

Sermon: Brief Stops; Eternal Impact

Text: Acts 17:1-15

Introduction:

I can't imagine that any of us deal well with rejection. It's just no fun whatsoever to be told "no!". I think about how hard it must be for telemarketers to hear "no" after "no", hour after hour, day after day [not that I appreciate being "pestered" by these phone calls—I'm just trying to put myself in the shoes of the underpaid person on the other end of the line who hears a thousand rejections a day]. According to scientific studies, rejection piggy-backs on physical pain pathways in the brain. Studies show that the same areas of the brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain. This is why rejection literally "hurts" so much. Worse than that, fear of rejection—the kind of fear that causes someone to pull away from others—can lead to chronic feelings of loneliness and depression.

However, the Lord can truly help us in this area of our lives. God is able to give us strength, courage, and hope to overcome rejection and discouragement. In fact, the Lord reminds us over and over again in Scripture that, as His children, we ought to EXPECT to endure rejection. Since the world rejected Jesus, disciples of Jesus need to prepare themselves for this same kind of rejection and resistance (Matt. 5:10-11; 1 Peter 4:1).

As we continue along with the Apostle Paul on his Second Missionary Journey, we follow him and his team as they are expelled from the Macedonian city of Philippi. (Acts 16:38-40) We saw how a mob was stirred up against them—and Paul & Silas were stripped, beaten, flogged and imprisoned. Following an earthquake (which led to the conversion of the jailer & his family), Paul, Silas and Timothy were escorted out of the city.

This is now the sixth time, since his conversion, that Paul has been forced by persecution to leave an area. Several of these times, he left with bruises, cuts, and most certainly injuries.

- How would you respond if this happened to you?
- Go back and read what Jesus tells Ananias to tell Paul in Acts 9:16, soon after Paul was blinded by Jesus on the Damascus Road. Do you think that what Jesus told Paul brought him encouragement in the midst of all of this rejection?

Take a few moments right now to think back over your own life. I know that "rejection" isn't an easy topic, but there's no question—as we've been saying—that rejection can truly shape our lives in significant (and sometimes devastating) ways.

- Discuss some situations in your life when you have felt rejected.
 - Was the person (or persons) who was rejecting you trying to do so on purpose? If so—why do you think they were acting that way?
 - Were you rejected because of something you had done, or a way in which you behaved? Or did it have nothing to do with you?
 - Did your faith play a part in the rejection? Were you "persecuted because of Christ"?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 17:1-9**
 - What cities did Paul and Silas pass through on their way to Thessalonica (17:1)? Why do you think they kept going and didn't stop?
 - What did Paul do when he arrived at Thessalonica (17:2)?
 - On what did Paul base his reasoning in the synagogue in Thessalonica (v. 2)?
 - What did Paul "open" to them (v. 3)?
 - What did Paul prove to them?
 - Why was Paul's approach important? Was this a good way to share Jesus with the Jews? Why or why not?
 - How does Paul's argument from Scripture in this passage parallel what he later says in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?
 - How many Sabbath days did Paul and Silas reason with the people at Thessalonica? Does this mean that they were ONLY in the city for 3 weeks—or is it possible that they were there for a period of time prior to evangelizing in the synagogue? (see 1 Thess. 1:3-10; 2:7-9; Philippians 4:16)
 - What was the reaction of those who heard their message (v. 4)?
 - How did the Jews react (v. 5)?
 - Of what did they accuse Paul and Silas? What charge was leveled against them (vv. 6-7)?
 - When they could not find Paul and Silas, what happened (vv. 6-9)?

- Read **Acts 17:10-15**
 - What was it that made the Bereans "more noble" than the Thessalonians (17:10-12)?
 - What did the Bereans do every day that is a good model for us today (v.11)?
 - The Bereans "received the message with great eagerness." Could the same be said about you? Why or why not?
 - What did the Jews of Thessalonica do when they heard the Word was preached in Berea (v. 13)?
 - What did Paul's friends have him do (v. 14)?
 - Why did Silas and Timothy stay at Berea?
 - Thinking about your own life—when you listen to a speaker, which of the following describes you best:
 - I listen too easily, accepting all that is said without question.
 - I listen too critically, never really accepting much that is said.
 - I listen with balance, referring to the Bible and relying on prayer to make sure what I've heard is true.
 - Is it okay to question what you hear from teachers or preachers? What is the best way to evaluate what you hear?

Application:

The people of Berea serve as an excellent model for us. Make a point to make the study & application of Scripture a priority in your life—careful to listen to God's Word and apply it.