

THE BIG IDEA: The gospel wins.

The Take-Off

If you've been with us at all over the last 6 months or so, then you know we've been taking a look at the history of the early church as it's recorded in the book of Acts.

Now, it's possible that you're hear and would object to taking any amount of time to study one of the books in the Bible just because you've bought the argument that the Bible is just like any other book and that what's found in the Bible isn't reliable.

Without going into tremendous detail, Christians do believe in the reliability of the Bible for many reasons, and here are a few. (And if you're a skeptic, you'll be thrilled to see that "because I believe it's God's word" isn't in this list!)

- There is more manuscript evidence for the Bible than any other piece of literature ever recorded. This means we can have more confidence that the Bible is accurate than we can that the works of Shakespeare are accurate. Of course, no one questions Shakespeare.
- The literary consistency is mind-blowing. Over 40 authors of 66 books over 1,500 years and it all contains one theme. You and I couldn't pull that off in this one room with 10 people writing spontaneously for 5 minutes.
- Finally, what about prophetic consistency? Over 300 specific OT prophecies are fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's impressive, especially considering the fact that we live in a age when meteorologists can't predict the weather in spite of state-of-the-art technology.

The point here is that it's not enough to simply read the book of Acts as a collection of stories. It is a history of what a saving God did FOR REAL at one point in time and promise that he can do the same things again FOR REAL in ours.

What we read is what we need, and throughout this journey called re|ACTS, we can have confidence to read it and expect God to do for us what he did for them.

Today we'll be in Acts 16 and 17, and even though it's a long portion, you'll see that the same things happened in the first 3 cities Paul visited after leaving the dead end of Troas that we talked about last week.

Whether it was Philippi, Thessalonica or Berea, Paul must have felt like he was living in the movie Groundhog Day.

1. Paul preached the gospel

- a. In Philippi, it was down by the river (Acts 16:13)
- b. In Thessalonica, it was in a synagogue (Acts 17:2)
- c. In Berea, it was the synagogue again (Acts 17:10)
- d. A couple of observations:
 - Acts 17:2 says "as his custom was" about Paul entering the synagogue
 - He had a predictable pattern
 - Paul was intentional about preaching the gospel
 - It was the FIRST step, not the last
- e. A couple of questions:
 - Are we intentional about preaching the gospel?
 - Do we leave it up to others?
 - Have we developed a pattern in this area of our lives?
 - Do we intentionally make opportunities to share the good news about what Jesus has done for others?
 - Don't wait for or take opportunities to share the gospel. Make opportunities. It's that important.
- f. Paul preached the gospel everywhere

2. The gospel caused reactions

- a. No matter where Paul preached the gospel, the same 2 things happened because 2 things always happen when the gospel is preached. There are:
 - Converts
 - Conflict
- b. In Philippi
 - Converts: Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15); A jailor and his household (Acts 16:29-34)
 - Conflict: Paul and Silas thrown in prison (Acts 16:16-40)

- c. In Thessalonica
 - Converts: Some Jews and God-fearing Greeks (Acts 17:4)
 - Conflict: Mob formed to get Paul and Silas but settled for getting their host instead (Acts 17:5-9)
 - d. In Berea
 - Converts: Many Jews and prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:12)
 - Conflict: Troublemakers from Thessalonica came down and stirred up the crowd (Acts 17:13)
 - g. A couple of observations:
 - A wide variety of people were converted (Greeks, Jews, women, jailor, men, etc.)
 - We can see why Paul later wrote Romans 12:11-13; Galatians 3:28; and Colossians 3:11
 - Paul and Silas found themselves in conflict because they stood for the gospel
 - Our conflict can open the door to someone else's conversion (Paul and Silas in prison led to jailor's salvation)
 - Paul and Silas didn't enjoy their freedom while leaving others in captivity
 - Praise is a powerful weapon when we're caught in the conflict the gospel brings
 - Paul and Silas praised and were not only set free themselves, but so was everyone else
 - Praise has NOTHING to do with where we are and EVERYTHING to do with whose we are
 - h. A couple of questions:
 - Are we experiencing conflict in our lives as a result of standing for the gospel or for fighting against the gospel?
 - Do we use our freedom for ourselves or to see others set free also (Galatians 5:13-14)?
 - Are we able to give God praise because he never changes even if everything is changing around us?
3. **Paul preached the gospel anyway**
- a. Please don't miss this simple point, because it will be the one that can leave you with a lot of hope
 - b. Paul preached and everywhere he preached he saw converts and conflicts and he continued to preach the gospel anyway
 - c. Was he crazy? What allows a man to experience such violent reactions and yet continue to do the very thing that will cause them again?
 - d. He could do it because he had one thing: confidence.
 - e. I don't mean the kind of confidence that gets pushed in self-help books and pop psychology
 - f. That kind of confidence is exposed in this picture (DEMOTIVATIONAL POSTER of CONFIDENCE)
 - g. Paul had no confidence in his:
 - Preaching (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
 - Possessions (Philippians 3:7-8)
 - h. Paul's confidence was in the power of the gospel to save souls and lead us to victory

The Landing

If you think back to last week, Paul found himself at a dead end in the coastal town of Troas

One of the things we learned was that it was a place of trial because Paul was struggling to find out what God's plans were for him next

One of the lessons he learned in Troas was that God leads us where we are to lead us where we aren't

But he learned another lesson as he left Troas, and that's the Big Idea that I want to leave you with today: **the gospel wins.**

Later as Paul was thinking back over this period of his life - the funneling by God through dead ends to Troas and the converts and conflicts that he encountered when he traveled from Troas - he wrote the words found in 2 Corinthians 2:12-14.

No matter what we face, we can have confidence that we are being led in victory.

Sometimes through conversions, sometimes through conflicts, but always - ALWAYS - to victory.

Why? Because **the gospel wins.**