Christians were so dynamic and powerful, you’d think the people of the mob would be slow to move against them and quick to hear what they have to say. But these are people held captive by the Devil to do his will.

I also love the fact that Jason and these other fellows were included in this accusation. *They* hadn’t done anything but join the family and shown some hospitality. But the angry mob said, “They’re part of the whole thing!” And that’s true. Your small actions, done unto the Lord, have eternal weight.

As for the “turning the world upside down,” that’s a good reminder of what the goal of Christian ministry is. Our goal is not to make sinners more comfortable on their way to hell, but to *rescue* them. They are in the depths of their guilt, swimming ever deeper into the abyss. And then God sends us to grab them and help them understand that there is life above in the other direction.

As for the charge that they were acting contrary to Caesar's decrees, well, that was mostly untrue. It had only been a couple of weeks. They didn't have *time* to refuse to pay their taxes. They were *great* citizens. Ones who *weren't* taking advantage of people or cheating the system (or starting riots). It is true that they now bowed the knee to a greater King: King Jesus. In the land of liberty it's *always* good to be reminded that we serve a *King*. We *belong* to Him and it is our duty to carry out His will.

**Acts 17:9 - <sup>9</sup>After taking a security bond from Jason and the others, they released them.**

Jason and the brothers are silent in this story. They demonstrate a quiet courage to endure faithfully, even in the face of injustice and unfairness. They paid the fine. In this case, they wouldn't have to pay in blood, but in silver. But there was *still* a price to pay and they were willing to pay it.

You know, so far in American history, it has been very *inexpensive* for people to be Christians. That may be changing. For some churches, as fines are coming down, things are starting to become more costly. We can trust that the Lord will guide us and, *however* He guides us, we also can walk in quiet courage like these infant believers in Thessalonica. It is courage to live a life forfeited to God.

**Acts 17:10a - <sup>10</sup>As soon as it was night, the brothers and sisters sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.**

It would be about 50 miles to Berea. Not exactly a safe trip, but courage again from Paul and Silas. It seems that, as Luke had been left in Philippi, Timothy was left in Thessalonica. That would've taken some courage. This young man, left to tend a brand new church that was being actively persecuted.

**Acts 17:10b - Upon arrival, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.**

"Hey, maybe let's try a local park or something this time? Things seem to go poorly when we do these synagogue outreaches." It's true, Paul's method met a lot of resistance, and it's easy to focus on the opposition, but we also see that every time he did this a *lot* of people gave their lives to Christ. Look at verse 11:

**Acts 17:11-12 - <sup>11</sup>The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. <sup>12</sup>Consequently, many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men.**

Now, do we need to 'cancel' Luke for being racist here? What's this *nobility* talk? Like a lot of Bible words, the term is a wide one, but most resources agree the sense of the word is "generous." The people of Berea had a greater generosity of heart and mind than their neighbors 50 miles away.

The truth is, we know that different cities and regions have a vibe. For example, it doesn't matter where you go, *everyone* is friendlier than Californians. Economists and sociologists study this stuff all the time. Barna is a group that studies things like this. In 2016 they listed El Paso, Texas and Las Cruces, New Mexico as the most generous cities in America. In the top 50 there was only 1 entry for all of California. The city? 'Fresno-Visalia,' ranking at #29.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/50-most-generous-cities-in-america/>

Barna also researched the most “Bible-minded” cities in the US. Fresno-Visalia came in at #71 on that list. There’s only 1 California city higher than that: San Diego at #70.<sup>3</sup>

In verse 12 it says “consequently” or your version might say “therefore” or “as a result.” The consequence of a person examining the Scriptures should be life change. That’s not only for people who get saved, but for you and me as well. As believers, we are to continue in an ongoing study of the Bible, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us in all truth. Ours lives should be continually changed by the power of God’s word. And when we minister to others, we should always appeal to Scripture because it is powerful and life changing.

**Acts 17:13 - <sup>13</sup> But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.**

As God sends out His workers into the field, so the Devil sends his out to sow tares and ruin young crops. There *is* a Satanic agenda that is anti-God, anti-Israel and anti-Church that permeates this world. And though we cannot always predict when he will launch an attack, we can expect him to stand in opposition and to marshal his forces to fight against God’s work and God’s people.

**Acts 17:14-15 - <sup>14</sup> The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. <sup>15</sup> Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.**

Again, we see a determined, quiet courage defining these Christians. You see it in Silas and Timothy, willing to stay behind while being spiritually shelled by the enemy. We see it in those brand new believers who were willing to escort Paul to Athens, standing with him in spite of the danger.

Why leave Silas and Timothy only to have them come and join him a few days later? We can’t be sure. Perhaps the situation was so serious they had to get Paul out as quickly as possible and didn’t have time to prepare properly. I also think it’s because Paul and the guys knew that, for these brand new churches, even a few more days of instruction and ministry would make a big, big difference. When you’re an infant believer, out in pagan Greece, 6 days with an apostle is much better than 3 days with one. They needed every precious ounce of spiritual guidance. Of course, even when the team left, these Greek Christians were never alone. They had each other. They had the Spirit and they had the filling of God’s courage and the demonstration of how to use it as they began their own walks with the Lord.

Tonight each of *us* should take courage, keep it up, and move forward in the power of God. Relying on His word to continue the life changing work in our own hearts and in the lives of the people we’re trying to rescue. As we live out our days, we should do so with quiet resolve, generosity and thoughtfulness, being willing to do whatever needs doing, expecting opposition but remembering that our King is on our side and He is leading the way, lighting our path, equipping us as we go through the world proclaiming the good news of our Messiah.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/2016-bible-minded-cities/>