

When I was in the seventh grade, our speech class went on a field trip to see a play, along with kids from another school. As a group, we were a little rowdy. Everybody talked during the play, which was inappropriate, and certainly not respectful to the actors. About three quarters through the production, some of the boys started shooting spitballs at the actors. At that point, the play stopped, and one of the actors chewed us out. Once the play started back up, everybody behaved as we should, but by that point, our teacher was totally humiliated.

When you are twelve years old, such things seem funny when you talk about it with your friends. It wasn't funny the next day when the teacher said that all of the boys in the class were going to get an F in conduct on our report card. When we heard that all the boys were going to get an F, and the girls got off Scott free, a great protest arose in the classroom. Our teacher reminded us of the events surrounding our field trip, and that shooting spitballs at the actors was the final straw.

I protested. I never shot any spitballs, why should I get an F? My teacher looked right at me, and in a loud voice said, "I know if these other boys were shooting spitballs, you were right in the middle of it too." There was no reasoning with her. I was guilty by association. I got an F on my report card, and I had to explain it to my parents.

People judge others according to a person's reputation, and by the company they keep. As a Christian, I avoid situations where my presence might harm my reputation. I don't go to the casinos on the Gulf Coast. I don't go to bars. I will never join the Masonic Lodge. You will never see me standing in line to buy lottery tickets, or pooling my money with others to improve my odds. I don't go to the dog races, or cock fights. I don't join with others in illegal activities. I am not into violent protests, or joining in with others in inappropriate comments on social media.

Our reputation is important, because it has a direct effect upon our witness. A person's credibility is directly tied to other people's perceptions. So, we protect and guard our reputation. We live in such a way as to build a reputation of truthfulness, goodness, godliness, and trustworthiness. We try to present ourselves in such a way that the world can see Christ in us and through us.

If we live in the center of God's will, we can have a powerful witness, but if by our lifestyle we bring conviction upon the lost, if we stand upon the truth, and speak out against godlessness, if we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, the world will hate us, because of our reputation. Jesus said that if the world hates us we should remember that it first hated Him.

In our passage this evening we are going to read about a man named Jason, who was found guilty by association, with Paul and Silas. He was not a bad man. He had done nothing wrong, and yet because of his faith, and his support of the missionaries, he found himself in trouble with they world. Lets see what insights we might learn by reading Acts 17:1-9.

Luke remained for a time in Philippi to encourage the members of the newly formed church in their walk with the Lord. Paul, Silas, and Timothy moved on to Thessalonica in order to spread the gospel in that city. The bible says that they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, cities that roughly divided the hundred-mile journey into thirds.

We can surmise that there were no synagogues in those cities, and the missionaries saw little opportunity to reach people in those towns. But, when they reached Thessalonica, they found a point of contact in a Jewish Synagogue. Paul liked to share the gospel in Jewish synagogues. He was comfortable in those settings because he had been trained as a Pharisee, and was used to speaking in the Synagogue before his conversion. The Jews had an advantage over

the gentiles, because they knew the scriptures. Paul had become a master at proving Jesus was the Messiah, using the Old Testament scriptures as proof. He also had a special love for his own people, so whenever possible, he would begin his ministry in a new town, at a Jewish Synagogue.

The bible says that it was Paul's custom to go to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. Paul had a reputation of going to the synagogue every Sabbath. Synagogue worship was a part of his life. Going to the Synagogue facilitated corporate worship, and the study of God's word. It was central to Paul's faith, and his relationship with God.

In the expression of Christian faith, we meet each week, not on the Sabbath, but on Sunday, in honor and memory of the Lord's resurrection. We come to worship and praise the Lord, to sit under the teaching, and preaching, of God's word, to encourage one another, and to use our gifts to the glory of God. Through regular church attendance we grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and in our knowledge of the scriptures. We learn how the scriptures are relevant to our lives today, and how they speak to the times in which we live.

If you profess to be a Christian, people's perception of you will be shaped by whether or not you are in the habit of going to church. Church attendance directly effects your reputation among your peers. It speaks to your commitment to Christ, and how serious you are about your faith. It is one of the ways that others judge whether or not you are real in your faith.

We don't know how long Paul and his companions were in Thessalonica, but it was probably for more than three weeks. We know from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians that he supported himself during his ministry there, so he had time to set up shop and to sell his wares. His letter to the Philippians tells us that they sent support at least two times during his stay there. He went to the Synagogue three Sabbaths in a row. The fact that he was allowed to speak on these occasions give us insight that many of the Jews were interested in what he said, and wanted to hear more.

