Acts 17:2-3 2As was his custom, Paul went to the Jews, and on three Sabbath days he led them in a discussion from the Scriptures, 3explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. He also said, “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”

As we have been going through the historical book of Acts, if you are like me, you marvel at the way the Christian church grew and expanded. Now the question that I find so wonderfully interesting in all of this is this one: “Why? Why did the Christian church grow and expand in the way that it did?”

It’s not like there was a shortage of “gods.” In the Roman religious structure, if you could call it that, there were some 67 separate God’s found in their main religious building, the Parthenon. The main gods were Juno, Jupiter and Minerva. After that there were another 12, somewhat underling gods and then after that there were the remaining 52 gods, who pretty well filled in every gap and nuance that you might need in a god. And rules. More rules and rituals than you could possibly imagine. What I love most about these gods is that there wasn’t a main book or bible of who and what. That knowledge was always passed down among those who were priests and priestesses and it has been shown that through the course of the ages what the god was or wasn’t could be amended to suit the needs and desires of the times. Just think about that. The who, what and where’s of your gods could be changed because the priests said so or because that’s what you wanted.

So, again, very seriously, how is it that a changeable, suit your needs, what do you want kind of religion, is a religion that anyone could take seriously? There were gods that covered just about anything and everything you might think you wanted or needed and actually a lot of other things that were demanded and asked even though they were not what you wanted or needed. Oh and there is this. I don’t know how you as a Roman take seriously your gods when clearly your gods were copied, amended and altered from the Greek gods? It all seems a bit shady to me, this religious world, this idea of a changeable, alterable religious world? And that is pretty much what is still found in the world today.

So back to my question. Why would anyone want to follow Jesus and believe in him when there were more than enough gods and beliefs to go around in the world?

I believe that the text before us answers that question quite clearly. Let’s look at our text under the theme: **JESUS IS THE CHRIST.**

Our text is actually a part of the history of the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. This text speaks to us about the second missionary journey of Paul. Paul had been appointed by the Lord to be the missionary to the Gentiles of the world, yet it is clear that Paul followed a pattern in his journeys. We heard that pattern in our text. He actually travels through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia and stops to do decisive teaching in the city of Thessalonica. It is commonly understood that he does this because Thessalonica had something the other cities did not. Thessalonica had a larger Jewish population and therefore an established Jewish Synagogue.

What does our text say? **“As was his custom, Paul went to the Jews, and on three Sabbath days he led them in a discussion from the Scriptures.”** I love the simplicity of that. Paul is going to a group that is established. More pointedly, Paul goes to a group established on the Scriptures of God. Paul wants to talk about God. Paul wants to share a message about God. To do that, Paul goes where God is already found, where the Word of God is established and respected. Notice then, that we are told that for the next three Sabbaths, that’s three weeks, no doubt with lots of conversations and instructing going on in between those services, but for three weeks Paul leads then in a discussion from the Scriptures.

By the way, if you don’t have the Scriptures, how do you go about teaching about God? Here is what I will tell you. Since there is a God, a true God who has a care and compassion for souls, doesn’t it stand to reason that this God would reveal himself, would tell you his wants and desires, would explain to us about his person and existence and would clearly reveal His truth and purpose in the world? Now, since God is God, I don’t expect that God will need to reveal himself one way to this group and another way to that group or that God would have one set of rules for this group and another set of rules for that group. God is going to reveal himself one way, clearly, precisely and do so in a manner that you and I as His creation will be able to grasp, so that all the things we need to know are made clear! Because if God isn’t going to do that, if God is some sort of changeable, malleable, I’ll fit your human ideas kind of being then I don’t think he is God! And if that is how God is presented to these people then why do they want to believe in Jesus? They already have more than enough gods in their world? Please, go study the histories of some of the other, today we call them mythologies, religions and note such is exactly what goes on. So why believe in Jesus if he is changeable by you?

That was the point of the Scriptures, to reveal the true God and what we needed to know of God. The Jewish people were the ones privileged to be the recipients of this revelation of God and they were to share this knowledge and purposes of God with the world. They did that badly. They did that badly because often they treated God’s revelation their way instead of God’s way. In this case, the warning given to us by Paul in 2 Timothy, is born of this horror of not treating God’s Word as God’s Word. He says to us, **“For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they had itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”** Paul understands what is and so Paul, on the basis of God’s Word, leads in a discussion about Jesus.

I hope that wonderful truth sinks in. Here is what our text says, **“He led them in a discussion from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.”** Again I love the total simplicity of that. Paul goes right for the truth, right for the heart of what God is all about and why we should care about God. It is what is revealed in Scripture, God’s Word.

In a nutshell here is what I can tell you Paul spoke of. First, Paul would have spoken on the nature and reality of sin. Sin is a real thing. Sin is a destructive thing. Sin horribly separates from the living and loving God. Sin is darkness. God is light. There is no doubt, the Old Testament reveals and shows the horrid problem of sin.

