

Who Gets our Allegiance?

Acts 16:11-17:9

July 6, 2025

Prayer

As we continue our walk through the Book of Acts I am struck by the change we see in the lives of every-day people.

Peter, who was known for stumbling over his words, preaches a sermon so effectively that 3,000 come to faith. The timid step out in courage. Common folk challenge the elite. Generosity becomes standard as people live in community with glad and sincere hearts.

The one who persecuted the church now proclaims Jesus as Christ. Those who were long considered to be rejected outsiders are welcomed into fellowship. Even though people are persecuted, jailed, beaten and executed for their belief in Jesus, more come to faith.

The changes brought by this new Jewish sect are so great that Paul and Silas are accused of causing trouble all over the world. Or as some translations put it, they were accused of "turning the world upside down."

Over the last several months we've covered many of these events. Yet sometimes it is good to step back a bit and ask, "What's underneath it all?" We know the Holy Spirit empowers the change, but what prompts it?

Today's text has three powerful stories of lives changed and cities disrupted because of the gospel. While it would be fun to dig into the details of each, we will look at the reason behind the stories. What is this gospel that disrupts lives and cultures and what does it mean to believe in Jesus?

Two of the stories take place in Philippi and one in Thessalonica. In Philippi we find the conversion of Lydia and the Jailer, with the Jailer's conversion resulting from his witnessing how Paul and Silas responded to being beaten and imprisoned for their faith.

In Thessalonica we find a summary of Paul's ministry pattern, his teaching, and an example of the disruption his teaching caused. To better understand what's going on under the surface, I think it might help us to start in Thessalonica and get a handle on what Paul taught. Then we can cycle back to Lydia and the Jailer to see how faith in Jesus plays out in the lives of those who believe. Acts 17:1-4

Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. ³ He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." ⁴ Some of the Jews

who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.

Paul's typical pattern was to use synagogue gatherings to share the good news of Jesus as Messiah and then expand his audience from there. But three weeks was all the chance he was going to get in Thessalonica.

They soon faced strong and organized opposition. When the mob could not find Paul or Silas, they dragged Jason and other new Christians before the City Council where they pleaded this case against them. Acts 17:6:

"Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they shouted, "and now they are here disturbing our city, too. ⁷ And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus." ⁸ The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports.

We know that from a Jewish perspective the issue was bigger than this. Jesus didn't just claim to be king, He claimed to be God, which would be blasphemy if it wasn't true. There were also concern for how loosely this new sect seemed to handle Jewish religious requirements and the infectious speed with which it was spreading.

From the Jewish perspective there was a lot more fuel for their fire than just Jesus' claim to be a king over Caesar, but this was the charge that got the most traction with the Roman culture and so they led with that. And there was a good reason to do so.

Both Philippi and Thessalonica were important Roman cities. Philippi was a Roman colony, effectively a "mini-Rome." Citizens of Philippi were retired soldiers and others deeply loyal to Rome and Caesar. They had a standard to uphold.

Thessalonica was the capital city for the province of Macedonia. Not only was it a major port city but it was also strategically located along the Via Egnatia, a key Roman road. If it was ever to become a Roman Colony, it would need to do everything by the book.ⁱ It, too, was filled with people staunchly loyal to Roman law and to Caesar.

The idea of Jesus being proclaimed as Messiah does not strike us as too revolutionary, but the crowd's response to those charges provides insight into what the people of that day and region thought about it.

To say Jesus is Messiah is to say Jesus is a king and that was enough to throw the city council and the entire town into turmoil. It makes sense when you think about how part of their message was to come into town and say, "I have good news for you! There is another king who has taken over and it isn't Caesar! Jesus is a loving King who died for you."

The good news of Jesus Christ has many elements. We know that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (4:25). He then ascended

into the Father's presence and was seated in authority (Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3). That's why Jesus could say to His disciples, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18-20).

Jesus has ultimate authority over both the spiritual and the physical realm. He is the King whose arrival established a new kingdom—the Kingdom of God. Though already present, it is not yet fully consummated. Like a mustard seed, it starts small but will one day grow into fullness and bring all creation under its rule. It is a kingdom of justice, mercy, righteousness and love.

