

30 or more years ago, I met a man who had moved to Maine from New York. He became a member of the church that I was pastoring at the time. And as I got to know his story, I learned that he was a businessman and he was in construction. He owned a company that specialized in clearing land. And when he moved north, he brought his operation with him. And in his words, at the first day of it, he almost lost his shirt. When I asked him why, he told me he came from New York. Any bid on land clearing jobs up here, the way that he had been on them down there, his prices were lower than the area contractors. And he couldn't believe the amount of business that he was getting. And then he got to work. You know what he discovered? The land in Maine is not like the land in New York. And again, in his words, it's all rocks. If you've ever tried to plant a garden, make a lawn. Dig a foundation. If you've ever wondered why there are so many rock walls as you peer into the woods while you're driving down the interstate. You know that Maine is rocky soil. This is how I heard one pastor recently describe his ministry in another New England state not far from here. He wasn't speaking literally. He was speaking figuratively. He was speaking spiritually. We live in a region that is notoriously difficult when it comes to planting the seeds of Christianity. New England is rocky soil. You might recall. Jesus. Called a parable about this. A farmer went out to sow his seed and as he scattered it, it fell on four types of ground. Some fell on the path that would have been tamped down and hardened by foot traffic and the gardener's wagon. It had no chance whatsoever of penetrating the hard earth. It was quickly eaten by the birds of the air. Some of the seed fell on rocky ground. It sprang up right away. But because there was no real depth of soil. It soon withered. Some of the seed fell among thorns, and though it began to grow, it soon was overtaken. By. The bad plants. Finally, some of the seed fell on good soil and it grew. And it produced an abundant harvest. This whole parable that Jesus tells is about the gospel. It's. It's. It's about the truth of God. What happens to it when it is sown, when it is preached, when it is shared. And it's about the different ways that it can be received. Sometimes faith just never gets started. The heart that it lands on is hard and and impenetrable. And that seed of faith is snatched away by the enemy of our souls. Sometimes it looks like faith is going to blossom. It shoots up quickly, but the conditions are too rocky. There's a ledge under there. The soil is too shallow in the heat of the day. Causes that plant to collapse. The faith collapses. Sometimes faith dares peek its head out of the ground. But as it matures, it's challenged by and it's compromised by competition. The thorns and the brambles that we know them to be. The cares of life. The cares of life. Choke out that faith. And sometimes. Faith finds a place to grow and multiply in the good soil of a receptive heart. This parable of Jesus is often called the parable of the sower or the parable of the soils. And in it we are meant to see the different ways and reasons that belief in God does or does not take hold, does or does not flourish. And perhaps we are meant to ponder when the truth of God is shared with us, when the seed of gospel truth is sown our way. What sort of heart? What sort of soil? Does it land on? In our passage this morning, we see the good news of Jesus is shared in two different cities, Thessalonica and Maria. And we see that it is received in two different ways, that it falls on at least two types of soil. Let's pray. Always, Father, as we come to your word, we truly come to sit under it. We come to learn from it. We come to hear your voice and pray. That will be the case as we examine these scriptures this day, whatever wisdom and knowledge is in these words of yours, help us to grasp it and help us humbly to receive it implanted that it might affect the change in us, the change in our thinking, the change in our living that you would desire. We do ask and pray these things in the name of your son, our Savior, Jesus. Amen. While

we finished up last week where chapter 15 and today we're in Chapter 17, and some of you might be wondering what happened to Chapter 16. And the answer is that about two weeks ago, Vice's director, Adrian Adrian Monroe, preached most of Chapter 16. He didn't preach all of it, but he didn't leave me enough for a sermon either. So we're going to we're going to move on. And whatever themes may have been left behind, I trust that they will emerge again in the Book of Acts, which I'm sure you've seen by now this far into it. This is what Acts does act sort of spirals up and you get again and again opportunities to see the same truths over and over. So we're moving on Chapter 17, but there are still are some happenings that occurred in 16 that we should take note of just because it's going to help us as we go forward in the book. So in Chapter 16, I want you to to know this. If you didn't pick it up, we are introduced to a couple new helpers in the work of spreading the good news. One is a young man named Timothy who joins in Lystra. He's going to become like a salt, a son to Paul. The other is the author of Acts himself Luke. Luke joins and Luke now will not simply be reporting the exploits of Paul. He's going to be a firsthand reporter in some of them. So that's why you'll see the language changed from time to time and will say we in us. That's because Luke is actually part of the action. And finally, in Chapter 16, we need to