

## SCRIPTURE STUDIES

**SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS****ACTS CHAPTER 17****“THE TALE OF THREE CITIES”**

Some of you have read Charles Dickens' classic "The Tale of Two Cities." Here in Acts chapter seventeen we have the tale of three cities: Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Let us, in our imaginations, travel with Paul and his Truth Troupe as they continue their evangelizing efforts in Greece.

While Dr. Luke did not record every event and every conversation, he did record enough highlights for us to get an understanding of how the Good News of Jesus Christ impacts a society. Some embrace the message joyously while others reject the message vehemently, as we shall see as we move from city to city. So, let us begin this very interesting journey.

**I. ESTABLISHING A SOCIETY OF SAVED SINNERS IN THESSALONICA.** Acts 17:1-9  
*“When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.” (v.1)*

Thessalonica was the capitol of Macedonia and a city of considerable size and influence. It had a population of approximately 70,000 at the time. As was Paul's custom, he went to population centers where he could maximize his Gospel outreach. Also, *“As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue...” (v.2a)*

**A. There Was Reasoning From The Word of God.**

*“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” (v.2b-3)*

Paul and company initially concentrated their efforts of evangelism in Thessalonica where there were people who had some knowledge of divine revelation and that was in the synagogue. These Jews had exposure to and respect for the Old Testament Scriptures. Notice Paul's approach in communicating the Scriptures to them:

First, he *“reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”* He drew from the Old Testament pertinent passages which highlighted the Messiah, and on the basis of what the Old Testament was saying about Him. He was employing an age old principle in teaching which is to start with the known and move to that which is not known. In other words, Paul built a bridge to Jesus Christ.

Second, he explained the verses that he cited from the Old Testament. He opened them up completely and made them clear and plain to his listeners.

Third, he gave evidence that Christ had to suffer, rise again, and that Jesus was the Messiah.

These Jews believed in a coming Messiah but they saw Him only as an earthly king. Paul sought to convince them that, according to the Scriptures, Christ must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. Paul ended his message by affirming that this Jesus whom he preached was indeed their Messiah for whom they were looking.

What Paul did is precisely what missionaries to Jews, or to anyone else for that matter, does today. The same pattern is followed: preaching the Word, explaining the Word and presenting the Gospel.

### **B. There Was Receptivity of The Word of God.**

*“And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” (v.4)*

Notice in verse four the phrase “*devout Greeks.*” These were religious people both men and women. The phrase “*leading women*” is referring to leaders in business and industry. Later on Paul writes to these believers. Here is part of that letter:

*“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” (I Thess. 1:5-7)*

In spite of opposition in Thessalonica a church was planted that grew and impacted all of Macedonia and Greece! It has been said that “The doors of opportunity swing on the hinges of opposition.” We see the door of opportunity swinging wide open in Thessalonica in spite of the opposition. The beginning of the ministry there was inauspicious and reminds us that we are not to “*despise the day of small things.*” (Zech. 4:10) Truly, “Little is much if God is in it.”

### **C. There Was Reaction to The Word of God.**

*“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.” (vs.5-9)*

One of the converts of the ministry of Paul was the man named Jason. Apparently his home had become a kind of base of operations for the newly formed church. Perhaps that is where Paul and his team were staying while they were in Thessalonica.

When the mob could not find Paul and his fellow missionaries, they dragged Jason and some of the other converts before the authorities. The charge brought against Paul and his fellow workers, and secondarily, against Jason for harboring them, was not only that they were upsetting the world, but that they claimed that Jesus and not Caesar was king.

Regarding another king, Warren Wiersbe remarks that, "The Greek word translated "another" means "another of a different kind," that is, a king unlike Caesar. When you read Paul's two Thessalonian letters, you see the strong emphasis he gave in Thessalonica on the kingship of Christ and the promise of His return. Of course, our Lord's kingdom is neither political nor "of this world" (John 18:36-37), but we cannot expect unsaved pagans to understand this. The kingship of Jesus Christ is unlike that of the rulers of this world. He conquers with ambassadors, not armies; and His weapons are truth and love. He brings men peace by upsetting the peace and turning things upside down! He conquers through His cross where He died for a world of lost sinners. He even died for His enemies!"(Bible Exposition Commentary)

The authorities could do nothing but take a security bond from Jason, making him responsible for the missionaries' future actions in that city. Then Paul and Silas were secretly sent out of town and on their way.

