

Market Place Missionaries 3: How Jealousy Affects Us Acts 17:1-10

I'll be completely honest with you

... while I'm enjoying this series called Marketplace Missionaries

... I haven't been looking forward to my sermon today

That's because my bible passage for today...

... is such a non event!

- Last week's passage was so exciting
 - This week's is largely a repeat of last week but without all the colour and excitement

Check it out here:



To make it worse...

- Next week, Tim Page gets to preach on Paul's most famous speech in the entire New Testament
 - That's Paul's speech in Athens at the Areopagus
 - The Altar to the Unknown God
 - It's history's intersection between Christianity and Greek Philosophy
 - And how Paul's message captivates people schooled in Greek philosophy

So I am jealous of Tim

- Jealousy - as it happens - is a key theme in my uninspiring little bible passage today

But before we get to that theme, and that bible passage

- I want to know what you think

DISCUSSION: **What do you do personally when you strike parts of the bible that seem repetitive or comparatively uninspiring?**

FEEDBACK

The thing with all Scripture...

... is to ask: Why is this passage here?

- So much happened in the lives of biblical characters that **doesn't** get in to the Bible

- ***So why is this passage here?***

- What is unique and important enough about it, that it was considered worthy of being put in to Scripture?

The less inspiring passages...

... also reveal to us our attitude to Scripture

- Is it really ***all*** the Word of God and thus worthy of our attention?
- Or is it only the bits we like that are the Word of God?

And so the same challenge is there for preachers

- If this story got into Scripture; and Scripture is God-inspired
... then it's worth my time ***and a sermon*** to figure out why
- And quite often we find that the harder you have to search for biblical wisdom, the more it matters when you find it

Here's our title slide:



Previously in this series:

- Guidance (week 1)
- and Freedom (Week 2)

So now if you can find a Bible...

Acts 17:1-10

1 Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. 3 He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." 4 Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.

5 But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some troublemakers from the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. 6 Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they

shouted, “and now they are here disturbing our city, too. 7 And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus.”

8 The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. 9 So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them. 10 That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea.

What matters about this story?

- Why is it in Scripture?
- What does it add?

For a start, **(1) it matters that Paul and Silas got up again after Philippi**

- They'd been severely beaten up in Philippi
- And put in jail, in stocks

Then they walked 100 miles to Thessalonica to start again

- Not only did their bodies ache
 - the weight of opposition must have played on their minds

You go on an overseas mission trip today...

- And it can all be quite fascinating, inspiring and pleasant
- And you can stay on a few days and take in some sight seeing
- The biggest cost tends to be the cost of your plane flight

There was a much higher cost for Paul and Silas

- But they got up again
- And walked the 100 miles to Thessalonica

And as a side comment:

- As we think about non violent resistance at Parihaka with our event next Sunday night
 - notice that that's exactly what the Christians are doing in both these passages

The second reason this story matters ...

... is (2.) because it's Paul's first contact with the city of Thessalonica

- Later in the New Testament, Paul writes two letters to the church of Thessalonica
 - that's 1 and 2 Thessalonians

What's really worth doing is comparing what you're reading here in Acts

- with 1 and 2 Thessalonians
- If this is how things started there - in Acts 17
 - then what are the issues that he writes to them about later on?
- You could do that this week

A third reason this story matters...

... is that (3). they were far more successful than they were at Phillipi

- Look at the response in verse 4:

- **Some** Jews joined Paul & Silas
- **Many** ... God fearing Greek men ... joined Paul & Silas
- And **quite a few** prominent women
- Prominent means influential

By the end of the story

... a new guy called Jason (v5) has his home invaded, is dragged before the courts and has to pay his way out of jail
 ... and he and other new believers allow themselves to go through all of this
 ... in defence of Paul & Silas who they've only just met!

- And then they smuggle Paul and Silas out of town

The gospel has struck really deep in Thessalonica

- A church has formed and it's already been through persecution and survived it
 ... all in the space of 10 verses!

And that leads us to the core issue ...