know this how the Holy Spirit is orchestrating the mission, guiding Paul and his team to certain regions and forbidding him from entering others. The Church that is to be the church that belongs to God. Jesus said he would build it. The Holy Spirit is leading the way and we pick up today in a region that's a long way from the church is ground zero in Jerusalem in a place called Macedonia, more commonly known to us as Greece, in a city called Thessalonica in Thessalonica, Paul continues that pattern that he has established a visiting the Jewish synagogues first by going to the Jewish place of worship. Paul was once an ardent Jew, a Pharisee among Pharisees, and his love for his brothers and his sisters persists. He once shared faith with them. His his care for them is great. These are in a way he was it. These are his people. And and he loves them and he desperately wants them to understand Jesus. He wants them to come to the Lord. So He goes to the synagogue first. And on three different Sabbath days we read he shared the story. He shared the story of Jesus in synagogue with those who would listen. 17, two and three. We see how we did it, he reasoned with them. Luke writes 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. So Paul's approach is first to reason with his hearers. To open the Bible and to talk about it. That word, translated reason, is associated with a modern term for us from the Greek dialog. And it just means to converse. It means to discuss. From the discussion. Paul explains the scripture and he teaches it and he takes the Word of God. And this may be a familiar scene because this is just what Jesus did. Remember the resurrected Jesus on the road to Him as He took the Word of God and he opened it and he showed them all things pertaining to the Christ. That's what Paul is doing here. He's imitating Jesus and he's reasoning with these people. He's talking with them. He's conversing with them. One way that we could put this is to say that Paul is presenting an argument for Jesus. He is. He is presenting an argument for Jesus. His hope is to persuade his listeners about who Jesus is and what Jesus did for them on the cross. He sincerely wants to make the case for Christ. So He presents an argument. But I want you to notice this. He presents an argument. We automatically have a thought, don't we? When it comes to that word argument, he presents an argument, but he's not argumentative, and that's something that we Christians would do well to heed. We live. I think you'll agree with me. We live in a society of

divisions in some ways. We live on a society that feeds on division, on divisiveness. I am sure you have noticed that there are many people in our world who seem to have an adversarial spirit who are ready to fight. People are regularly taking to print or social media in argumentative ways. They will demean those who disagree with them. They will call names. They will seek to discredit those who don't agree with them. They will try to cancel those individuals. At times, they even want to kill those who oppose them. That's becoming more and more common. And we Christians must be careful not to adopt or fall into this mindset. It's a worldly thing. It has no place in our kingdom. I don't know of anyone who has come to faith in Jesus because he lost a Facebook debate. Do you. Paul is in person. Paul is face to face and he's opening that Bible and he's showing people how it points to Jesus and how everything about that Bible is about salvation and Jesus. And verse four tells us 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. Some of the Jews were persuaded, and in that same synagogue they would have been Gentiles. They were known as God fearing. They had not embraced the tenets of Judaism. They didn't follow the Mosaic law, but they really did have an interest in God. They really did want to understand what this God thing is all about. And so they would worship with the Jews. Many of those came to faith because of so some of the Jews and many of the God fears that Luke calls them devout, the devout Greeks. Many of them came to faith through Paul's ministry and many of the leading women of the city. Luke is careful to point that out to us. So among the established Jews are some of them. Not a great reception. We're going to talk more about that in a second. But among the Gentiles, a better result they believed and looking again in verse four, if you have your Bibles open and they joined. These little words. It's always fun to read through the scripture slowly made. My job is in a great job because I have to read through the Scripture slowly in order to try to put it out here. Right. They joined Paul and Silas. Which again, would be we can read right over that. But listen, this is what they didn't do. They didn't believe in go their own way. They didn't just to come to some semblance of faith and say, well, that was fun, good for me and move along. They joined. True belief in Jesus unites one with every other believer who has ever been or who will ever be. Think about that. That's what true faith in Jesus does. It makes us want. It unites us with every other believer who's ever been or wherever will be. To believe. TURLEY Believe to be a Christian is to become part of a family. If we going to use Paul's language in first Corinthians, it's to become part of a body. And every part of that body is needed. At every part of that body is essential, is to become part. To join the new believers, join Paul and Silas. But as we come to verse five, we see a familiar scene playing out. And I say, familiar scene, because if you're