Before we leave the city of Thessalonica, I want you to notice that a tribute in disguise was paid to the servants of God in verse six: *"These that have turned the world upside down have come here also."* That is a great commendation! It is often the impression today that the preaching of the Word of God is not supposed to disturb the status quo. It is also often the impression that the preacher is supposed to be a namby-pamby sort of fellow and blend in with every-one, siding with the existing political system.

But Christianity is revolutionary. The world today needs turning upside down, or rather, right side up! But this revolution must take place in individual hearts first. We will have a changed world when we have changed people. We will have a better world when we have better people in it! When Jesus Christ comes into a life, He does not just rearrange it, He makes it new! *"Old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new."* (II Cor. 5:17)

A man bought a painting and tried to fit it into his room. He hung it here, there and everywhere but it did not fit anywhere. He finally called the painter who came to his home, looked about and said, "You can't fit the picture to the room. You must fit the room to the picture."

You cannot take Jesus Christ into your life with all of its clutter and sin and fit Him into your sinful lifestyle. You cannot just rearrange the furniture. There are some furnishings in your life that will have to be tossed on the garbage dump when Jesus Christ moves in!

## **II. EXHORTING A SYNAGOGUE OF SCRIPTURE SEARCHERS IN BEREIA. 17:10-14**

*"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds."* (17:10-13)

Paul & Co. are on the move again. Sixty miles away was Berea and the Holy Spirit directed them to go there.

### **A. The Commendation Of The Bereans.**

*“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness....”* (v.11a)

It must have been a refreshing experience for Paul to find such a company of hungry souls. They were more noble than those in Thessalonica. Their nobility is revealed in the fact that the Thessalonians had to be persuaded by argumentation while the Bereans were persuaded by independent investigation. These Bereans were apparently more teachable.

How do we respond to the proclamation of God's Word? Do we respond by saying, "That's just your opinion!" Or do we carry our Bibles and open them when the preacher is preaching or the teacher is teaching, comparing Scripture with Scripture?

### **B. The Concentration of The Bereans.**

*“....and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”* (v.11b)

Notice v. 2 *“three Sabbaths”* and v.11 *“searched the Scriptures daily.”* When the Bible becomes a seven-day-a-week book and not just a one-day-a-week book we will see the mercy drops become showers of blessings!

I have said it repeatedly throughout my pulpit ministry: “Concentration leads to consecration!” When people seriously concentrate upon what God is saying in His Word, lives will be transformed. The hearers in Berea were seven-day-a-week Scripture searchers. They did not believe Paul's message until they had confirmed it by searching the Scriptures to see if what he said was true. No wonder the Bereans stand out so admirably even to this day.

### **C. The Conversion of The Bereans.**

*“Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.”* (v.12-13)

There were two types of responses by the hearers in Berea: some received the Word of God and some rebelled against it.

*Some received the message.*

Compare this with the people in Thessalonica in verse four: *“Some of them believed.”* Concerning those in Berea we read in verse 12, *“many of them believed.”* “Some” in Thessalonica -- *“many”* in Berea. We have Thessalonian type believers in every church as well as Berean type believers. Which type are you?

In a recent poll it was revealed that three-fourths of adult Americans said they believe the Bible to be God's Word, however, only 53% of them could identify the four Gospels! People in America may be carrying the Bible, but, evidently, they are not caring about the Bible enough to daily search it.

