
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 17:1-9
Lesson 31 – How to Handle Haters

Acts 17:1-9 (NIV)

¹ When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. ⁵ But the 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. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here," ⁷ and 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. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

Discussion Questions

1. **How did Paul respond to the pain of his previous experience without allowing it to stop his next assignment?**
Acts 16:22–25, 40; Acts 17:1–2.
Discussion: What is the difference between *healing from what happened* and *allowing what happened to determine where you go next*? Where have you allowed an old wound to interfere with a new assignment?
 - a. Key thought: **"Pain may change how you travel, but it doesn't have to change where you're going."**
2. **Acts 17:2 says, "As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue." What does Paul's consistency reveal about knowing your purpose?**
Read Acts 17:2; Ephesians 2:10.
Discussion: What spiritual habits or disciplines keep you focused when your emotions, circumstances, or other people's opinions change? How can a lack of purpose make us vulnerable to distraction?
3. **How do you know whether you are following God's direction or simply responding to people's expectations?**
Proverbs 3:5–6; James 1:5–8; Galatians 1:10.
Discussion: The sermon asks, **"Whose voice is navigating my life?"** What voices currently have the most influence over your decisions—and have they earned that influence?

4. **Why was it important that Paul “reasoned,” “explained,” and “proved” his message from Scripture rather than relying only on emotion?**

Acts 17:2–3; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15.

Discussion: Could you explain *why* you believe what you believe without saying, “My pastor said”? What areas of your faith do you need to understand more deeply?

- a. Key thought: **“We aren't just trying to make people shout on Sunday. We're trying to make disciples who can stand on Monday.”**

5. **Why did opposition increase when Paul's ministry began producing results?**

Acts 17:4–5; James 3:14–16.

Discussion: Acts specifically identifies jealousy as a motive. Why can another person's success expose something unhealthy within us? How can we recognize jealousy in ourselves before it becomes destructive?

6. **How can we distinguish between a “hater” and someone God may be using to correct us?**

Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 27:5–6, 17.

Discussion: The sermon warns that *every person who disagrees with you is not a hater*. What qualities should we look for in people whose correction we allow to influence our lives?

7. **What happens to our Christian witness when we respond to mistreatment by becoming like the people mistreating us?**

Ephesians 6:12; Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 2:21–23.

Discussion: Which is harder for you: proving that you're right or refusing to become wrong while being mistreated? Why?

- a. Key thought: **“Some battles are won not by proving you're right—but by refusing to become wrong while you're being mistreated.”**

8. **Why does jealousy make someone else's blessing feel like your loss?**

James 3:14–16; Romans 12:15; Psalm 84:11.

Discussion: Have you ever struggled to celebrate something God did for someone else because you were still waiting on God yourself? What does that reveal about our understanding of God's provision?

- a. Key thought: **“God did not bless somebody else and accidentally use up your blessing!”**

9. **Who has earned the right to influence your life?**

Proverbs 13:20; Matthew 7:16–20; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Discussion: Consider the sermon's distinction: **“Everybody can have an opinion. Everybody cannot have influence.”** What criteria should determine whose voice receives authority in your life?

10. **Why could Paul survive people's rejection without abandoning his calling?**

Acts 9:15–16; Galatians 1:15–16; Romans 11:29.

Discussion: How does remembering *who called you* change the way you respond when people don't approve of you? Where are you giving people “God-sized authority” over your identity or assignment?

- a. Key thought: **“People can't cancel what they didn't give you.”**

11. **What did Paul's opponents understand—perhaps better than many Christians today—when they accused the believers of saying, “There is another king, one called Jesus”?**

Acts 17:6–7; Philippians 2:9–11; Colossians 1:15–18.

Discussion: If **Jesus is King**, what areas of our lives must surrender their claim to the throne—fear, popularity, money, ego, appetite, relationships, culture, or people's opinions?

12. What would change in your life if you spent less energy answering your critics and more energy answering your calling?

Read **Psalm 62:5–6; Philippians 3:13–14; 1 Corinthians 15:58.**

Discussion: Identify one criticism, rejection, disappointment, or distracting voice that has received too much of your attention. What would it practically look like this week to stop answering the distraction and return your attention to God's assignment?

