

Sermon Title: **“Theology Matters”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Acts 16:39-17:9

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Strength Through Suffering (Acts 16:39-40)

“So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” -Acts 16:39-40

As we step back into the Acts Narrative, remember this is early in Paul’s Second Missionary Journey. Paul is leading his team of Silas, Timothy, and Luke (the Author of Acts). Having shared the Gospel now in Europe, a church emerges through Lydia and many of the women who

worked outside of Philippi. Similar to the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, Lydia's network came to place faith in Jesus and became the nucleus of this church plant.

However, the Holy Spirit was not the only spirit working in this city. Having rebuked a demonic presence in a girl, she experienced deliverance and freedom in and by the name of Jesus Christ. As a result of this act, Paul and Silas were publicly stripped, beaten, and then imprisoned. Why would this happen if the Gospel is such good news?

Around this time the Roman Emperor Claudius had issued an order to expel the Jews from Rome. Paul and Silas were Jews, preaching a message about resurrected Jewish Messiah of a Kingdom that is Coming, and they just hurt the pocketbooks of influential businessmen in Philippi. Without a trial, the two were at the mercy of a city taking liberty to persecute swiftly.

While suffering may touch the Saints of Christ, it cannot quench the joy of Christ!

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” -[Acts 16:25](#)

Because of this witness and God's miraculous intervention, *Paul and Silas did not use their freedom to leave because it would have prevented the Jailor from coming to faith in Jesus along with his network of influence.* Suffering is the ingredient that can both **strengthen** our faith and cause the church of Jesus Christ to grow!

Afterwards the city leaders wanted to release them both, however Paul revealed they are Roman citizens and what was done to them was illegal. This is where we pick up with our text today. The magistrates apologize to them Paul and Silas and ask them to just leave the city. *Just go!*

“And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” -[Matthew 10:14-15](#)

Upon release they regroup with the believers at Lydia's (headquarters for this church plant) and seek to encourage them. Encouraged here means to comfort. Paul and Silas who suffered for the Name of Jesus are trying to comfort those who have just come to place faith in Jesus. Stay the course, keep your hand in His, trust Him to lead you all the way home. Trust Him to give you His strength to endure what this world throws at us; trust Him to bring His joy through His Spirit within you. Don't let suffering discourage your walk with Jesus- nothing of this life is worthy to be compared to what we have in Him!

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” -[Romans 8:18](#)

“And someone said to him, (Jesus), ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few? And he said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door (straight gate). For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.’” -[Luke 13:23-24](#)

“By your endurance you will gain your lives.” -[Luke 21:19](#)

II. Theology Matters (Acts 17:1-2)

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’” -Acts 17:1-2

Paul and his team traveled 100 miles southwest of Philippi to reach the capital city of Macedonia, Thessalonica. With a population of over 200,000 this was prime ground to plant for Kingdom growth. Paul locates the Synagogue and begins connecting on the foundation of Judaism in the city. He shows how Jesus is not just Messiah to the Jews, but the Christ for the world!

It is here we now dig into the heart of this message. **Theology matters.** Theology means the study of God. It is taking the whole of the Bible and systematically looking at what it teaches on given subjects, bringing them together, and allowing them to shape our understanding of God through His Revelation to us.

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

-Deuteronomy 29:29

Note that Paul is **explaining** the scriptures. *This term means to converse in such a way that the audience is invited to change their mind toward the message being preached.* It embraces a season of mental reflection, thinking through, and weighing out the reasons to say yes or no to Jesus.

Paul is doing his part to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, yet even in his strength and weakness, it is Christ alone who brings the increase. Note the witness of Scripture on this:

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.” -1 Corinthians 3:5-9

To truly value the eternal destiny of anyone as a Believer and Follower of Jesus Christ means that we do not neglect to share this Gospel in both proclamation and demonstration. Paul didn’t change his message in order to gain larger crowds, he preached the truth and prayed in faith that God would bring the increase through their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

For three weeks this effort reached throughout Thessalonica. What was preached on the Sabbath would have been explained and lived out in the days that followed. Always remember, the Gospel is a message that is both proclaimed and demonstrated. And what is Paul’s source material for these sermons?

The Scriptures, meaning the Old Testament section of our Bibles. It is crucial to understand that all that we know and live in Christ comes to us from God's Word. Jesus fulfills the scriptures, meaning that everything in them will lead us to see and know Jesus more and more in ways that cause us to Learn from Him, Live like Him, and Lead others to Him!

Our New Testament came by the Spirit of God through those chosen to write, bringing forth the fruit of the Old Testament for us today. We do not have the New Testament without the Old Testament, and we cannot live in the Old Testament is unfulfilled without the New Testament. This is not to be understood as letting go of one to embrace another, but the shadows giving way to the light of day. *Everything before Jesus looked forward to His Coming; everything after Jesus looks forward to His Return!*

Look at what Paul's message was shaped around- *the necessity for Jesus to have suffered and to rise from the dead!* For Rome their strength was the result of their militant victories- they fought forward to step into the dominance they now enjoy. To preach of submitting to a King who ended up on a cross is foolishness to many. The fact that Jesus came and suffered is not sufficient in and of itself- the *reason* Jesus came and the *reason* Jesus submitted to suffering are the theological themes laced into His Death, Burial, and Resurrection.