... the issue at the heart of this story is ... (4). **jealousy**

- Do you remember last week, that the real reason...
 ... they got beaten up was because we were bad for business?
- This week it's because of jealousy
 - The Jewish leaders are losing influence as all these prominent women & many greek men, and some Jews all decide to join up with Paul & Silas

And just like last week...

- ... the authorities are not honest about their real reasons for hunting Paul & Silas
- They say in verse 6 that Paul & Silas are 'causing trouble all over the world' - that's not true
 - And that they're 'committing treason against Caesar' - that's not true either

Imagine how pathetic it would sound if they told the truth

- Imagine the Jewish leaders saying to the city council:
 - Could you arrange for Paul and Silas to be beaten up and thrown into jail
 ... cos we're really jealous of them
 - And we used to have influence over lots of people but now people are listening to them rather than us
 ... and it really hurts our feelings...

The truth wasn't going to get them anywhere

... so instead they use the word 'treason'
 ... knowing that treason against the Roman Emperor can end in death

So all that follows from verse 5 in this passage

... is set off because of this core issue of jealousy

We've thought about finding guidance in our 9-5's as marketplace missionaries

- And we've talked about finding freedom from things that hold you back in your 9-5
- So now let's think about jealousy

In your 9-5...

... whether you're in health, education, business, law, whatever

... how much of a role do you think jealousy plays?

- How do we deal with colleagues driven by jealousy?
- Is it something we should be compassionate about?
 - Because I'm convinced the effects of jealousy in your 9-5 can be every bit as deadly as they are in today's passage

How has jealousy affected your own life journey?

- how's it affected your discipleship?
- and your emotional health
- and your relationships?

... ever felt a sting of jealousy about the way someone looked at your spouse or boyfriend?

If we could wipe out all jealousy entirely tomorrow...

... how might the world look?

- No jealousy at school?
 - Coke and Pepsi applauding each other's year end figures
- The CEO of Apple phoning CEO of Samsung to congratulate him on greater smartphone sales
 - And imagine no jealousy in relationships

One thing I read was that the US stats show...

... that jealousy is the number one cause of spousal murder

- Imagine no more jealousy in relationships!

Imagine feeling excited...

... for your neighbour who just bought the car you always wanted

... or for the girl who got the Maths prize ahead of you

Jealousy is such a pervasive issue

... but no one ever seems to talk about it

... except ... for Taylor Swift

- That's true isn't it? - it's only Taylor?

And Taylor Swift is in fact, an excellent case in point:



If you were this beautiful, a multi millionaire and supremely talented,
WHAT ON EARTH COULD YOU POSSIBLY BE JEALOUS ABOUT?

If you were:

- This beautiful
- a multi millionaire
- Supremely talented
- An international celebrity with lifesize posters of yourself on bedroom walls all across the world...

WHAT ON EARTH COULD YOU POSSIBLY BE JEALOUS ABOUT?!!!

And she's not jealous according to this song from her early years:

Permanent Marker

I know he loved you,
A long time ago
I ain't jealous of you
Just thought you should know
You were never good enough for him
Or anything like me
So you might as well sit back
'cause I'm not trying to show maturity

"X" is the shape I drew through your face
In permanent marker
Oh, yeah

- The third line says: 'I aint jealous of you'
- So why then in the chorus does she end up with "'X' is the shape I drew through face in permanent marker"?!

More upfront are the lyrics of Teardrops on my guitar

I'll bet she's beautiful,
That girl he talks about

And she's got everything that I have to live without

He's the reason for the teardrops on my guitar...

And there he goes, so perfectly,

The kind of flawless I wish I could be

The mind boggles as to what in line three Taylor has to live without!

- But in those last two lines, maybe she's honest here about something we've probably all experienced - and that's the personal effects of jealousy

And there he goes, so perfectly,

The kind of flawless I wish I could be

And the same things comes up in the next song: Mean

You have pointed out my flaws again

As if I don't already see them

... which leads in to everybody's favourite chorus:

Someday I'll be living in a big old city

And all you're ever gonna be is mean

Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me

And all you're ever gonna be is mean

Why you gotta be so mean?