Final thought: **"I don't have to spend my life answering my haters! I'll spend my life answering my call!"**

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

G. Thessalonica, a Most Important City: The Message that Turned the World Upside Down, 17:1-9

(17:1-9) Introduction: this is the message needed for today, the message that turned the ancient world upside down.

1. (17:1-2) Minister— Paul: the messenger. As Paul travelled about proclaiming the gospel, he set a dynamic example for every believer. Note three challenging points.

1. The messenger continued on for the Lord despite great opposition and terrible persecution from those who did not understand the gospel (Acts 17:23-24). Paul was the Lord's, and he had been called by the Lord to preach the gospel. And even more to the point, he knew the Lord personally—His glorious salvation—and he knew there were many persons who had never heard the gospel. Therefore they were dying and doomed to an eternal hell. Even as Christ loved the world, Paul loved the world; therefore, he was driven to carry the message to Thessalonica. He wanted them to at least have the opportunity to hear and be saved.

Thought 1. We must not allow opposition to stop our witness.

⇒ We must witness out of love for people who have never heard a clear cut presentation of the gospel.

⇒ We must witness, being compelled by the love of Christ for us.

⇒ We must witness, for men without Jesus Christ are lost and doomed unless they are saved.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

2. The messenger sowed the gospel wherever he was. This is clearly seen in this verse. Paul "passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia." The city of Apollonia was in the district of Illyricum, and Paul said he preached the gospel all the way "from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum" (Romans 15:19). Paul witnessed wherever he was. He missed no opportunity to reach out to those who so desperately needed the gospel.

3. The messenger followed his plan. His plan was wise: he would first reach out to those who were already familiar with the Scripture, to the Jews and to the God-fearing Gentiles (see note—Acts 13:14-16 for discussion).

Thought 1. One major reason for the weak witness of believers is the lack of a plan. Believers need to plan their witnessing, how...

- to discover the lost. • to make opportunities. • to approach the subject of the gospel. • to share Christ.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching [make disciples] them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

2. (17:2-3) Gospel— Preaching: the message was critical. It always is, for what a person believes determines everything he becomes and does.

1. The source and authority of Paul's message was the Scripture. This is critical. Paul did not preach the ideas of other men nor his own ideas. His message did not come from man's mind, not from man-made...

- philosophy • history
- psychology • religion
- sociology • law

Paul preached the Scriptures. The Scriptures were both the source and authority of his message.

2. The points of Paul's message were threefold.

- a. Christ died
- b. Christ arose from the dead
- c. Jesus is the Christ

3. Paul preached the message in the synagogues for three Sabbath days. This does not mean that Paul preached in Thessalonica for only three weeks. Paul simply moved out of the synagogue and began to preach in homes wherever he was welcomed. Several passages indicate that he was in Thessalonica for a considerable length of time, and while there he...

- worked night and day at a secular job (1 Thes. 2:9).
- received financial support *several times* from the Philippian church (Phil. 4:16).
- apparently led the church in a strong evangelistic thrust throughout the whole region (1 Thes. 1:8).

Thought 1. The great need of the hour is for believers to be just as dedicated as Paul was. Just imagine being so committed to preaching the gospel that...

- when people reject, one just moves out of the worship center into the homes and even outdoors if needed.
- when people do not support the ministry, one works at secular employment, works night and day if necessary, just to have enough to continue preaching the gospel.

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:14-16).

"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

3. (17:4) Preaching: the result of the message was that many believed. A real cross-section of society came to Christ. Note who they were.

1. Some Jews believed and joined with Paul and Silas in following Christ. Note a significant point that should encourage every witness of the Lord. The Jews were the most prejudicial people imaginable, yet some were saved and became true disciples. Sin can be overcome in lives, no matter how deeply rooted it may be. Paul did not let gross sin keep him from preaching. He knew the power of the gospel and proclaimed it even to the most bitter and prejudicial.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

2. Many devout (God-fearing) Greeks and influential women believed. These were the people...

- who were sick of the idolatry and immorality of their society.
- who sensed the presence and sovereignty of the one true and living God.
- who saw in the Jewish religion and the Scriptures hope for discovering the truth of God and life.

