

Opposite Outcomes

The 16th chapter of the Book of Acts records the Apostle Paul's first venture onto European soil. Following the vision of the man of Macedonia, Paul and his companions went into Macedonia and ended up in Philippi, the chief city in that part of Macedonia. The balance of the chapter unfolds the events that took place in Macedonia and ends with Paul and his companions leaving the city. That is where we will begin with chapter 17.

Acts 17:1 – 3

Thessalonica had a synagogue and Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with them from out of the scriptures. These would have been the Old Testament scriptures. The 4 Gospels and the Epistles had not yet been written at this point in the Book of Acts. But it is important to note that Paul was expounding the written Word: showing them the prophecies that told of Christ's suffering and being raised from the dead and that Jesus was that Christ, the Messiah.

Acts 17:4

Some of the synagogue members believed, but a great multitude of the Greeks and chief women believed. This verse shows us some of the demographic makeup of the Thessalonian church. It had a large component of those with a Gentile background.

Acts 17:5 – 8

The Jews who chose not to believe were envious of the multitude that decided to follow Paul. Their response was to get some "lewd fellows of the baser sort" and set the city on an uproar. They basically started rioting. It is amazing sometimes what the adversary will promote. But even in our day and time, we have seen small groups of people set a

city on an uproar. And because of this, the people of the city and the city leaders were troubled.

Acts 17:9 – 11

With all the city in an uproar, the believers got Paul and Silas out of town by night to the city of Berea. In Berea, they again went into the synagogue of the Jews to preach. This was Paul's "modus operandi" – the way he operated. He would start his preaching in the synagogue and see what developed. These Jews in Berea were more noble than the Jews in Thessalonica because, when they heard Paul preaching out of the scriptures (as was his manner), they would go to check the scriptures themselves to verify what Paul was saying. The implication of course is that the Jews in Thessalonica did not do this.

Acts 17:12

Because they made the effort to check the written Word, the scriptures, themselves, many of them believed. And along with these more noble Jews were honorable women who were Greeks and more than a few of the men.

Acts 17:13, 14

The Thessalonian Jews weren't satisfied with simply getting Paul and his companions out of Thessalonica, they followed them to Berea and began to stir up trouble there. The believers again got Paul out of town, though this time Silas and Timothy stayed behind. Paul goes to Athens, where he spent some time, before moving on to Corinth in chapter 18. He ends up staying in Corinth for a year and six months. It was probably during that time that he wrote the first of the Church Epistles, I and II Thessalonians.

So, we have just read the record of the “planting” of the church in Thessalonica and that will help us to appreciate the first “outcome” I want to share with you.

I Thessalonians 2:13

The Thessalonian church had a large component of people with a Gentile background. We saw that Paul had reasoned out of the Old Testament scriptures, but these Gentile background believers had no, or very little, exposure to the Hebrew Old Testament. Yet, they accepted what Paul had said, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God which effectually works when it is believed.

For instance, when we accept Jesus as lord and believe that God raised him from the dead (as the scriptures proclaim), then we are saved, born-again. The Word of God effectually works. When we accept that the new birth spirit comes with enablements in our lives (as the scriptures declare) and we begin to evidence those enablements, we begin to cultivate the fruit of the spirit. The Word of God effectually works. When we accept that the scripture says that we are justified and made righteous, then we begin to live without a sense of guilt or condemnation. The Word of God effectually works.

And though we are not going to read these sections, you can see from I Thessalonians that the Word of God worked effectually in the lives of the Thessalonians despite the tumult and uproar caused by the unbelieving ones.

But as I mentioned at the outset, the title of this teaching is “Opposite Outcomes”, so let’s take a few minutes to see something different.

Mark 7:1 – 5

The Jews, and the Pharisees in particular, had elevated these traditions of the elders to a point where these traditions were more important to them than the actual scriptures of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:6 – 12

They were religious and sincere. They talked good. But their hearts (which is where the issues of life come from) were far from God. They set aside the commandment of God in order to hold on to the traditions. And they did this with full knowledge. They were completely aware of what they were doing.

Mark 7:13

Making the Word of God of none effect is the exact opposite of having it effectually working in your life. They are “Opposite Outcomes”. And they are both still possible even in the year 2024! We won’t look at this verse but perhaps you can check it later, Hebrews 4:2, talking about the Israel of the Old Testament, the preached word did not profit them because it was not mixed with believing on the part of those that heard.

Two “Opposite Outcomes” – which is why our attitude towards the Word is so vitally important. Let us continue to make the Word of God our only rule for faith and practice and see it work effectually in our lives.