The next song shows how jealousy...

... can give birth to revenge

Better than revenge

Soon she's gonna find

Stealing other people's toys

On the playground won't

Make you many friends

She should keep in mind

She should keep in mind

There is nothing I do better than revenge, ha

If you thought that was all you'd find about jealousy in Taylor's songs, you'd be wrong!

You belong with me

She wears high heels

I wear sneakers

She's cheer captain and I'm on the bleachers

*Dreaming about the day when you wake up
And find that what you're looking for
Has been here the whole time*

Or this real shocker:

Speak Now

*I am not the kind of girl
Who should be rudely bargin' in
On a white veil occasion
But you are not the kind of boy
Who should be marryin' the wrong girl*

... where she wants to steal someone's fiancé just as he's about to get married!

I think this is her most recently released song:

Gorgeous

*You're so cool, it makes me hate you so much (I hate you so much)
You're so gorgeous
I can't say anything to your face
'Cause look at your face, and I'm so furious
At you for making me feel this way
But, what can I say? You're gorgeous*

And I read, that since September Taylor's been working on a new song...

- Guess what it's called?
 - Jealous much!

The theme of jealousy is pretty frequent...

... in Taylor Swift's songs

- And her songs on that theme are very popular
 - Maybe it's because she's saying out loud, what many of us keep on the inside?

As much fun as it was analyzing Taylor's songs...

... I'm still left with this problem:

- **If jealousy is so pervasive in our 9-5's and in our relationships
... and if it goes right to the heart of our self esteem
WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?!**

Maybe it's only me...

- But I can't recall ever reading or hearing anything helpful on this topic

- We just know that we shouldn't be jealous
 - *So it's like there's just one big rule about jealousy that says: 'Don't do it!'*

What was helpful...

... was Andy Stanley's book: 'Enemies of the Heart'

- He says jealousy is not about you and the person you're jealous of
 - It's about you and God

We are jealous because we are unhappy with what God gave us

- That's the root of the issue
- The fact that that girl in your class (or in your office) can fit into size 6 jeans and you can't, is not her fault
- She can't do anything about that
 - She can't change you
 - She didn't make you like you are
 - And she didn't make herself like she is
 - ◆ God did

At heart, you're unhappy because God didn't make you slim

- With all such examples there's a sense that God owes me something
 - I should have better than what I got
- God could have made you more talented
 - Or smarter,
 - Or more socially relaxed
 - ◆ It's completely within his power

So when you're jealous...

... your beef is actually with God, no one else - just God

- That's a hard reality to face

It's even harder when we realise that...

... we can reduce our own motivations down to the phrase: ***'I am not getting what I want'***

In the book Andy Stanley says: "Let's be honest for a moment..."

- Have you ever taken pleasure from seeing someone more successful than you get demoted?
 - Or bomb out in a test?
- Did you ever feel a twinge of satisfaction that your sister in law didn't look quite as good at the beach this summer as she did last year?
 - Have you ever taken satisfaction in the ding on your neighbour's car door?

You've never had those kind of feelings before have you?

- Of course not! Me neither!

And what about resentment?

- What category of people do you resent?
 - Dig around a bit
 - Who raises your hackles?
 - Professionals, performers, business executives, marrieds, singles, children, retirees?

Look deeper...

... and you'll find that your resentment, with all its shallow justifications

... is really a cover for jealousy

Or this really insightful comment I got from Pastor Rob:

- As Rob Lovatt puts it: 'Setting out to be successful often means you end up jealous'
 - That's really worth thinking about

All the ugliness that flows into our lives as a result of jealousy

... flows from our dissatisfaction with God, who has not given us what we want

The person we are jealous of is almost irrelevant

- If it's not them who is richer, more talented or just plain luckier than you, it will be someone else
 - Jealousy shows the true condition of our hearts - probably more than anything else
 - As long as it rages unchecked in our lives, no relationship we have is safe

So here's what the book says we should do about it:

[Loosening the power of jealousy in your life. Four powerful statements]

1. Own it! Say to God, 'I am unhappy with what you gave me and I want better'

- he can handle prayers like that
 - ... and you're right; He could have given you better than you got
- honesty is the only place to start to really deal with this
- it's taking a long hard look in the mirror - not across the street or across the aisle
- focusing on somebody else fans the flames of jealousy
 - focusing on our own hearts begins the process of quenching it

2. Understand that our desires and pleasures are not best dealt with by continually trying to satisfy them

- that's a big challenge!
 - do we get into a cycle that drives us?
 - and how much of our life could be affected by that?

