

Acts Series Part 47

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[0 : 0 0] reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead. This is the central necessity that we want to consider this morning, but we're going to consider two others, and I'll mention what the three are, and then we can think of each in turn. I'm going to begin, first of all, by considering the necessity of the Scriptures. And then the central part of what I want to say is the second element, the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection. So, not simply that it happened, and we could explain the reason for it happening, the purpose of it, but particularly to focus on this element, the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection. And then the final necessity that I want to mention more briefly is the necessity of your response. So, these three things, the necessity of the Scriptures, the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection, and the necessity of your response. Before we do look at each in turn, let's just locate ourselves, remind ourselves where we are as we continue on this journey with Paul and his companions as it's described to us here in the book of Acts. Having concluded their time in Philippi that we were thinking of last Sunday, Paul and Silas continue their journey in Macedonia. They're still in Macedonia, but they move from one city, from Philippi, along the Ignatian Way towards Thessalonica, which was then, as now, the principal city of Macedonia.

Some wonder that as Paul was indeed heading westwards, whether his intention was, having been in Thessalonica, to continue westwards, to be able to then cross the Adriatic and make his way to Rome.

It's possible that that was in his mind. We'll discover this evening that the Lord had other plans. In any case, Paul and Silas arrive in Thessalonica, and as was their custom, they head for the synagogue.

As Thessalonica was a larger city than Philippi, and it had, presumably, a significantly larger Jewish population, there was a synagogue there that they could go to. Now, the account that we've read here in Acts would suggest, if it was all the information we had, it would suggest that they were there for a very short time. In our reading, we've read how they participated there in the synagogue, proclaiming the news that they had brought on three Sabbaths. And then there's the opposition, the violence, and they are forced to leave. And so, if this is all that we had, we might think, well, this was a relatively short time that they were there. However, when we pull in the evidence that we have from other parts of Scripture, it's clear that they were in Thessalonica for a considerably longer time. We don't know how long for sure, but we just notice one thread of evidence, as it were, in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippians, of course, are just down the road from Thessalonica, both cities in Macedonia. And when Paul writes to the Philippians in chapter 4 and verse 16, listen to what he says. We'll probably have to read from verse 15 to get the sense of it. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Now, here Paul is referring to this visit, this time in Thessalonica, and he speaks of receiving aid time and again. Now, it seems difficult to imagine that had he been there for only three weeks, it would have been necessary to have received aid from Philippi time and again.

So, it would seem that he was there for much longer. How to explain then this suggestion of three Sabbaths and then they're run out of town? I suppose the bottom line is we don't know for sure, but one possibility is that they had been attending the synagogue for some time before they were given the opportunity to address the congregation. And so, the three Sabbaths referred to are the three Sabbaths when that opportunity was granted. And of course, it is only then that the reaction will be produced. The opposition of those who, hearing what they have to say, decide that this is not news that they want to hear. Well, these things are of not great importance, but simply to help us locate ourselves in the occasion. What is certainly true is that opportunity is given and presents itself, and Paul grasps the opportunity to do that for which he was in Macedonia. You remember from the previous chapter the reason why they were there in the first place. In chapter 16 and verse 10, following the vision of the man calling them to Macedonia, we read there, after Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. That is why they were there, to preach the gospel, and here the opportunity presents itself in the synagogue. Paul must preach the gospel.