Paul's message was the same, everywhere he went. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and the Savior of the world. He suffered for our sins, was buried in a tomb, but arose again on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures. Through faith in Jesus we have forgiveness of our sins, and eternal life. It should be obvious to us that the Holy Spirit anointed Paul's preaching, because during the course of those three weeks, people were getting saved. A broad spectrum of people surrendered their lives in faith. Jews, devout gentiles, and leading women of the city all became believers. The word here translated as devout gentiles is the same word used of Lydia. These were not Jews, but they worshipped Yahweh, and the gospel was particularly good news to them, because they became a part of God's people through faith in Jesus Christ.

As God had blessed the missionaries' efforts in Philippi, he continued to bless their ministry in Thessalonica by establishing another church. As we have seen already, every great movement of God will be met with opposition. Once again, the Jews, who did not receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, became jealous. Paul was no longer welcome in the Synagogue. They appealed to godless people, stirred up a mob, and set the city in an uproar, in order to stop Paul from being able to continue in his witness.

Among the faithful, Paul had a reputation. He was a man who stood on the word, spoke the truth, and won people to Christ. Among those who did not believe, he had a reputation as a troublemaker. From their perspective he was dangerous, and he must be stopped at all cost. The gospel message that Paul preached turned their world upside down. It challenged the status quo. The people who had been born again no longer joined in with the crowd as if nothing had changed. This stirred up all kinds of feelings of anger and resentment.

Today we do not feel, as badly, the bite of rejection from others who do not believe: not here in Milton Florida, although in other parts of the world it is just as bad, or worse. The spiritual dynamics, however, are just as real, and they are still in play. When we ascribe to a biblical worldview, and stand upon the principles of God's word, when we proclaim that there is no other name, under heaven, given unto man, whereby we must be saved, when we say that we are all sinners in need of the Savior, those who do not respond to the gospel in faith, will resent those who do. If we are living for the Lord, we have a negative reputation with much of the world.

As the angry mob in Thessalonica searched for the missionaries in order to persecute them, they became frustrated. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were nowhere to be found, but the mob was so worked up that they attacked the house of Jason, a new convert, and brought him, and some other believers, out to the crowd.

The bible does not give us any indication that Jason did anything wrong. He was guilty by association. Where the bible says that Jason received the missionaries, it might be an indication that he opened his home to give them a place to stay. It might simply mean that he received their message, and they visited in his home. In any event, Jason already had a reputation among the unbelievers, and he was going to suffer because of it.

Many years ago, I picked up the nickname, "the next best thing." If you cannot get ahold of Brother Carl, Brother Greg is the next best thing. As Senior Associate Pastor, people associate me with Brother Carl, and the ministries of Hickory Hammock Baptist Church. In the eyes of some, who have never met me personally, I am esteemed by association, and in the eyes of others, I am guilty by association.

Brother Carl is a much more public figure than I am, but I stand with him on most every issue. Some people agree with these stands, and some disagree. Some bitterly oppose these stands. I have a reputation in the world that is based largely upon the company I keep. If you are a member of Hickory Hammock Baptist Church, you too are guilty by association, in the eyes of some.

What we have to ask ourselves is what kind of reputation do we want to have with the world. If we just want to fit in, not make any waves, and make whatever compromises are necessary to get along, we will have one reputation. If, on the other hand, we discipline ourselves to always stand upon the truth, if we stand upon the principles of God's word, as they apply to what is going on in the world right now, and refuse to compromise, then we will have a different reputation altogether. If we take no stand, we will face little opposition. If we stand upon the truth of God's word and the gospel of Jesus Christ, much of the world will hate us, but many will see that our faith is real, which will soften their hearts so that they might have an opportunity to be saved.

Notice the accusations against Jason are similar to the accusations we have seen elsewhere in Acts. They have turned the world upside down. Jesus does turn our world upside down. It is a part of being born again. Faith in Christ changes our perspective on everything in life. They accused Jason of acting against the decrees of Caesar by saying that there is another king, Jesus. This accusation comes from taking words out of context. Jesus is King of Kings. His kingdom is eternal, but His kingdom is not of this world. We should be prepared to face accusations of our beliefs, and the words that we speak that are taken out of context. This is where the study of Christian apologetics is helpful in preparing ourselves for the stands we must take, and the opposition we are likely to face from the world.

The bible does not tell us what happens to Jason and the others, only that he posted bail and they let him go. In our passage next time we learn that the brothers sent Paul and Silas away for their own safety, and so that they could continue to share the gospel.

The lesson for the church is that we cannot make a difference in the world if we do not take a stand upon the principles of God's word, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we take such stands, people will get saved, but the world will oppose us, and our message. Whatever we have to suffer for Christ, we are to count it all joy, because whatever suffering we endure for Christ serves to advance His kingdom.

If there are any here who have not yet found saving faith in Jesus Christ, tonight you can confess your sins to God and trust Jesus and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. If you pray the sinner's prayer, then come talk with one of us so that we can help you with the next steps of living out your faith in Jesus Christ.