



THE STORY CONTINUES

READING BACKWARD | ACTS 17:1-15

What do we make of the Bible? We know it is an important book. We honor it in our statements of faith, and carefully display it on our book shelves. But when we actually open it up and read it, what are we to make of it.

For some, the Bible is a little strange and foreign to our ear. We've launched into any number of reading plans, but soon get lost in the story and end up laying it aside. For others, we are committed to reading and studying Scripture, but if we are honest with ourselves it is more often out of a sense of duty and obligation, than an act of pure love and devotion.

No matter what our relationship is to the Bible, we are all a long way from the compelling portrait Paul paints in his letter to the Colossians.

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts (Colossians 3:16)."

For Paul "The Message of Christ" was the heartbeat of the church. It animates our life and worship, fills us with gratitude, puts a song in our hearts, offers us strength and encouragement and is the source we draw from to strengthen and encourage others. To be a vital church, or to be a vital follower of Christ for that matter, is to be vitally connected to God's Word.

The writer of Hebrews would agree. He reminds us that Scripture is far more than a record of what God has done in the past. It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12-14), and foundational to what God is doing right here, right now.

Jesus taught his disciples how to read Scripture with a new set of eyes. Once Paul realized who Jesus was, he began to read Scripture with a new set of eyes. As Paul walked into local synagogues and read from the ancient Hebrew texts, he encouraged his fellow countrymen, and anyone

else who might be interested, to read Scripture with a new set of eyes. He taught them to read backwards. To see the whole of Scripture through the lens of Christ.

In the first half of Acts 17, we have two synagogue stories. In Thessalonica Paul opens the Scripture to prove that the Messiah must suffer and die. In Berea, those who heard him enthusiastically received his message and searched the Scripture everyday to see if what he said was true. We can learn a lot from these stories about how we should hear and respond to Scripture.

THE HEARTBEAT OF SCRIPTURE (vv. 1-9)

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

²As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said.

⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

1. How would you describe Paul’s approach to teaching?
2. What was the heart of Paul’s message?
3. Why is it particularly important for him to prove to a Jewish crowd “the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead?”
4. Why was it necessary for the Messiah to “suffer and rise from the dead?”
5. Why is the “life, death, and resurrection of Jesus,” really good news?

6. How do people respond to Paul’s message?
7. Why do you think some people have a “violent response” response to the gospel?
8. How do these people exhibit a greater understanding of the gospel than many believers do?
9. How might Jesus have been a threat to Caesar?

A NOBLE RESPONSE TO SCRIPTURE (vv. 11-15)

¹⁰As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

¹¹Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

¹²As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³But 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. ¹⁴The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

1. While Luke describes how Paul framed his message in Thessalonica, he highlights how the message was received in Berea. What is notable about how the Berean’s processed Paul’s message?
2. While the Berean’s were model unbelievers (they gave Paul’s message a fair hearing), how do they serve as a model for believers?
3. What do these passages teach us about how we ought to engage with critics and skeptics?
4. How would you describe how believers should be engaged with God’s word?
5. How can we tell when the word is having the impact in our lives that God desires?
6. How can we transform our time with God from something we do out of duty and obligation to an act of genuine love and devotion?