Christian women had gathered in a home for Bible study. The leader, much to her dismay, discovered, when she arrived at the Bible Study, that she had forgotten her Bible. When she

arrived at the home in which the Bible study was to be conducted, she asked the hostess if she could borrow hers. The hostess looked where she usually kept it, but it wasn't there! She searched for it everywhere but still couldn't find it. She was thinking, "What will those ladies think of me?" Running downstairs, she said to the newly employed cleaning woman, "Pearl, have you seen my Bible?" The maid replied, "Praise the Lord!" The lady of the house said, "What do you mean, Pearl?" Beaming with joy the maid said, "The first thing I do when I go to work at a new place is hide the Bible if they have one." The employer asked the maid, "Why do you do that?" Pearl replied, "Just to find out how long it takes for people to miss it! I put yours in the linen closet under the sheets! I'm glad you missed it!"

Do you know where your Bible is? How long has it been since you read an entire chapter at one sitting? The poet Amos Wells addressed the following poem to casual Bible readers:

*"You who like to play at Bible,  
Dip and dabble here and there,  
Just before you kneel all weary,  
And yawn through a hurried prayer;  
You treat the Crown of Writings  
As you treat no other book;  
Just a paragraph disjointed,  
Just a quick and careless look;  
Try a worthier procedure,  
Try a broad and steady view,  
And your soul it will enrapture  
When you read the Bible through."*

The Word of God is like a deep mine, with jewels rich and rare hidden in its mighty depths for every searcher there. Let's be Berean Christians!

*Some rebelled against the message.*

I like the KJV description of the trouble-makers in Thessalonica: "*lewd fellows of the baser sort.*" (17:5) These were the fellows who followed Paul and friends from Thessalonica to Berea and stirred up trouble. We read, "*But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.*" (vs.13-14)

It seems that "*lewd fellows of the baser sort*" did not all live in Thessalonica! Their tribe has proliferated and populated every place where the gospel has reached. I have had the privilege of preaching in most of the States in the United States and in many foreign countries and have seen the devil's minions at work everywhere God is doing His work. However, praise the Lord! Jesus is building His church and, as He said, "*The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" (Matt. 16:18)

We're on the winning Team! The devil is a loser! Let's keep preaching, praying and pressing ahead! That was Paul and friend's attitude for they moved on to the next city – Athens.

**III. EVANGELIZING A SUPERSTITIOUS, SATANIC STRONGHOLD IN ATHENS. 17:15-34**

*“So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens....”* (v.15a) A three-hundred mile journey by ship across the Aegean Sea brought Paul to Athens. Silas and Timothy temporarily remained in Berea. However, later Paul sent for them *“and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.”* (v.15b)

**I. PAUL’S AUDIENCE. 17:16-21**

Athens, model of Greek culture, epitome of Greek scholarship and the ultimate display of Greek philosophy was all showcased in this city. It would be logical to assume that this was a very enlightened city. However, just the opposite was true. It was decaying in an atmosphere of stygian darkness. What a setting for the *“light of the glorious gospel of Christ.”* (II Cor. 4:4)

**A. It Was an Idolatrous Audience.**

*“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.”* (v.16)

The city was filled with idols. There was a god on every street corner and upon every hilltop. Petronius, a Latin writer, said that “In Athens it was easier to find a god than a man.” It has been said that there were as many as 30,000 different statues, temples, shrines and symbols of gods in the city. Temples were erected to such gods and goddesses as Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom; Demeter, the Goddess of the Earth, and Zeus, the King of Gods, etc.

It is said that in ancient Greece a plague once swept through the city of Athens. To pacify the angry deities, who were believed to be responsible, altars were erected to every god known to the Greeks. Yet the scourge continued. Finally in desperation, one more altar was built. It bore the words: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whether by coincidence or because the disease had run its course, the plague subsided. Many years passed. Then one day Paul visited Athens on his second missionary journey.

What stirred Paul was not the artistic beauty of the statues, shrines, altars and temples, but what these works of art represented. The populace was worshipping everything and anything, therefore, in reality they were worshipping nothing! These idols demonstrated the depth of degeneration and degradation to which the people of Athens had gone. Is it any wonder that Paul’s *“spirit was provoked within him”*? (v.16)

**B. It Was an Intellectual Audience.**

*“Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?”* (v.18)

Athens was different from any other place that Paul had visited in that it was the most culturally celebrated city in Greece. It was the center of finance, art, literature, politics and philosophy. It was the home of such men as Socrates, Plato, Epicurus, Zeno and Aristotle. In all fields of knowledge it was the most advanced. It was the university city of the world.