3. Recognise that our disappointment with God is misplaced - we owe God a debt we could never repay

- There's a point we need to get to where we say,
 - 'Sorry God. I realise that I have struggled to accept the way you made me. I've wanted more and better. But I have no right to demand that of you. You have gifted me in many ways - sorry that I have not been content with these. You gave me everything I have including relationship with you through the cross. These things are debts I could never repay. Thankyou.'

4. Make a habit of celebrating the success of others

- If someone did something well but you just can't bring yourself to compliment them,
... that's a signal that something is wrong
... and that's exactly the time to challenge yourself, to go and say: 'Well done!'
- The book says, when you do this...
... when you make a habit of this, your feelings will eventually follow

How might those things impact your life, and your 9-5?

Jealousy has played a huge role in my life

... as I believe it does with anyone who is ambitious

- As a result of this passage and this book I need to go away and think
... about how I have struggled for so much of my life to be content with what God gave me
 - And what an insult that must be to God, given the skills and gifts he's given me
- But I also realised God has done some work on this issue in my life

I met with the Mt Albert Church Ministers the other day

... and we realised that inter church meetings like that only work when everyone in the room wants the best for each other

- I'm really lucky to have found myself in Mt Albert where all the churches have great ministers
... and are all genuinely interested in and supportive of each other

As I walked into the Salvation Army for that ministers' meeting...

... I noticed this flier:

- It says: 'Mt Albert Celebrates ... Parihaka'
 - Oh my goodness, I thought, ***the Sallies are doing it too!***

And I just know that a younger me would have been jealous

- Hold on ... this was our idea; our community event
 - You can't be doing it too!

When I brought the flier back to MABC...

... one of my staff looked at the flier and said: 'Oh ... but our flier is much better than theirs!'

- I laughed, and we both knew how ridiculous that kind of thinking is

I'm really excited that another local church is doing this

- Parihaka is NZ's best untold story - and it has a powerful Christian message
 - I'd love it if every church in the country was inviting their community to celebrate it
- Imagine the impact on our country if we did
 - Communities all over NZ, getting inspired about racial togetherness and loving their enemies
 - ◆ That would be incredible!
 - ◆ And what a witness to the country if it were churches that were providing the opportunity for this!

So we come to the end of this message...

... on a seemingly unimportant and redundant story in Acts

... with what I believe is an incredibly powerful challenge:

- How determined are you to beat the power of jealousy in your life?
- How different would it be in your 9-5 and in all relationships

... and particularly in your own relationship with God,

... if you did?

Prayer:

Business people stand:

- As business people you provide things that we need, but you don't always have guarantees of financial security from it
- So we recognise the particular stresses of running a business
 - The constantly changing and sometimes fickle markets
 - New consumer trends that can suddenly threaten your livelihood
 - The challenges of leading and of following... and of how to balance productivity with good values and care for people
- These things can make this vocation incredibly hard

In line with today's passage, and it's theme of jealousy

... Lord, it must be really hard not to be jealous when another business seems more secure than your own

... and everything suddenly swings in their favour

- And there must be times Lord, when it feels really unfair

Help our business folk...

... in the spiritual journey of this

- You've called them, like all of us, to be missionaries

All Stand

1. Own it! Say to God, 'I am unhappy with what you gave me and I want better'
2. Understand that our desires and pleasures are not best dealt with by continually trying to satisfy them
3. Recognise that our disappointment with God is misplaced - we owe God a debt we could never repay
4. Make a habit of celebrating the success of others