"For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:10).

"And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the

Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

4. (17:5) Gospel, Reaction— Church, Problems in: the world's reaction to the message. Three different segments of society react to the gospel.

1. There are the religionists.
2. There are the loafers, the idle, the disorderly who are always ready to stir up trouble and do mischief and evil. Such people are easily aroused and led to react against anyone and anything. Leaders of government and religion have always found the slothful and disorderly easy prey to use in their schemes to attack opponents. Note how the loafers and the disorderly have no interest in Christ at all. They go about their own interests and the pursuit of doing nothing until they are aroused by some leader to oppose something. In the present situation the religionists used the disorderly to inflame the city against Paul and Silas and the new believers.

Thought 1. The loafers are a dangerous threat to believers if aroused. Throughout history they have been used time after time to oppose the movement of God. This is true even in the church. Carnal leaders seldom have been able to arouse the spiritual against God's will, but they have found easy prey in the uninvolved and in the loafers. By far most trouble within churches comes from carnal leaders arousing the uninvolved.

3. There are the average citizens. The response of the average citizen to Christ is clearly seen in the picture described here. They ignored Christ and had little to do with Him. But they could be easily influenced and become very disturbed with Christ and His followers. Note what caused them to become aroused. It was...

- men with selfish motives. • rumors being spread. • talk against leaders. • the ill-informed being aroused.
- religious leaders speaking against Christ and His followers.

"And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people" (Matthew 26:47).

"And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them" (Acts 16:22).

"And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Numbers 11:4).

5. (17:6-7) Gospel— Preaching: the charge against the messengers and the message. The mob could not find Paul and Silas. They were out someplace. Paul had been staying at the house of a man named Jason. The mob dragged him and some other believers before the rulers of the city and made two charges.

1. The charge was that the message was revolutionary, a message of insurrection; it turned the world upside down.
 - a. The charge was true in one sense. The gospel does change lives. It turns men from sin and shame to God and from immorality to purity.

b. The charge was false in the sense the accusers meant. They said that the message disturbed the community and threatened the public peace, put people in an uproar and infringed upon their rights.

Thought 1. The same charges are often made against the church and believers, especially when the needs of a large number of people are beginning to be met.

2. The message was the claim that Jesus is King. Note that one of the major teachings of Scripture is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth. Paul had been teaching the glorious truth to the believers (1 Thes. 4:13f). The public at large had misunderstood the teaching, "Jesus Christ is King." But He is the King of man's spirit and of heaven, of the spiritual world and dimension of being, not of *this world* (John 18:36-37). He came to rule and reign in the hearts and lives of men, in the realm of the spiritual and eternal, not of the physical and temporal. (See note—' Ephes. 1:3.) No earthly power need be concerned about Christ usurping the authorities and kingdoms of this earth. The Lord's concern is the spiritual revolution of men, the changing of their hearts and lives to live righteously and godly *in this present world*.

Note: a righteous and godly man becomes a much more loyal and responsible citizen than an immoral and unjust man. The latter is much more likely to cause the collapse of his government through the sowing of dishonesty and corruption, immorality and unfaithfulness, unattachment and selfishness, dishonor and betrayal.

"By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 11:11).

6. (17:8-9) World, Reaction— Gospel, Reaction: the world's fear of the message. Very simply, the city leaders feared the loss of their positions and authority, esteem and recognition, power and rule, wealth and livelihood. If the news of another King reached Caesar, Rome would react and remove the city leaders and they would lose all. Apparently, the officials only took notice of Paul's preaching so they could keep an eye on things and prevent the rise of a *Christian King* in their midst. They put Jason under a bond that apparently was to prevent him from housing the ministers again and to see to it that they left the city immediately (cp. 1 Thes. 2:17-18).

Thought 1. Men reject Christ because of what it will cost them. Christ demands the denial of this world and death to all selfish desires and ambitions (see note—' Luke 9:23 and Deeper Study #1—Luke 9:23 for discussion).

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13).