[5 : 47] And that brings us to the first necessity that we highlighted a moment ago, the necessity of the Scriptures. To illustrate it, or to draw this out in this way, in preaching or in announcing the gospel, what is needful? What is the indispensable resource at Paul's disposal, if he is indeed to fulfill his mission of preaching the gospel? Well, the answer is apparent. What does it say there in the passage in verse 2? He reasoned with them from the Scriptures. The necessity of the Scriptures, if he was to present the gospel to this audience in a clear and reasonable and coherent way, it was necessary that he make use of it, it was necessary that he turn to the Scriptures, which, of course, for Paul, as he did so on this occasion, were what we know as the Old Testament Scriptures. The Scriptures were necessary for him if he was to present the gospel. We can maybe draw that out or develop that in three ways as we consider the Scriptures as necessary. First of all, to highlight their authority. Paul turns immediately to the Scriptures as he is persuaded that they are authoritative. Their authority is not because Paul has decided that they enjoy this authority, but the authority derives from their author. The Scriptures are the Word of God. Now, when Paul addresses his congregation or his audience there in Thessalonica, he enjoyed the luxury of speaking to an audience who shared his convictions regarding the authority of Scripture. This was common ground, as it were. When Paul said, well, the Scriptures say, then that would immediately mean that his audience would say, well, we want to hear what the Scriptures say, because we agree that they are indeed our authority.

Now, they would come to disagree with his conclusions about what the Scriptures say, but there was that common ground, and that certainly helped Paul. Paul was not to enjoy that same luxury just a little while later when he addressed the men of Athens at the Areopagus. There he could not look to this common ground of the Scriptures, and it's interesting to see, and will do so in due course, how he seeks out other common ground in order to connect with his audience. But here he could indeed use the Scriptures in the assurance that his audience shared, certainly in a measure his convictions concerning their authority.

We are in a different situation in our society. As we would make known the gospel, largely it carries no weight with our audience, certainly the audience out there, to say the Scripture says, or the Bible says. That is not something that has any echo with people. So what? So while we do not enjoy that advantage as it were, this question of authority still remains a very important one, because independently of whether the audience share our convictions concerning the authority of Scripture, it is crucial for the one who is announcing the gospel, be that a preacher or be that a Christian, sharing the good news with a friend. It is so necessary that we have the assurance and the conviction that the Scriptures are authoritative and so necessary for our proclamation. We will only be able to make known this good news with the confidence and the urgency that the truth merits if we are persuaded as to the authority of the Scriptures. This is one of the core problems of the Christian church, certainly in the

Western world. There is this crisis in terms of people's convictions concerning the authority of Scripture. And once you lose that, then effectively you've lost just about everything. The necessity of the Scriptures, first of all, because of their authority, but secondly, because of their content. The Scriptures are necessary in the proclamation of the gospel because of their content. And what are we told that Paul speaks of from the Scriptures? Well, what do we read there in the chapter there in verse 17? He reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

The content of the Scriptures is the Christ. Certainly, that is what Paul focuses in on, not only referring to Him, but referring particularly to His death and resurrection.

[11 : 00] I wonder what passages Paul might have made reference to in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament, in order to do this, in order to demonstrate, in order to present the Christ as the one who had to die and rise again. Well, we don't know because we're not told what are the passages that he turned to.

But we know for sure, given the words of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that he would not have been short of options. What is it that Jesus has said on that occasion?

In Luke chapter 24 and verses 25 to 27, as he spoke to these disciples following his resurrection, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." And those words of Jesus make it clear that there would have been no shortage of material that Paul could have used in presenting the Christ and indeed the need for his death and resurrection from the Scriptures. We are not this morning going to suggest what these passages might have been. There are many, but perhaps if we were to simply mention one, it would be the one that we've read earlier on in the service in Isaiah 53. There are other passages, but perhaps that passage, the closing verses of chapter 52 and the whole of chapter 53, we have perhaps the fullest picture in one passage that presents to us the person of the Christ, but also particularly the need for his death and resurrection. There are other passages that maybe would touch on or point to or hint at the need for the suffering of the Messiah. Others that might speak of his resurrection or hint towards that, but in the Isaiah passage, we have both these elements found together and very clearly and very explicitly.

We remember that Philip, when he was presenting the Gospel to the Ethiopian, it was to that passage that he turned. Well, in God's providence, the Ethiopian was already reading from that passage, and we're told that beginning at that passage in Isaiah, he was able to present to the Ethiopian, the Gospel, the good news about Jesus. So, the Scriptures are necessary because of their authority and because of their content. They speak to us concerning the Christ, the Messiah. But one final thing just very briefly to mention about the Scriptures is the manner in which they are to be used.

