

“Pointing People to Jesus”

Acts 17:1-21

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I’ve got to tell you, this has been one amazing week in the life of our church. And if it’s okay, I just want as we begin this message to brag on YOU a little bit, Champion Forest. I’m really bragging on God and how he is using you, but what I’m going to report will set the message and where we are going today up perfectly.

The first is of our CMC. As many of you know on a weekly basis we help our community by feeding the hungry and meeting various needs of people that come in looking for help...and truly it’s a pleasure to serve our community in this way. Many of you drop donations and goods off to us, and we are thankful.

However, we are not just meeting physical needs. With every person that comes in, the gospel is shared and check this out – you might have seen this on our social media.

This bell (**SHOW PIC**) is hanging on the wall...it’s got Luke 15:10 inscribed on it – “In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of all the angels of God over one sinner that repents”.

It’s in English, Spanish and Vietnamese and whenever someone prays to receive Christ, this bell is rung so that it’s heard throughout the entire in the building and everyone can celebrate the person coming to know Jesus.

I can’t tell you how awesome it is getting reports on the bell be rung...and we get these reports on an almost daily basis. Yesterday, it was rung twice with two people praying to receive Christ. This is what it’s all about. Meeting needs, yes, but mostly pointing people to Jesus.

Then, last year, we gave our staff a small 4x6 picture frame and I challenged them to “fill the frame” with someone they are sharing Jesus with and discipling. This week, I get this picture and text from Louis Miori (**SHOW PIC**).

Here’s the text: “Remember my friend I was telling you about? I took him a cookie cake to celebrate his 80th birthday tomorrow. Ended up staying two hours and he prayed to receive Christ...I’m so pumped!” I responded: YES!!! Fill the frame!

How cool is that?! LOVE seeing our team serving people, loving people, and what’s our ultimate in goal in this – to point people to Jesus.

Then yesterday, we have Upward Basketball...hundreds of kids up here learning the game of basketball. I’m coaching the Lady Bears and let me just say, they had my blood pressure up at 8:00 in the morning yesterday...goodness!

In practice each week, a devotional is shared...I got this pic this week of Stephanie our children's minister sharing the gospel (**SHOW PIC**).

Yes, we want to learn the game of basketball and have fun doing it, but we use it as a way of sharing the gospel – because again, it's all about pointing people to Jesus.

Same with our Car Care ministry that our deacons lead out in, helping widows and single moms (**SHOW PIC**). Yes, we want to serve them in Christ name, but we also want them to KNOW the name of Christ. And yesterday, our guys serviced nearly 40 cars! Amazing!

We had our preteen winter retreat. You are seeing some b-roll of that right now (**SHOW B-ROLL**)...you see a bunch of kids wearing green shirts.

We had nearly 300 preteen kids here having fun, playing games, hanging with their friends – but here's the coolest thing – 15 kids prayed and asked Jesus into their hearts and we are following up with them and their parents this week.

I highlight ALL of this at the outset of this message today to celebrate what God is doing here, but also to underscore this important point...and this is important:

EVERYTHING we do here at Champion Forest...every program...every event...every ministry...I pray every conversation we have is in some way pointing people to Jesus.

Because Jesus is the only that can truly change a heart! Jesus is the only one that can truly change someone's life. Our church exists...we should be living our lives for the sole purpose of pointing people to Jesus.

And that's the title of the message today...it's also the BIG idea I'm trying to communicate. If you're taking notes, write it down...it's all about: **Pointing People to Jesus**

Now, last week we introduced you to Paul's Second Missionary. It takes place shortly after the Jerusalem Council, where if you remember, they settled once and for all as a Church that they were affirming the teaching...the doctrine that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

When someone came to know Jesus, they didn't have to be circumcised or follow the Jewish customs and regulations of the day – that didn't make them right with God, only faith in Christ did.

And so, as we saw last week, fresh off this council concluding, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and very soon after that, launch into their second missionary journey.

Now, again, just a little review to catch us up...let's look at our map (**SHOW MAP**). According to Acts 15:36, Paul and Barnabas decide to go check on the churches they planted during the first missionary journey. They get in a little dispute – the bible actually calls it a “sharp

disagreement” because if you remember John Mark left them back in Perga on the first journey and Paul hadn’t gotten over it I guess!

Barnabas the Encourager, takes up for Mark and they just decide it’ll prob be best to go separate ways. So, Barnabas and Mark cross under 249 and head to Cyprus (bad dad joke!) and Paul takes Silas with him or Silvanus (as you’ll see his name in other places in the New Testament) and they go through Syria and into Cilicia strengthening the churches.

