



## **Ekklesia: Welcomes and Multiplies**

**June 28, 2015**

### 3 Main Points:

- 1.) Paul's "Why?" (The Resurrection)
- 2.) 3 Responses to his message (Rejection, Delay, Acceptance)
- 3.) "How" do we develop disciples & have an outward focus?

Acts 17:32-34

*When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." <sup>33</sup> At that, Paul left the Council. <sup>34</sup> A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

In his book, Start With WHY: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action, Simon Sinek says the foremost question to life and leadership is **Why?** That's a very relevant question for this text.

Paul is on a Missionary Journey. Rather than ask the questions ("Where did he go?" and "What did he say?") which are good and interesting and should be asked, there's another question which is at the heart of everything he did. **WHY** would he do this? Why would he endure all his suffering and affliction?

This is an amazing story. Paul was an amazing man. We talk about Columbus or Magellan sailing, or Lewis & Clark's trek, or even Neil Armstrong being the 1<sup>st</sup> man on the moon. Tremendous courage. Paul was the first to go into these places.

As soon as he leaves Athens he goes south to Corinth. He leads a number of people to Christ there and ends up staying for a year and a

half. He later writes several letters to them, two of which are in our New Testament (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians).

He explained to them in **2 Cor (11:23-29) some of his experiences:** *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

**Why** did Paul go to such extraordinary lengths to share the gospel?

There's a primary reason – he encountered the resurrected Jesus. So, naturally when an opportunity to speak about his faith he explains “Why” he believes – and his message centers upon the resurrection of Jesus.

**1 Cor 15:14-19** *If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

The resurrection was Paul's core reason for everything. He was 100% convinced that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead...and he had a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ.

When Paul touched upon the topic of the resurrection of Jesus and judgment, it was too much for these Athenian philosophers. They spent their days discussing the latest in philosophical thought. It reminds me of John Wesley's quote: *"An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."*

We see 3 responses to the message of the resurrection:

1.) **Rejection**. When he speaks of the resurrection, some in his audience sneered. Sneering = to mock, insult, deride or hold in contempt. Paul knew about this because he had sneering about Christ and Christianity, too. For a **Jew**, in addition to the lack of belief in the resurrection, an additional stumbling block would've been "How could a Messiah have been crucified" (it violates Deuteronomy 21:23: *anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.*) It's interesting how Paul puts it: *Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* For these **Gentiles** it wasn't so much a personal thing (other than thought he was a fool) but they mocked him for saying that a dead man could come back to life.

2.) **Delay**. This isn't always bad. In fact, Jesus told us to "count the cost." Sometimes people need facts and time to sift through the message and to ponder it before they can make a commitment. But often, the delay is simply one of avoidance. We see this happening later with Paul when he goes to speak to King Agrippa in Caesarea. Acts 26:28-29 *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long — I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."*

Christianity needs some time to examine because the call of Jesus isn't for a single transaction, it's for life-long loyalty. The danger is that some will allow their delay to last a lifetime. At some point, not to decide is to decide. Abe Lincoln's question was: "4 frogs are sitting on a log. 3 decide to jump. How many do you have left? 4. Because deciding to jump is not the same thing as jumping."

3.) **Acceptance.** <sup>34</sup> *A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

It's wonderful to read in Acts how the Gospel cuts across a variety of socio-economic levels. On this trip, Paul has converts from every different place and station. In Philippi, there is a rich woman, Lydia; a woman @ the bottom of the food chain – a slave girl exploited by cruel masters; a middle class family man who was a Philippian jailor. In Berea, there were converts who were deeply devoted to the study of scripture. In Corinth he finds a church with a wide variety of people.

For us, we are asked the same thing: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is resurrected from the dead? It's either a "Yes" or a "No" answer. If it's a "No" then we're on our own. Maybe science can figure out a way for us to live forever. Some are hoping that will be the case. Others hope that by their good deeds, in comparison with others, that they'll get a passing grade. Others, like John Lennon sang, just "Imagine" that there's no heaven/hell and that this world is as good as it gets. Jesus brought an entirely new option to the table.

If we accept Paul's message about the resurrection, then it's a major life changer. **"How can we communicate this message to others? What are we going to do about it?"**

Their challenges are our challenges, too. How do we Make Disciples/leaders – and how do we have an outward, not an inward focus?

This isn't just a "Paul" show. The gospel can't just spread by apostles, missionaries, evangelists, pastors and teachers. EVERY believer must engage in its spread. It's such a wonderful, hope-filled message! And we believe it is absolutely true! Having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is really the key to life.

Let me ask 3 questions:

Who is your **Apostle Paul**? Who brought the gospel and mentored you?

Who is your **Dionysius and your Damaris**? Who are **you** mentoring and leading to Christ?

The Gospel “just for me” or “just for us” is a false gospel. The reason people get bored with Christianity is because they stop with Question #1 – they just want to reminisce about a past experience. If it’s not present-tense and future oriented, we lose the power of the Gospel.

Where’s your **Areopagus**? This was the place where Paul met unbelievers. Are you open to new relationships? Get outside your comfort zone bubble. Some of you serve on boards, volunteer in schools. I went on the Hillcrest South Hospital Board of Trustees. I’ve learned some things. I’ve met some new people. When I arrived at my very 1<sup>st</sup> board meeting there, I ran into “Mr. Volunteer” @ Hillcrest South – Gary Beatie, an Asburian. What a great **influence**! He could be camped out in retirement, but instead, he’s engaged and is trying to impact others in a positive way. Yesterday, I was talking with one of our pastors, Dick Read, who was conducting a wedding last night. He told me about how effective the “Couple to Couple” mentoring couple had been. Vacation Bible School is a great illustration of this, too. We can’t make decisions for anyone else, but we can try to influence people for Christ!

If we truly believe the “Why?” we are Christians = the resurrection, then we will figure out “How we’re going to make disciples” and “What that’s going to look like.”