The verbs that are used here are noteworthy. We're told that Paul reasoned with them. We're told that Paul explained to them. We're told that Paul proved to them that the Christ had to suffer. Our faith is a reasonable faith that must be presented in a reasonable and coherent manner. The third of these verbs in particular is interesting, the one translated in our Bibles, proved. It's a verb that literally means to set alongside. And so, when we think of Paul turning to the Old Testament Scriptures and then presenting to them the person of Jesus, what we're being told that he did was something along these lines. Paul would set out what the Old Testament said concerning the Christ and his death and resurrection alongside the account of Jesus. And that would lead him to his conclusion, his clinching the argument with the powerful words that we read there in verse 3, this Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.

[14 : 55] You can find him in the Old Testament and look at what it says about him and look at the truth that I can tell you about this man Jesus. It's the same person. This is he, the one described, and this Jesus.

Jesus that I speak of. So, the Scriptures as necessary, but also moving on to the necessity of the death and resurrection. This is where the word is actually used in our passage, explaining and proving that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead. Now, as already commented, Paul makes this point, that it was necessary. And the choice of language is deliberate and carefully chosen, but it is not original, this language of necessity. It's not original because in Paul describing the death and resurrection of Jesus as necessary, he was simply doing that which Jesus himself persistently had done throughout his life when he spoke of these things. He did so before he was crucified. In Luke chapter 9 and verse 21, to mention just one example. In chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel, in verse 21, we read,

Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone, and he said, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. This language of there being a necessity to what was going to be a necessity to what was going to occur. There was this divine compulsion placed upon the Messiah that he must die, that he must rise again. We've already read the passage in Luke of Jesus on the road to Emmaus where the same language is used, this language of necessity. It was necessary. It was necessary for the Christ to die and rise again. Jesus had a clear sense of the compelling necessity of his suffering, of his death and resurrection. Well, we can state that, we can read it, we can identify that that was so, but the question that emerges is, why was it necessary? Why was it necessary? And that question can be answered in two complementary ways, where the second answer, in a sense, forms the foundation for the first.

One first answer to the question, well, why was it necessary? Okay, that's what it says, but why was it necessary? Well, it was necessary that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. It's possible that this is the primary sense in which Paul uses that language on this occasion as he speaks to the Thessalonians. It was necessary, because that is what the Scriptures said would happen. It was the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and the fulfillment of the will of God constitutes an unavoidable necessity given the very nature of God as a faithful God who keeps his promises. So, why was it necessary? Well, it was necessary because the Old Testament, the Scriptures say it's going to happen. The Old Testament constitutes the revealed will of God. God is a God who tells the truth.

God is a God who keeps his word, and so if he has said this is what will happen, then it must happen. It's necessary in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. And we could leave it there legitimately. But what we've just said does rather beg another question. Why was this the divine will? Why was it the divine will that the eternal Son of God suffer in such a cruel and brutal way? Why was it in the words of Isaiah that we've read?

[18 : 59] Why was it the Lord's will to crush him, to crush the Messiah, to crush Jesus, and cause him to suffer? Why was this so? And that question leads us to our second answer to the question, why was it necessary? It was necessary that sinners might be saved. The reason that the Scriptures speak of the Christ dying and rising again is that this was the manner in which God determined to save sinners. The wages of sin is death. The justice and holiness of God require that the wages be paid. But the love of God procures a way whereby we might be spared, whereby we might be saved.

And that way is the death of the innocent one, of his beloved Son in our place. And that way is the only way of salvation, of his beloved Son in our place. This way of salvation, involving the death and resurrection of Jesus, is necessary. It is not simply one way among different options available to God. It is the only way. If sinners are to be saved, it is necessary that the Christ die and rise again.

If there be any lingering doubt as to the necessity of salvation being secured in this way, and only in this way, consider this question.

Can we even, for a fleeting and foolish moment, imagine that the Father would have handed over his Son, his only Son, the one whom he loved eternally?