Scott Riling did an excellent job last week in my stead tracing the first part of this second missionary journey and if you remember from last week’s message, Paul, connects with Timothy in Lystra (that’s an important relationship that we will see developed throughout the New Testament).

From there they go into the region of Phrygia and Galatia (keep in mind this is modern day Turkey, what the Bible calls Asia Minor). They had planned on going up into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit prevents them and they end up traveling through Mysia and Samothrace and end up at Troas – right here – and this is where Paul receives a vision of man from Macedonia (what is modern day Greece) saying, “come help us”.

And so, Paul and Silas hightail it from the port city of Troas and they set sell to Macedonia, landing in Neapolis, traveling to Philippi, this is where they landed in jail, are miraculously delivered...and we pick up on their journey beginning in:

Acts 17:1 – “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Now, just an interesting “did you know” here...when they traveled to these places, they traveled on what was known as the “Egnation way”. It was like I-45 if you will...it was a major highway that was 500 miles long and stretched from the Adriatic Sea all the way across Macedonia.

I highlight just to let you know God is in the details. This road was originally built just for the Roman military to be able to get from place to place and it obviously helped make it easier for goods and services to be transported throughout Macedonia.

But realized here, God like he always does was working behind the scenes and he made sure that this road that was built, was built for something else and that was the future advance of the gospel.

Who knows how God is working behind the scenes...who knows how God is setting things up...working under the surface...preparing for something that may happen in years to come. What a God we serve!

It reminds me of that quote by **John Piper** – “**God is always doing 10,000 things in your life and you may be aware of three of them.**”

Acts 17:2-3 – “**And Paul went in** (into the synagogue), **as was his custom** (remember, this was how he rolled...this strategy worked on the first missionary journey and he was using it again here. The idea is let’s go to the synagogue where Jewish people worshipped...they would be familiar with the Law, Old Testament history, the prophecies of the Messiah, and let’s start sharing Jesus with them first – and the Bible says), **and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures** (underline that phrase in your bible as well as this next phrase, we’ll come back to this at the end of our time together – Paul KNEW the scripture), ³ **explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer** (this was the sticking point...still is to this day. How is the Messiah to suffer – Jewish people have a hard time reconciling these things and I guarantee you Paul was using passages like Is. 53. Ps. 22 – passages that show the suffering nature of Christ to prove he’s the Messiah – it’s necessary for Christ to suffer -) **and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”**”

Now, just something I want to extract right here, and I want you to think about. Everywhere Paul has gone just about, has led to Paul being arrested, beaten, stoned or at a minimum run out of town.

And think about what he’s doing! He has no ulterior motive. All he is trying to do is good for people...he’s trying to share with them the message that heaven has come to earth. He’s sharing with them that God loves them and that Jesus is the one who God has sent to forgive sin and save them.

And EVERYWHERE he does this nearly, it doesn’t end well. I mean, he’s just been in the previous chapter...the previous place he was (Acts 16:22-23) “beaten with rods” and thrown in jail.”

I bring this up to say, if that was me, I’d be a little jaded by now, I think. I’d be a little suspicious of people and little frustrated with God.

? – Anyone ever been there before? You’re trying to do the right thing and it just blows up in your face?

- You’re trying to love your ex and be patient and do the right thing but your attempts get you nowhere...
- You’re trying to serve your boss or employer, but they aren’t honorable, don’t appreciate it and it actually backfires instead of helps...
- You’re living for Jesus...you’re being faithful to Jesus. showing integrity, but it costs you. You don’t get the promotion...you don’t win the election.

There’s little that is MORE frustrating than trying to do the right thing and not just that it doesn’t work out on your behalf, but it actually hurts or wounds you...costs you! This is where Paul is!

And it’s just amazing to me that he keeps going and keeps doing his thing! It’s a lesson in perseverance. It’s a lesson in endurance!

This isn't the major point of the sermon today, but we can learn from Paul in this.

- Let's not give up so easily...
- Let's not get too bent out of shape when reality doesn't line up with our expectation...
- Let's stay faithful to Jesus when it's hard...when it's difficult...when things aren't working out.
- Let's stay focused on Christ even when it "appears" that God has forgotten us, neglected us or even abandoned us.

Paul very easily could have said, "Forget this! I'm not doing it anymore!" Talk about doing the right things and it blowing up in your face! Paul was evangelizing, making disciples, planting churches – he was doing ALL the right things and at the same time was being beaten, thrown in jail and getting ran out of town and yet he stayed faithful. He kept with the game-plan.