There were two prominent schools of philosophy with which Paul had to contend. They were the Epicureans and the Stoics.



### *The Epicureans.*

These were the followers of Epicurus who taught that pleasure was the main purpose of life. They were materialists and atheists. They believed that man should free himself from all belief in gods; that the universe was created by chance and that since there was no future life, their motto was, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

### *The Stoics.*

The Stoics were the followers of Zeno who believed that God was everything and everything was God. The universe and God were one. Actually they were pantheists. "Pan" is Latin for "all" and since God is all, all is God. These among others, were the schools of thought that comprised Paul's audience.

## **C. It Was an Ignorant Audience.**

*"As I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." (v.23)*

To say that Paul had an intellectual audience and then say that his audience was ignorant sounds like double talk. However, his audience, although intelligent about some matters, was ignorant about the most important matter with which humans are confronted. True, they were intelligent but ignorant; yes, they had wisdom and worship. However, they did not know the only true and living God or His Son Jesus Christ! They were no better off, as far as their souls salvation was concerned, than the most uncivilized heathen.

This is the same condition faced today by those who preach and teach the Gospel of the grace of God! The places of the greatest cultural and intellectual advancement are the places of the greatest ignorance of the salvation that God has provided through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of our great American secular universities are centers of skepticism, agnosticism and atheism.

These were the people to whom Paul preached. These were learned persons who listened to a message that they had never before heard. What an opportunity Paul had and he took advantage of it masterfully.

## **II. PAUL'S ADDRESS. 17:22-34**

As he stood on Mars Hill, he observed the inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Seizing the opportunity, he proclaimed, *"The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you...."* (v.22)

### **A. He Commenced With Their Concept Of God.**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon remarked about verses 22 and 23 as follows: "His beautiful address is somewhat spoiled in our version, and therefore we will a little revise it." (I pause here for this comment: Spurgeon used the King James Version of the Bible. He is known as Mr. Orthodox; as Mr. Baptist; as one of the supreme models of correct doctrine and preservers of the esteemed King James Bible. Yet, he dared to correct that version! In the eyes of some in our day that would be the anathema of anathemas!)

Then Spurgeon gives his translation: *“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that ye are on all points very God-fearing.”* (The King James Version reads, *“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.”*) Spurgeon continues with verse 23 as follows: *“For as I passed by, and beheld your sacred things, I found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What, therefore, without knowing it, ye worship, that I announce to you.”* (The King James Version reads: *“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”*) Spurgeon’s remarks on this passage of Scripture are from Spurgeon’s Devotional Bible, Baker Book House, 1974; November 6, morning.

From all of this we must come away with admiration for Paul’s tactful and courteous approach in addressing such an audience. He did not chastise his listeners but began by referencing their devotedness in erecting an altar to a god whom they did not know. This is a classic segue going from what they admittedly did not know to informing them about the One of whom they were ignorant.

**B. He Continued With The Characterization of God.** (vs.24-29)

*“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”*

Paul gave the Greeks an excellent short course in Theology::

- He is the Creator of the universe, v.24
- He is Lord of the universe and controls it, v.24
- He does not dwell in an idol or temple, v.24
- He is the Author of all life, v.25
- He is the Sovereign Ruler in the affairs of mankind, v.26
- He is not unapproachable but is near to all, v.27
- He is not an inanimate object but a living Being, v.29
- He commands all to repent, v.30
- He has ordained One by Whom He will judge the world of mankind, v.31
- He has raised that One from the dead, v.31

The word “theology” is from two Greek words: the word “theos” meaning “God” and the word “logos” meaning “word.” Theology literally means “the word about God” or “the study of God.” Paul’s classic sermon at Areopagus (Mars Hill), was a masterful Theology 101 Course! The preaching of God is basic to and preparatory to presenting the Gospel.