familiar with reading your Bible at all, you should have little flashbacks here of kind of what what Jesus went through. And we will see as we move through this book of acts that as Paul follows Jesus, he increasingly experiences the things that Jesus experienced. And you might expect that as well, beloved. As you become more mature in the faith, as you as you follow closer on the heels of your rabbi, you will experience some of the things that he experienced. And here the Jews are jealous. These are the unpersuaded Jews, which would be the majority of those who didn't receive Paul's preaching. They didn't really believe the good news about Christ. They are jealous because other people didn't believe so. They've been sitting with these people in worship and these people haven't come over to their way of thinking. And then Paul comes into worship and talks about Jesus and they follow Jesus, and there's great jealousy there. I'd like to talk more about jealousy, but I don't have time. I

suspect we'll have another opportunity. But understand this. What is the root of jealousy? Well, I don't even want to go that deep. We're jealous. When we're jealous, it's all about us. Let me put it that way. Okay? Jealousy is just all about me. Jealousy is all about us. And so we see right away that these unpersuaded Jews are already a little bit off kilter because their major concern in life is not the glory of God. It's maintaining what they like and what they want. And it's all about them and them not getting what they want here. And that's all I'm going to say about that. We'll get back to jealousy some day for sure. These are the unpersuaded Jews. They are jealous. The old Scottish preacher, Alexander McLaren, has said this The effects of the faithful preaching of the gospel are as uniform as the method. It does one of two things to its hearers either it melts their hearts and leads them to faith, or it stirs them to more violent enmity. It is either a stone of stumbling or a sure cornerstone. We either build on it or fall over it. Violent enmity is the response of these jealous men. And they devise a plot. They canvass the marketplace for the loiters, for the men who are literally sitting out there in that arena and have nothing else to do, nothing better to do. Luke calls them the rabble. The insinuation here is that their kind of ne'er do wells, they are not not the highest echelon or the people of the greatest character. And he goes, they go, they. And that's one I can use. And around these men are and and they form a mob and then they manufacture a crisis. They purposely attack the home of Jason. And as you read through that, if you're like me, like, who's this poor Jason guy? I haven't heard about him. I haven't seen about him. And all of a sudden Luke's talking like we all should know, Jason, like we all just came from his house. But anyway, he seems to be a sympathizer. He seems to be somebody who has opened up his home to the Christians, possibly, apparently, Paul and Silas, if they didn't if they didn't work there, they may or they may have stayed there. They may have worked there. Again, we don't know. But they the crowd thought that Paul and Silas would be there. So they go and they attack the home of Jason. They want to pull Paul and Silas out into the street. This is kind of similar to that scene we find in in Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot's house where people are demanding. We want Paul and Silas there not to bring them out, not to do them any good, but to do them harm. But Paul and Silas aren't there. And so absent the missionaries, this crowd decides that they will grab Jason and they'll bring this guy before the city officials. And they accused the Christians in that setting, before the officials of turning the world upside down, of being disruptive, even though they were the ones that created the crisis, they were the ones that incited the crowd. And then they threw out this political jab, this, this, this threat that they knew would inspire action. These men are acting against the decrees of Caesar again. Does it sound familiar when Jesus is going to be accused of this sort of thing, of being a revolutionary, and they're saying that there's another king Jesus, this is a serious threat, because even though Rome wasn't that interested in Thessalonica, if there was a true word of possible insurrection, if there was something treasonous going in there, the Romans could land with force that you and I couldn't really comprehend and do a good deal of danger. These guys don't care about the decrees of Caesar. Don't be confused. They don't care about that. And they really don't care about Caesar. Or as a king. And if they, in fact, were devout Jews, they would like Daniel had long before refused to bow to anything other than their God. But she they simply just needed some traction. They needed a way to make a case to get these bothersome Christians out of the way to marginalize Paul and Silas or to discredit them. So nobody would possibly listen to them. And so they would say or do anything to get what they wanted, just the way the Pharisees treated Jesus. They're going to stifle this