Stay faithful...Endure in hardship! Persevere in tough times, even when it's not working out so well for you. How could Paul do this?

It's because his focus was NOT on himself, but the glory of Christ...the advancement of Christ! He knew that cause was worth it and secondly, listen to this: People were worth it!

For Paul, the mission was bigger than him. It wasn't about him. It was about Jesus and pointing others to Jesus. And in the end, that's all that matters. This was reinforced for me yet again this week.

Illus. Stephanie Williford funeral (tell story) – she lived for Jesus and pointing others to Jesus...this is what drove Paul and I pray it's what drives me and you.

Acts 17:4-6– “And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...”

Would that be said of us! Champion Forest...they are turning Spring, Klein, Tomball, Jersey Village upside down for Jesus. Teenager, what about your school? What about your team? Turning the world upside down!

Now, keep in mind this is taking place around 49-50 AD. We're talking less than 20 years since Jesus has resurrected and ascended and they are claiming the followers of Jesus have already

turned the world upside down. They were actually turning it right side up, but you get the picture.

Less than 20 years and look at the difference they were making! It's convicting, isn't it? Not many are speaking about the church like this today! Truthfully:

- I hear more about scandals than I do community transformation.
- I see more division – everyone doing their own thing, working on causes only important to them instead of a pulling together for the common cause of Christ.
- I see more compromise...more luke-warmness than I do a hot-hearted pursuit of Christ and his name being glorified in our world.

The fact is, we're not turning the world upside down because we're not looking that different than the world! Shame on us for being more in love with the world than we are Jesus at times...for embracing the world and it's ethos instead of separating ourselves from it! I don't know...I do know I'd like to get back to this though...people saying about us, "Those group of Jesus followers, they are turning the world upside down."

In order for this to happen though, it starts with me...it starts with you saying, "I'm going to live for the glory of Christ...I'm going to live to point others to him!"

You keep reading this passage and ultimately, these believers are forced to give money in exchange for Jason's life AND evidently a deal was cut to make Paul and Silas get out of town because look at what happens next:

Acts 17:10-11 – “The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

Now, before we unpack this section of scripture, I just want to note how the Church was working together to advance the cause of Christ. It's pretty cool when you begin to read Paul's letters in the New Testament...many of them are letter to these churches he planted. Churches in Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae/or letters written to people about these churches (Timothy and Titus)

Do you remember where Paul was before Thessalonica? Philippi! And talking about the Church helping one another. Listen to what he wrote to the Philippian believers.

Phil. 4:15-16 – “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”

The Church was working together. Listen, if we are going to point people the maximum amount of people to Jesus as we can, we're going to have to work together.

illus. CF Connect and missions – In March we’re hosting another CF Connect gathering. Have about 50-60 pastors coming in, many are church plants. Why do we bring them in? To resource, bless and encourage. We want to be like the church in Philippi was to the church in Thessalonica. It’s why your giving to ministries like CF Connect and our missions offering is so important. You help us do this!

Paul would write to the Thessalonians. **1 Thess. 1:2-10** – “**We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”**

This church that Paul and Silas had to leave thrived in many ways...so much so that their faith and love and steadfastness became an example to all the other churches throughout Greece.

Who gets the credit for this? Well, God does FOR SURE, but Paul and Silas, they might have left Thessalonica thinking, “did anything good come from our time there?”

And just look what happened! The Philippian church, they had no idea how the help given to Paul helped this church in Thessalonica move forward! Who knows how many people turned from idols to God because of the prayers and financial gifts given of this church.

We’re talking about pointing people to Jesus today. Yes, you can do this and should do this through your personal witness, but you can also point people to Jesus through your prayers and through your giving!

I can’t stress this enough! We’re working really hard to make available to you through our website, our Sunday morning services and we have more plans in the future to help inform and educate you on:

- the churches we are partnering with...
- the missions organizations we help support - that your giving helps to finance.

We want you to **KNOW** who you are giving to so that you can follow them, pray for them. When you give you are pointing people to Jesus.

illus. FORWARD offering – The whole idea behind the FORWARD offering is to point people to Jesus. Yes, we're updating parts of our building, but that's the weeds - the big picture is we want people here on our campus and we want them to enjoy themselves while here so that ultimately, we can point people to Jesus. It's ALL about pointing people to Jesus.

Paul and Silas get here to Berea (**SHOW MAP**). It's about 45-50 miles from Thessalonica. And Berea, is off the beaten path...it's not on the Via Egnatia. And notice again what the Bible says about the Jewish people of Berea.