This is truly good news, and people were putting their faith in Jesus as the Christ in growing numbers.

The phrase, "Jesus Christ is Lord" and the image of a fish are two of the earliest professions of what the church believed. Why the fish? The Greek word for fish is Ichthus and this word becomes an acronym.ⁱⁱ

ΙΧΘΥΣ (or ΙΧΘΥC): Ἰησοῦς. Χριστός. Θεοῦ. Υἱός. Σωτήρ
Jesus. Christ. God's. Son. Savior.

Christ is not Jesus' last name; it is an honored title given to God's anointed Messiah, the royal king. Lord is not a name suffix indicating a degree He has earned or an honor he received. It identifies Jesus with God's divine name in the Old Testament, the very Father Jesus came to reveal.

To say Jesus Christ is Lord is to say that Jesus is our authority, and we choose to align ourselves with His teaching and His way. But it is more than that too. The Old Testament likened a king to a shepherd because He was expected to care for, protect and supply his flock what they needed for safety and life. Saying Jesus is Lord also says that we know He is a benevolent, gracious, forgiving ruler and so we joyfully trust Him to provide what we need for this life.

Jesus Christ is Lord. When properly understood, this is the kind of statement that can turn the world upside down.

We've seen what happened in Thessalonica. Let's go back to Philippi and see how two people responded in faith and how that faith plays out in our lives.

After hearing Paul teach, a successful businesswoman named Lydia put her faith in Jesus. After she and her household were baptized, she invited Paul, Silas, Luke and the others to stay in her home (which, as we've seen with Jason, was a courageous thing to do).

After witnessing their response to a terrible beating, unjust imprisonment, and their refusal to escape when they had the chance (if they had left the Jailer would have been executed for dereliction of duty), the Philippian jailer fell before Paul and Silas and politely asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

He was told to “believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” Both Lydia and the Jailer put their faith in Jesus. They believed in Jesus. But what does it mean to believe?

The Greek word we translate believe or faith is *pistis*. While it covers a range of meanings, its meaning begins not with having faith *in* something but about the quality another person possesses that leads us to have faith or trust in that person.

Said another way, faith or believing begins with someone other than me. It is not about my faith or the amount of my faith. It is about the faithfulness of someone else that evokes my trust in that person. My faith and trust in that person is then expressed in what I say and what I do. It is expressed through commitment or allegiance to the person in whom I have placed faith.

You can begin to see how this relates to believing in Jesus.

Jesus has expressed His deep love for us and then displayed it by sacrificing His life in our place. His love prompts Him to provide all we need and to shower blessing onto our lives. His faithfulness evokes in us a response of faith that He has done what He said He would do and that He will do what He has said He will do.

So we put our faith, our trust, in Jesus. Yet, for faith to be a saving faith in Jesus, it must be more than just words. The phrase “I believe in Jesus Christ the Lord” is empty unless it is accompanied by actions that align our lives with what He taught and did.ⁱⁱⁱ

An interesting thing about the Greek word *pistis* is that, when it is applied to royalty (related to king, kingdom or Christ), *pistis* is a word that describes a subject’s loyal devotion to a king. It combines the idea of mental agreement with emotional allegiance, professed loyalty and lived-out obedience. In other words, our head, heart, tongue and actions are His.

No wonder the town was in turmoil. To gather and rapidly grow a group of people who say that they are loyal to another king and live under the rules of a different kingdom would send shockwaves through any political or religious system. They turned the world upside down.

Let’s take it a little deeper by looking at Hebrews 11:1.

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Faith is confidence in what we hope for. Biblical hope is not like the kind of hope we are used to. It is not wishful thinking—“Gee, I really hope the Cubs win the World Series this year. They are currently on top of their division. It is possible so I hope it’ll happen.”

No, biblical hope is grounded in the certainty of God’s promises. Resting on a firm trust in God’s goodness, faithfulness and loyal-love, biblical hope is a confident expectation and assurance that God will fulfill what He has promised. In fact, our confidence is so great that we act on these truths even though they are not yet seen.