Can we imagine that he would hand that Son to Calvary, had there been another way? Had there been another way?

[20 : 56] Remember Gethsemane. Remember the words of Jesus as he addresses his Father, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Jesus is asking the Father in this moment of darkness, is there another way?

Is it altogether necessary that I proceed to death? And what was the answer that Jesus received? Well, the answer was silence, but it was an eloquent silence.

It was a powerful silence, announcing to Jesus, There is no other way. There is no other way. If sinners are to be saved, as we in eternity have determined, then this is the way.

This is the only way. It is necessary that the Christ suffer, that the Christ die in the place of sinners, and that the Christ rise again, triumphant, conqueror over death.

There was a compelling divine necessity for the cross. Only at the cross could salvation be secured. If sinners were to be saved, it was necessary for the Christ to die and rise again.

[22 : 17] Now that truth, of course, carries with it a necessary implication. If you are to be saved, there is no other way than putting your trust in the work of this Jesus, putting your trust in his finished work on your behalf.

And that brings us to our third and final necessity. Not only the necessity of the Scriptures in presenting the gospel, not only and fundamentally the necessity of the Christ dying and rising again, but finally the necessity of your response.

What response was Paul looking for from his audience? As Paul made his way to the synagogue in Thessalonica, what was it that he aspired to? What was it that he wished to see in those who would hear what he had to say?

Well, evidently, it would have been his great desire and aspiration and objective that they might believe. Hence the manner in which he presents the truth to them.

Hence the importance of reasoning with them. Hence the importance of explaining to them. Hence the importance of proving to them, of setting alongside what the Old Testament Scriptures say with the person of Jesus, that they might come to share his convictions, that they might come to believe that what he is saying is true.

[23 : 44] This is the response that he was looking for. And we're told that some did. Then in verse 4, some of the Jews were persuaded. They were persuaded.

They listened to the arguments. The arguments were credible. They were coherent. They were persuasive. And so they came to believe.

They joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. This is part of the response that Paul was looking for. But there is another response that Paul is seeking.

And this other aspect of the response is not something separate. It's something that's part of. But another aspect of the response that Paul is looking for is curiously, interestingly revealed to us by his opponents.

Then in verse 7, we're not going to spend time this morning considering how his opponents reacted and what they did. But we just want to notice one thing that they do say in their accusation against Paul and his message.

[24 : 52] We read there in verse 7, They are all defying Caesar's decree. This is what they are saying concerning Paul. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.

And in this accusation, there is a great deal of truth. They are right in claiming that this is what Paul was stating.

We're not told that he said that in the brief summary that we have at the beginning of the chapter. But his opponents bring that to us. What Paul did was not only say, Well, look, I'm showing to you that this Jesus is the Christ.

I want you to be intellectually persuaded that my arguments are coherent. He went further. He said, Now, and if he is the Christ, if he is the king, then you must bow down before him.

He is the king before whom you must bow. It's not enough for you to say, Well, these are wonderful and lovely and intellectually stimulating arguments that you present, and I think I'm persuaded.

[25 : 52] No. What had to go with that was a bowing down before the king. His opponents were very clear. This man, he's saying that there's another king.

And I'm sure Paul would have been quite willing to have said, I plead guilty to that accusation. Yes, indeed. This king Jesus is the king before whom all must bow.

The gospel presents Jesus as Savior and as Lord, and we must respond to him in a manner that does justice to both these truths that are inseparable.

He is the one and only and sufficient Savior of sinners. But he is also the king of kings before whom we must bow down in humble submission to his gracious authority.

And so, there is this necessity of responding to the message of the gospel. And as we close this morning, I ask you, have you done so? What is your response to this Christ for whom it was necessary that he die and rise again?

[27 : 07] How do you respond to these truths? How do you continue to respond to Jesus as King of kings and Lord of your life? It's not only advisable that you respond in the right manner.

It is necessary that you do so. Let us pray. Let us pray.