Acts 17:11 – “**Now these Jews were more noble** (some bibles translate this word as “fair-minded” or open-minded. They were thoughtful) **than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.**”

Illus. Berean Baptist Church – if you grew up in the country, you would sometimes see a Berean Baptist Church. I think I counted six online here in Houston. Used to describe the Berean believers.

It's a good lesson for us to long to be like the Bereans. To be open-minded when we read God's Word. To “examine” the scripture. The word picture here is of a judicial investigation. Like a lawyer or detective, we ought to take God's word and go through it like were looking for evidence – this is what our devotional life should look like!

Wed do this, we'll know the word better and the knowing the word better helps us point people to Jesus in a more effective way!

Here, we see the key to knowing the Word...the Bible says these Bereans were examining the scripture DAILY.

Let me give you very quickly, the 50,000 ft level of how you can examine God's word. I don't know where I first saw this illustration, but it's stuck with me a long time.

Illus. HAND (Meditate, Memorize, Study, Read, Hear) Do this every day!

This is how we grasp God's Word! This is how we get it into our hearts and are able to point others to Jesus with it, because let me tell you. The power is not in what we say, it's in the Word of God!

Heb. 4:12 – “**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**”

2 Tim. 3:15-16 – “**and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**”

There is power in the word of God...it's what transforms lives. It will transform your marriage. It will transform the way we think. It will transform our priorities!

I'm telling you, there's NOTHING like the transforming power of the word of God. So, let's be like the Bereans and give ourselves to the study of scripture daily.

Paul and Silas were hanging with the Bereans, but it wasn't long before the Jews from Thessalonica that had stirred up trouble for them, found them in Berea and started stirring up trouble for them there...and yet God uses that trouble to get Paul out of town and on his way to Athens.

Now, we're going to look at Paul's ministry in Athens in great detail next week...you're not going to want to miss the next two weeks. I promise you.

Paul's sermon in Athens – given from a place called Mars Hill is next week and then we have a special treat for you the following week...I'll tell you more about that later – you're NOT going to want to miss it though.

Athens is interesting not simply because of its beauty...it's filled with temples to gods of every kind. One writer wrote that it was easier to find a god in Athens than it was a man. It was the seat of intellectualism...world philosophy and religion was intricately woven into the history of the city...and Paul is here by himself!

Silas and Timothy were still in Berea. And the Bible says:

Acts 17:16-20 – “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned (underline it!) in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. (Paul went where the people were because people mattered to God and he wanted to point people to Jesus) ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. (I'll talk more about this next week, but the Epicureans and Stoics were materialists...small differences in what they believed. Epicureans were more of the mindset of enjoying life, if it feels good, do it – while the Stoics were more about enduring life. You didn't live off feelings, you lived off reason) And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (Easter is 8 weeks away – who are you bringing)? ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”

Now, you're going to have to come back next week to hear Paul's response! But before we call it a day, I want to leave you with a challenge if you will as it relates to pointing people to Jesus.

We saw this ALL through Acts 17 – Paul's usage of Scripture. In:

- (v. 2) – he reasoned with them from the Scriptures...
- (v. 11) – we read that the Bereans examined the Scriptures daily..."
- (v. 16) Paul is reasoning in the synagogue using the scripture as well as in the marketplace in the city...

He was ALWAYS using the scripture to point people to Jesus. And so here is the challenge:

1. Seek to KNOW the scripture like Paul.

If we're going to reason with people from the scripture, we've got to know the scripture. There are so many blessings from knowing, loving and holding tight to God's word – just read Psalm 119.

The word of God is sweeter than honey, better than silver or gold...it guards us...it guides us...so, let's give our lives to it!

Illus. LIFE Groups

2. Seek to EXAMINE the scripture like the Bereans

They studied it daily...remember the hand illustration. Let's show it again (**SHOW HAND IMAGE**).

This is important...because listen: If we know the scripture like Paul and examine the scripture like the Bereans, then watch this: We will be able to debate and reason with people like the Athenians – i.e. the world.

We live in an Athenian world...people following their own little gods, doing their own little thing. The MOST effective way we can point them to Jesus is to be able to talk with them about the truth of God's Word and WHY it's a greater truth and more objective truth than anything they are ascribing to.

1 Peter 3:15 – “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

And so, to conclude the message, I highlight: **If we know the scripture like Paul and if we examine the scripture like the Bereans, then we will be able in an effective way to point people to Jesus.**

It's all about pointing people to Jesus.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.