Why am I focusing so much on this?

*“But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.” **-Revelation 2:14-16***

The believers are being warned by Jesus that their tolerance of heresy (incorrect teaching / pieces of truth but distorted and leading away from Jesus) is empowering the influence of heresy. Balaam seduced Israel through Moabite women, inviting them to marry into a nation that would lead them away from God. As Israel in the Old Testament experienced temptation to not take seriously wrong teaching, so the Church in the New Testament faces the same.

The Nicolaitans began with a man named Nicolaus, whom we are introduced to in Acts 6:5-6 as one of those chosen to serve as Deacons under the Apostles for the Believers.

*“And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.” **-Acts 6:5-6***

What were the reasons Nicolaus pulled his hand out of Jesus' and not only left the church but led many others to follow? We do not know. *Maybe* it was suffering that touched him or someone he loved and God didn't answer the way he wanted Him to. *Maybe* it was desire to be higher rank. *Maybe* he got tired of the constant persecution for following Jesus in the manner the Apostles did. And on the reasons could go. In the end he not only chose to walk out, he

labored to lead others to do the same. By the time of John's writing of Revelation near the end of the 1st century, the Nicolaitans had become a significant influence valuing personal pleasure as the ultimate joy we can experience in this life. Pursue what makes you happy; especially sexually. Even if we are wrong, God is full of mercy, and He loves us and will forgive us; He wants you to be happy. This led into gross perversions and become the damper to many whose hearts once burned for Jesus. *Can we claim Jesus as our Savior from sin without submitting to Him as our Lord? **Jesus said no, you cannot.***

How could the early church avoided this influence? Theology. Knowing God through His Word. Had they studied to seek out God's blessing or curse on this, they would have seen the danger of tolerating this sin. We must be anchored in God's Word because this was not a movement someone picked up a flyer and read, or a facebook add that randomly popped up. *No, the invitation to heresy often comes from **someone we love, someone we trust, and someone we are willing to follow.***

I close this section with Paul's words to Timothy later on,

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra-which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." **-2 Timothy 3 (selected verses)***

This, dear saint, is why Theology matters. This is why Theology should matter to you.

III. This is Jesus! (Acts 17:3)

*"This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." **-Acts 17:3b***

Do you love Jesus? If so, then that is good enough for me! We hear this often. It is a nice sentiment. But is it true?

Yes, I love Jesus. Most Evangelical Christians, splintered in the myriad of Denominations that we are, will say Yes, they love Jesus. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox will affirm that they love Jesus. Mormons will say they love Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses will affirm a love for

Jesus. Many in our day will say they love what Jesus did and meant as a good man, a good intentioned teacher, and ultimately someone who tried to be and make a positive impact in this world.

But do we love the same Jesus? The Jesus who came, suffered, died, and rose again in order to defeat sin for us? The Jesus who fulfills all Scripture, is seated at the Right Hand of the Father while His Spirit brings all things into His subjection, ultimately leading into a time of great judgment were sinners with sin outside of His Grace are cast into an eternal separation from Him to experience damnation?

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” -[John 14:15-17](#)

This may not be the Jesus the world wants, but it is the Jesus we all need. And to preach this Jesus faithfully is a lifelong journey of **LEARNING** from Jesus, **LIVING** like Jesus, and **LEADING** others to Jesus!

IV. To Believe or Not to Believe (17:4-9)

There are those who desire to *learn more* about Jesus, those *choosing to follow* Jesus, those who *started but stopped* following Jesus, and then those who *do not want anything to do with* Jesus at all. To share the Gospel faithfully is to experience such soil of human heart even with those closest to us that we love at times.

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” -[Acts 17:4](#)

For those whom the Spirit quickens at the moment this Gospel message becomes a personal invitation to them, this Jesus is who they realize they need and come to Him for salvation and life. However, for those who do not, there is not just the rejection of Jesus but the sense of offense this Jesus brings to how they desire to live their lives. Who are you to tell me I am wrong? That I am a sinner?!

“But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.” -[Acts 17:5-9](#)

The suffering that touches the Apostles will overflow to touch all who proclaim and demonstrate the Good News of Jesus Christ. Paul was constantly concerned that his spiritual

children would buckle under the weight of suffering and leave Jesus, and he wrote, sent leadership, and labored in prayer for their continued steadfastness. Paul's prayers were fruitful.

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved- so always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!” **-1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

Theology matters dear saint. Study God's Word. Listen to the Spirit's leading as He brings its life into you to train and equip you, to stay faithful in Him every step our journey through this world in all of its ups and downs, all of its seasons- all of the moments of difficulty and suffering that may be a part of the story.

The results of the Gospel are not our work. That is God's and God's alone.

Preaching and Living the Gospel are God's work in and through us.

Pray dear saints for the Gospel seeds cast. **Pray** for those yet to get up and follow Jesus. **Pray** for those following to stay the course in Jesus. **Pray** for those who walked away from Jesus. And **pray** for those who desire nothing to do with Jesus.

Know Him and make Him known.

Theology Matters.

Learn from Jesus. Live like Jesus. Lead others to Jesus.