Second, Paul would have discussed the need for sin to be atoned for, for sin to be paid for, in order that there might be a reconciliation with God. Again it was clear in Jewish theology, in God’s Word, that God demands and expects only holiness and perfection. You cannot be smeared, stained, smudged or even speckled with a single sin and still expect that the promise of eternal life from God will be yours. We must be holy and perfect, without any flaw or defect, in order to be recipients of God’s promises of eternal life and salvation with Him. (And if you think about it, this is today’s greatest problem, not grasping the truth of sin. If you don’t think there is a thing called sin and a judgement against sin, what do you care if there is a God or not?)

And then Paul explains how the Christ, the promised Savior of God had to suffer. It really must have been an easy task to do that. The whole of the ceremonial laws of God pointed to the sacrifice that must be made to pay for sin. You see, those animal sacrifices that took place in the Temple were not about what you did but rather every single sacrifice pointed to what God’s Savior would do. He would suffer and die for your sins. He would offer his blood as the atonement price for your redemption. Almost everything in the ceremonial laws pointed to the sacrifice of the Christ as the very thing that would cause God to forgive your sins and count you as holy before Him. It must have been so easy to show that the Christ had to suffer and die.

Yet it doesn’t end there. It says, **“That the Christ had to…rise from the dead.”** He who would die would not stay dead. He would come back to life. He would be in the grave but would not remain in that grave. The Christ, it was promised, would rise from the dead. That resurrection was the sure sign and hope that you had before you the Son of God. Isaiah said of this Savior: **“After his soul experiences anguish, he will see the light of life. He will provide satisfaction. Through their knowledge of him, my just servant will justify many, for he himself carried their guilt.”** Or dare we overlook the promise and shadow found in Jonah? Three days in the belly of a great fish before he was spit out on land. The sign of Jonah was the sign of the Christ.

Now here is the thing that again so intrigues me. You have this group of people running around proclaiming that this guy who was put to death via the horrors of Roman capital punishment, this same guy is now alive and has proven he is alive. All I can say is that the proofs Jesus gave were so numerous, the eye-witnesses so numerous that people don’t question that it happened. What people questioned is “What does it mean that this happened?” And that’s what Paul finally gets to. What does it mean that this resurrection has taken place?

Our text says, **“This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”** Here is the whole point of Jesus. I guess it is just a matter of understanding what is meant by “the Christ.” The term, “Christ” or “Anointed One” is a reference to the promises found in God’s Word that pointed to the One that God would send. Now the Jews, being the confused people they often were, thought of the Christ in three ways. They think of the Christ as “the Savior” but they only thought of Jesus as the Savior from their worldly enemies. They thought the Christ would be a great King who would rule the world with them as his devoted helpers and agents. And finally, they thought of the Christ as the final great Prophet of God who would show them and the world the complete truth and wonder of God, unfortunately as their Jewish human ideas had devised that truth. Paul is going to show them that the Christ is all of these things and more.

Christ is indeed the Savior of the world, but not from our earthly enemies (at least for now.). Christ would save us from the deadly spiritual enemies we have: sin, death and the Devil. In Jesus the threat of sin, that we will go to Hell, is gone. God the Father, for Jesus’ sake forgives and erases our sins through the blood of His Son shed on the cross where sin was paid for. Jesus is our Savior from sin.

Christ is indeed a great King. For now, He rules over all things from His throne in Heaven. Jesus carries out the Father’s will perfectly and in accord with all that will be. And although, right now, I am not experiencing Jesus as the Lord of lords and King of Kings, one day it will be clear He is. He will return. When he returns, from that time forth, those who believe in Him will be with Him in His new heaven and earth, a place of holiness and perfection forever. We will be with Him because our King fought and died for us. His absolute rule and authority will be without doubt and in absolute accord with His Word! Yes, Jesus, King Jesus will rule forever and those who believe will be a part of his eternal kingdom. Yet don’t forget that King Jesus will also, because there are those who will not believe, send unbelievers to hell.

Christ will be shown to be the very Prophet, the spokesman and voice of the Lord himself. To know Jesus is to know the true God. To know Jesus is to have eternal life and salvation. To know Jesus is to be a forgiven child of God and heir of all that He has promised in His Word. All that Jesus has said will be true and faithful, for He is the True and Faithful One. Salvation is found only in Jesus, by true faith in Jesus.

Here is what I want you to know. People came to faith in Jesus. They believed the message of sin and redemption from sin. They believed that Jesus lives and rules and that He is truth itself. They believed this because in a world filled with gods and goddesses, with rituals and rites, with rules and demands and commands, they found that the message of Jesus was and is entirely different. It wasn’t a matter of what you needed to do, it is a matter of what Jesus has done and accomplished for you. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He is your Savior. He is my Savior!

Here is my final point for today. These people believed and they suffered for it. They were persecuted and harassed. Some of them will eventually lose their life for the name of Jesus. Yet, they believed. They believed because they realized the truth of the message of Jesus. Yes, even those people who never saw or heard Jesus, they will believe because of the power and marvel of Jesus and the truth of what He has done. Jesus is the one God who is totally different. Jesus did it all for you, that you might have forgiveness and eternal life. May we, like so many during Paul’s visits, hear this truth and also believe in Jesus. Amen.