threat to their status quo, this threat that Christianity poses. And the civil authorities are naturally disturbed at the allegations that are being made. But we find no evidence here that they investigated them at all for any truth. They took money from Jason as a security. Luke tells us likely a pledge that Paul and Silas would not bother them any more. They wouldn't cause any more trouble. And that night, under the cover of darkness, the church sent the two missionaries down the road to Berea. In Berea, Paul also goes to the synagogue to teach. Luke tells us the Jews in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica. That is, they were more fair minded, they were more open minded. They were willing to listen. They were also diligent to test everything that was being told them against the Scripture. That's where that encouragement you hear. Sometimes somebody says, Be a barrier, check it out. Look, look at scripture. Make sure that what you're hearing, what you're being taught, what you're being told, particularly in a setting like this, check it against the scripture. Not everybody who picks up a Bible and opens it is going to teach from that Bible. Not everybody who reads from it is necessarily going to teach from it. Be a barrier and check it out. That's exactly what the people of Berea did. Every believer should be weighing what we hear, what we are taught in light of scripture. You know, in the last days, Jesus says that many will fall away. And one wonders if the reason so many are going to fall away is that they would have such little knowledge of the Bible if we had a greater knowledge of the Bible. I believe that keeps us faithful to God. The Marines were faithful to the Word, and they were students of the Word of God. They took advantage of the privilege they had. They had the Word of God. We could learn from them in that regard. Don't you think we have the Word of God? Do we open the word of God? We have the Word of God. Do we study? We could be students of the Word of God. And you may be sitting there going, I don't have any interest in being a student of the Word of God. You realize so many people around this world don't even have that opportunity, can't even do it, don't have a copy of of the Bible. If they had a copy of the Bible, some of them could be punished greatly for having that in their possession. Think that through. We're blessed. We have the Bible, let's use our Bibles. Let's get to know God through his word. The Marines examine the Scriptures daily. And when Paul was preaching Jesus and they were opening the Bible and they were looking at it. Guess what they're finding? This lines up. This makes sense. This is true. And. Whereas, some of the Jews in Thessalonica believed in Beria, many believe. But catch this Act 17 I think is verse 13 When the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was proclaimed by Paul and Maria also, they came there to agitating and stirring up the crowds. There wasn't enough of these anti Christians to drive the missionaries out of their city in Thessalonica. They actually make this 50 mile or so trip down to Berea to do the same thing, to stir up the crowds, to manufacture a crisis, to spread disinformation to to gender strife, to to paint Paul and Silas Young and say Paul and Barnabas all the time, because it was so long saying Paul and Barnabas. But to paint Paul and Silas. In a in a wrong light, in a negative light, and to demean the whole movement of Christianity, that's all they want to do. Paul in particular seems to be the object of great hostility, was probably the primary operator, which makes sense. And so people were definitely against Paul. And again, the church ships him off to a safer place, this time by way of the sea. Timothy and Silas are going to remain for a little while. Eventually, they will rejoin Paul in Athens, and that's where we'll leave the story. That's enough for today. But I want to take just a few moments to draw out some implications. What are we learning from the missionary work that is described in the Book of Acts? First thing I pull out of this is the importance of gospel conversations. It's the

importance of dialog. Paul is interested in talking with not talking and certainly not talking down. He's having dialog that implies some give and take. And you'd imagine that his teaching wasn't restricted to the synagogue either. He was teaching all the time whether he was making tents or whether he was in an area religious or whether he was sitting outside the synagogue. Paul is always teaching. He's always having these conversations. He's making an argument for Jesus. But again, he's not argumentative, and I pray that we can be that way. Persuasion is what it's all about, laying it out, but not browbeating. Paul wasn't interested in that. He didn't do that. He's not coercive. Why would anybody why would anybody want to somehow be coerced into a faith system that makes no sense whatsoever? So gospel conversations, trying to have gospel conversation. Secondly, we see here the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible has the answers that everybody's looking for. It really does. It really does. And those who are destined to know those answers will see them. When they are shown them, they will see them when they are shown them, show them the scriptures. That's what Paul does. He teaches from the Scriptures and the brigands. Examine the Scriptures daily. Our appeal for Jesus can't simply be based in our own opinion of him. We may love him. That's awesome. But that's not exactly going to bring someone to faith. Even even our own experience with him can be powerful. But that's not even as compelling as the Word of God. The Scripture is sufficient. Know the Scripture, use the Scripture, point to the Scripture otherwise. And I'm sure you've had this experience when you're trying to witness to somebody, it really comes across as my opinion versus your opinion my thoughts versus your thoughts. Whereas we might be able to say, Well, have you considered what the Bible says about