



18. 'Troubling the world'

Acts 17.¹⁻⁹

Background

Jesus warned His disciples that *"in this world you will have trouble"* (see [Jn.16.33](#)) – and the story of the early church certainly bears that out, as the passages in this week's study underline. He also explained *why* they would have trouble, declaring that *"if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also .."* (see [Jn.15.18-22](#)).

But why did they persecute *Him*? The answer, from the outset, was bound up with that which the earliest Christian creed affirmed – Jesus is Lord: it was (and still remains) the kingship of Jesus which rocks the boat of a culture's self-seeking and self-centred living. It was that which troubled Herod at the time of His birth – the challenge of a new King: it was that which troubled the religious authorities in Jerusalem – a threat to their authority. And it's that, the message proclaiming the kingship of Jesus, the grace of salvation and the summons to turn in repentance from idols to serve the living and true God – it's that which so disturbs and discomforts people to this day.

Thessalonica provides a good illustration of just this. By proclaiming God's message to the people there, Paul and his companions were doing what Elijah (in a rather different context) had been doing in his generation: viewed as the 'troubler of Israel' (1 Ki.18.17) by the king and the crowds – virtually 'public enemy no.1' – Elijah himself insisted that in truth it was Ahab who was the real trouble-maker, on account of his and his country's departure from the Word of God and their disdain for the rule of God over their lives.

The church's calling is essentially to that Elijah-like ministry, proclaiming the lordship of Jesus and the necessity of a salvation found only in Him. To declare that Jesus is Lord, and to display that in our living – the two of which together essentially comprise true 'godliness' – invariably and inevitably touches raw nerves and generates an hostility, such that Paul can insist to Timothy that *"everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Tim.3.11).

What Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim.3.1-4.8 (in what very probably was the apostle's final letter) provides a useful commentary on the experience of Paul and the believers at Thessalonica described in Acts 17.1-9, and thus the two passages are included in this study. If you're not able to address them all, **'days' (3), (5) and (7)** are probably the best ones with which to start!

1) Monday 3rd July – choose life

Read [Acts 17.1-5](#)

“.. some of the Jews were persuaded .. but other Jews were jealous ..” (Acts 17.4-5)

The message of the gospel is inevitably divisive. It demands a verdict and requires a choice. And there’s never any middle ground. Blessing or curse. Life or death. You’re for Jesus or against Him: you’ll adore Him or deplore Him. What will you do with Jesus?

What was it about Paul’s ministry, do you think, which occasioned such starkly different reactions from people?

Why, and in what ways, does the preaching of the gospel make some who hear it ‘jealous’ (v.5)?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me by Your Spirit at the start of each new day to choose definitely that in all I say and do through the day I will seek to follow and honour You.*

2) Tuesday 4th July – troubling the world

Read [Acts 17.6-7](#)

“.. these men who have caused trouble all over the world ..” (Acts 17.6)

Rejection of Jesus becomes antagonism to His people: and it doesn’t much matter who they are! If Paul and Silas can’t be found, Jason and others will do. Like Elijah before us, the church has a ‘prophetic’ ministry which invariably ‘troubles’ the world.

Read [Matt.10.34](#): how do we avoid being unnecessarily divisive, or is the preaching of the gospel inevitably divisive?

In what ways in today’s society and culture is it evident that the church is “defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king..”?

Prayer: *Grant me the wisdom and grace of Your Holy Spirit, Lord, that I may be used to ‘trouble’ those who need to be challenged, while ministering to those in trouble.*

3) Wednesday 5th July – the King has come!

Read [Acts 17.1-9](#)

“.. the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil ..” (Acts 17.8)

The coming of Jesus invariably ‘makes waves’! Think of the consternation in the city of Jerusalem when news came through of His birth ([Mt.2.1-3](#)): the King has come, and whenever and wherever that news gets out, people are thrown into a tizzy!

The noted scholar N T Wright is said to have remarked – ‘Wherever St Paul went there was a riot. Wherever I go they serve tea!’ To what extent has the

church in our land lost that sort of 'cutting edge'? What should be done to recover it?

What has been your experience of people being thrown into turmoil by the proclamation of the gospel?

Jason was 'guilty' by association in the view of the crowd: have you associated yourself with a body of believers who faithfully and boldly preach the gospel?

In what ways are you able to stand with and support those who proclaim the gospel? And how may that mean 'in this world you will have trouble'?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'm not naturally bold and I don't like conflict at all! Help me to stand clearly with those who proclaim the gospel, and to help them shoulder the cost.

4) Thursday 6th July – avoid bad company

Read [2 Timothy 3.1-9](#)

".. lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God .." (2 Tim.3.5)

The 'last days' encompass the whole period between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the return of the Lord Jesus. The society described is not just humanity on a bad day, but rather the world in which we live. Believers are to be *in*, but not *of* the world.

What does Paul's exhortation to "*have nothing to do with such people*" involve for you?

Are you starting to slip into a mere *form* of godliness – and what steps might you take to avoid that?

Prayer: God, have mercy on me, a sinner! By nature I'm a lover of self and a lover of pleasure: and only by grace can I learn to love You. Stir in my heart such love for You!

5) Friday 7th July – keep on learning

Read [2 Timothy 3.10-17](#)

".. continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of .." (2 Tim.3.14)

Believers are at best still learners. We learn (like Timothy) from the example of other believers (vv.10-13), from the patient instruction of those who love us (v.14-15), and from the study of the Scriptures: and we're to *keep on* learning and growing in faith.

Why will all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus .. be persecuted?

As you've sought to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, what experience have you had of being 'persecuted'?

From what Paul writes to Timothy here what lessons are there for the church to learn in terms of equipping believers to cope with such persecution?

Who have been the people from whom you've learned most in your walk with the Lord? Give thanks for them today.

What examples can you give from your own experience of the Scriptures 'rebuking, correcting and training you in righteousness'?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for giving us Your Word. Thank You for those who translate it and for those who teach it. Teach me Your truth and transform my living thereby.

6) Saturday 8th July – telling the truth!

Read [2 Timothy 4.1-5](#)

".. be prepared in season and out of season .." (2 Tim.4.2)

There's no place for people-pleasers! We seek to please *God*, for it's to Him that we render account. That means being careful to pass on what God has chosen to say, rather than what others want to hear. And not just when it's safe or easy to do so!

What opportunities do you get as a believer to 'preach the word'?

What pressures does Paul recognise pastors will face and how does he suggest they handle such pressures?

Prayer: As You promised Moses, Lord, so I pray today for all who will preach Your Word tomorrow – 'Help them to speak and teach them what to say' [Ex.4.12]

7) Sunday 9th July – glory awaits you!

Read [2 Timothy 4.6-8](#)

".. there is in store for me the crown of righteousness .." (2 Tim.4.8)

The Lord's Day is a constant, weekly reminder that the Lord is the resurrecting God, and resurrection's coming. Jesus will appear. Judgment will happen. And glory awaits. Believers live towards that future with eager anticipation. Delight in that future today!

What three pictures does Paul use in v.7 to describe the life of discipleship?

In what respects do these pictures help, encourage and challenge you?

Believers are described here by Paul as those *"who have longed for His appearing"*: how well does that describe you?

How do we keep the right balance between seeking the Lord's glory and blessing in the here and now, while longing for the Lord's 'appearing' and the consummation of His purpose in the future?

Prayer: How I long for the day You have promised, Lord, when at last all things shall be made new! Keep me faithful to the end and give me daily grace to persevere.