



Gospel to multi-faith society, Acts 17:15-34

This sermon explores different scenes, starting with a reminder from Acts 16.

Perhaps explore just one scene at a time: [each scene is posted separately to help do that]

Each has a scripture setting, a thought and then a reflection to think and pray about; and to discuss in your small group

1) Picture the Scene; 'The prequel'

Paul and his friends have been working hard at sharing Jesus' gospel with Jew and Gentile alike and they've seen some great successes.

After obeying the spirit of Jesus who told them not to head north, they continued along the road which took them to the port city of Troas.

- Perhaps Jesus was granting them a little holiday by the sea? They had been told where they could not go, but not where they should go...
- The road took them to the port city of Troas; time to chill out on the beach a little, enjoying the rhythmic sound of the waves gently crashing up the beach?
- Boats at the dock, commercial and tourist trade alike; maybe an opportunity for Paul the Tentmaker to be introduced to a bit of fishing, the former trade of Simon, Andrew, James & John?

But there was no time for such things; Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man calling for him to come and visit, and that sets the little fellowship off on their adventures to Philippi, where success first comes in Lydia and her whole household being baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (see Acts 16)

'But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15 NIV)

What a great start for Paul and little gospel-fellowship!

...Christianity as a Blessed life?

Suddenly things take a turn for the worse. As a reaction to Paul commanding the name of Jesus over a slave-girl possessed by a spirit, the owners cause a huge fuss and had Paul and Silas thrown into jail. We might expect Paul and co. to be angry themselves saying, 'how rude! Is this the thanks we get for releasing the captives? To become captives ourselves?' and 'what an ungrateful lot! Why is this happening?'

"It's this multiethnic reality of the Jesus movement that leads to the next theme Luke emphasizes, namely, the clash of cultures between the early Christians and the Greek and Roman world." (Bible Project)

But no, that's not what they do. They pray out loud and sing hymns to God, observed by the other prisoners. From that comes another great success, the prison warden and all his household get baptised after the Lord releases all the prisoners from their cells.



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Hooray! We all cheer for how Jesus and his spirit are working through that little fellowship of the Gospel! But then, more setbacks...

From Philippi they go to the city of Thessaloniki – and a riot is started against Paul's group; they are not fitting into the beliefs and culture of that society – so Paul and Silas are sent away to another town.

Reflection. Life as a Christian does not mean an easy and abundant life; but it does mean a life where God's spirit is with us and opportunity to develop deep friendship with a few other followers of Jesus.

Questions: How do you deal with problems and setbacks? What happens when someone insults you? How can you be a godly difference with others? Explore this prayerfully, using scripture and with one or two others.

Example prayer: oh, Lord Jesus, it's really hard to love some people! I'm sorry when my feelings and reactions have not shown your mercy and grace, and I thank you for the times when you have helped me to react better. Please show me from your word and the life of my brothers and sisters in Christ how I can live differently, bringing your presence into all my interactions with others.

ⁱ Bible Project, 'Guide of the Book of Acts', <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-acts/#:~:text=Discover%20how%20the%20small%20Jesus%20community> [accessed 15 Aug 24.]