it's just just a little variation from what we may be used to. But have you considered or what do you think about what the Bible says? And I have found people receptive to that. They may not even believe the Bible, but you know what? They often respect the fact that I do. So don't underestimate the person that you're talking with or the power of the scripture. What do you do with and then point them to the Scripture? Thirdly, we note the centrality of the Christian message in Paul's. What did Paul preach? He showed up preaching Christ and Christ crucified. He kept it. He kept it very focused, very simple that way. He preached the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures, that he was seen alive by many witnesses. And Paul himself could say, and I have experience the resurrected Lord, so let me tell you, and that he is now proclaimed everywhere as our only savior from sin. That has to be and that has to remain the central message of the church. We can teach and talk about all kinds of other things. Of course we can. But as James Montgomery Voice says in his commentary on ex, any teaching that leaves out this core leaves out the very thing God blesses, the only thing that results in the salvation of sinful men and women like ourselves. Jesus. Christ. Crucify. Fourthly, I pull out of this, or the idea of the mixed reception of the gospel message in Thessalonica, Paul encountered a good amount of hostility, and in Berea there was curiosity. Some believed in Thessalonica. Many believed in Berea. The truth of God lands in all sorts of places, on all sorts of hearts, on all sorts of soil, we would say. And there will be multiple responses to how that truth lands. Our job is to sow the truth. We don't make it grow. We can't drive it into somebody's heart. We might want to, but we can't. Our job is to lay it out there and pray. Pray for a receptive soil. We can do that, but we can't make it take hold. We should expect mixed reception to our sharing of the gospel, and it gets a little worse. We should expect the rejection of the messenger. Paul, do you notice Paul's getting kicked out of

everywhere he goes, isn't he? There's a pattern here. Everywhere he goes, he's getting bloated for the most part, anyway. I think this is like the fifth time, as one pastor said. He said you probably wouldn't hire a guy who was kicked out of his last five churches to be your preacher. But maybe you should. No one wants to be rejected. And yet increasingly, we're seeing the rejection of the Bible's teaching. Right. And we would be foolish to think that that's not going to translate into the rejection of the Bible's proponents. Let's not be unwise about this. The message. May be rejected and the messenger may also be rejected. So I want to ask you, can you stand up to that? Will you stand firm in your faith when it becomes personally costly? How will you respond in times of trial? And if we don't? Prepare ourselves for. I'm not sure we're going to respond well, but if we do prepare ourselves, then we understand this is a reasonable expectation. Jesus said that you will be hated by all on account of my name. That's what Jesus said. So we can expect a degree of rejection. And yet how will we respond if we if we look at how Paul responds, this is the answer. Don't quit. Carry on. I don't know. How would you do, if you like, the first five cities that you preached and you got kicked out of? I remember thinking I might have this assignment wrong. I might be confused. I'm. I'm. I may be really bad at this. None of that. None of that for the apostle Paul. He's just going to carry on. The mob in Thessalonica was formed to shut down the gospel. They chased the preaching to Berea with the same intent to shut down the Gospel. But in God's providence and we have seen this before, remember at the very beginning of the church, the persecution that is intended to squash the gospel inspires is the impetus for the spread of the Gospel. See, that's God's way of saying, you're not going to stop this gospel. You can't stop it. And if we're part of an unstoppable gospel, we can't quit either, can we? We may want to. Oh, there are tons of you can take a break, but you can't quit. Don't quit. That's going to continue to be the case. As long as Christians are willing to stand firm, we will be persecuted. We will be rejected for sharing the story of Jesus. But we don't have to quit and the story goes on. Tony Merida concludes his commentary on this section of action with these encouraging words, he says, Paul and his companions turn the world upside down by turning the word loose, keep teaching and learning the Christ centered scriptures and ask God to use you to change neighborhoods and nations for the glory of King Jesus. Let's just take a moment, if you don't mind, just for a minute, to reflect on to reflect on this view just by your heads for just a second. And think think about this in particular. I want to ask a couple of questions as we reflect. When it comes to the truth of God. Friend, how have you responded? Or how do you respond? Do you respond with hostility? Like some of those special American Jews. Are you resistant to God? Because you want to keep things in your control. You want you want them to be the way that you like them. Or when it comes to the truth of God, do you respond with curiosity like the Marines? Are you open? Are you eager to learn? Are you teachable? Is the soil of your heart hardened? Or Rocky. Or filled with cares, competing affections. Or is it ready to receive the word? Ready to see that word grow. And produce an abundance of goodness in your life.