The rest of Hebrews 11 shows that those with faith are willing to act decisively within our physical world because they have become convinced of an unseen more genuine reality that is grounded in the promise God.

This is why Paul was able to say to the Corinthian church,

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18)

In Colossians 3 we read, "For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory."

Faith is the willingness to act on a hidden but true reality. Faith in Jesus is not a leap into the dark. It is a reasonable, action-oriented response to what God has revealed. The response is anchored to the conviction that God's goodness and promises are more certain, more real, than the things we currently see or experience around us.

For the most part we live out our faith in the common, daily events of life. But there are times when God calls us to express our confident hope in those hidden realities in very specific and difficult circumstances.

We exercise the confident hope we have as we live through the horrible diagnosis, choose to embrace the caregiving role, stand next to another grave, or grieve the decline of our abilities as we age. We exercise the hope we have when we represent a child in court, serving as a CASA volunteer, help love a child through the foster care system, experience the pain of natural disasters or engage the next troubling issue we may face.

While being alert to all that goes on around us and with our feet firmly planted in the reality of life in a fallen, sin-sick world, we fix our hope not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

What was it that Lydia believed? What did the Jailer and his family put their faith in? What prompted Paul and Silas to do what they did? They all became convinced from Scripture, the testimony of others, and their own experience that Jesus is God's promised king who has brought His kingdom into the world and now invites anyone from any nation, tribe or social standing to enter that kingdom and receive the privileges and benefits that come with it.

More than this, they also believed that Jesus would redeem and restore not just them, but all creation as well. By giving their allegiance to Jesus, Jesus gave them the opportunity to join with Him in his work of redeeming creation and spreading His kingdom. What an amazingly high calling and purpose to life!

And so we join them, believing that Jesus is both Christ and Lord. That

- Jesus was delivered over to death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins
- He was raised to life for our justification
- He ascended to the Father's presence where He is enthroned as king over all creation
- His kingdom is now growing as people place their faith in Him and align their lives with His way
- He will come again to establish His rule over all creation and so finish the work He started.

Salvation in Christ begins with the faithfulness of God which prompts our faith in Jesus and faith in Jesus is something that transforms the way we think and live.

The gospel is not primarily about our personal trust in Jesus, what we are becoming or what we are doing for others; it is not primarily about us. It is about what God has done and is doing in and through Jesus the King.

On this weekend when we celebrate our nation's independence from an earthly king, we also celebrate our dependence on our heavenly King. The one who loves us, cares for us, provides for us and walks with us through all experiences of life is the one who is worthy of our trust and allegiance. In Him we place our faith.

And so we close with three questions that are worthy pondering today.

1. Who do you say Jesus is? If you say He is Christ and Lord, are those just words or does that truth touch your life?
2. Whose authority do you live under? Is it your own? A political platform? A podcaster?
3. To whom have you given your allegiance?

Please pray with me.

Jesus, we believe you are both Christ and Lord. We choose this day to surrender our control and put you on the throne. We acknowledge that you have all authority in both the spiritual and physical realms and we desire that every element of our lives would bow to your loving, gracious, merciful way.

Help us live with eyes open to the struggle around us and our hope fixed on the promises you have given to us. Help us to live in a way that reveals what is hidden and gives hope to others.

You are King over our lives, over our families, over our world and over all creation. You allow us into your presence and are seated among us even now. Let every heart acknowledge and receive what is currently hidden, but absolutely true.

ⁱ Thessalonica became a Roman Colony in 250

ⁱⁱ **I (Iota):** Ἰησοῦς (Iēsous) - Jesus.
X (Chi): Χριστός (Christos) - Christ.
Θ (Theta): Θεοῦ (Theou) - of God.
Υ (Upsilon): Υἱός (Huios) - Son.
Σ (Sigma): Σωτήρ (Sōtēr) - Savior.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 5:7. The demons expressed their belief in Jesus as Lord but that alone is not enough to bring salvation.