Just to say that “God loves you and has a great plan for your life” leaves unaddressed the identity and nature of God. The person to whom we make that statement may not have any more knowledge of the true and living God than the Greeks on Mars Hill had. Who is the God that you say “loves me and has a great plan for my life?” Where is He? Why do I need Him? What plan does He have for my life? To the average person in America the concept of “God” is veiled in mystery. He is just about as “unknown” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as He was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Athens! We who propagate God-truth should follow preacher Paul’s example and lay a biblical foundation for the presentation of the Good News. If one does not know the basics about God, that one will not understand why the Gospel is Good News.

### **III. PAUL’S APPEAL. 17:30-31**

*“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”*

These people had gathered to hear something new and different, and they heard the most different message they had ever heard in their lives! It was a message confronting the listeners with truth about the living God and appealing to them to respond positively to Him.

#### **A. Paul Appealed To Them To Recognize The God Whom He Had Preached.**

The first response of an enlightened mind is to acknowledge that there is a God and to Him we are accountable. Paul made known the UNKNOWN GOD to them and then extolled His attributes, thereby giving them information about God that they had not previously possessed. Consequently, they are now responsible to act upon that information.

#### **B. Paul Appealed To Them To Repent of Their State as Sinners Against God.**

God *“commands all men everywhere to repent.”* (Verse 30) Paul appealed to the Athenians to repent of their idolatries, turn from their idols, and worship the one, only, living and true God. Repentance means not only sorrow for sin but a turning. Repentance is a change of mind toward God with a corresponding change of direction of life. Paul reminded the believers in Thessalonica *“how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”* (I Thess.1:9) That is repentance!

Three of the major issues concerning repentance that must be brought to bear upon the consciences of sinners to bring them to the point of repentance are:

*First*, Sinners must be made aware of the God against Whom they have sinned. They have sinned against the God Who is good! Paul asked the readers of his Roman Epistle, *“Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”* (Rom.2:4)

*Second*, a Bible based knowledge of God, produces godly fear. Of unrepentant sinners Paul writes, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* (Rom.3:18)

*Third*, there will be no repentance unless and until the Holy Spirit brings conviction. *“He will*

*convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*" (John 16:8-10) No sinner will genuinely repent unless the Holy Spirit uses the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to bring the sinner to Jesus Christ for salvation.

### **C. Paul Appealed To Them To Remember The Coming Day of Reckoning.**

*"Because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."* (v.31)

The results of Paul's message were threefold:

Some mocked, *"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked"* – v.32

Some procrastinated, *"while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter'"* – v.32

Some believed, *"However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."* - v.34

Paul sowed the seed but it did not bring forth much fruit until after he had left. Church history takes up the story from here and reports that a strong and influential church was eventually established at Athens.

### **Conclusion**

The basic nature of man has not changed since the days of the Athenians. We continue to have among us the worshipers of Athene, the Goddess of Intellect; we have the worshipers of Demeter, the Goddess of Nature, etc. The materialists, the atheists, the intellectuals, the naturalists, the humanists - to all sinners there is the same message. It is the message of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance means a change in thinking about God with a corresponding change of the direction of one's life. Change is the result of the Holy Spirit's conviction, bringing sinners to the point of decision making. A spiritual change will take place when persons choose to repent and obey God. Making the wrong choice is very expensive.

Adam's choice cost him Eden; Esau's choice cost him his birthright; Achan's choice cost him his life; Lot's choice cost him his home and family; Saul's choice cost him his kingdom; Judas' choice cost him his apostleship; Demas' choice cost him his discipleship; the Athenians' choice cost them eternity. *"Choose you this day whom you will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

When Paul and friends came to Athens they planted in the soil of the souls of the listeners the flower of hope. In some lives the flower bloomed, in others it died because of unbelief, neglect and procrastination.

There is a story about a Frenchman named Charney. He incurred the displeasure of Napoleon and was put into a dungeon. He felt forsaken by his friends and forgotten by

everyone in the outside world. In loneliness and despair he took a stone and scratched on the wall of his cell, "Nobody cares."

One day a green sprout came up through the cracks in the stones on the floor of the dungeon and began to grow upward toward the light in the tiny window at the top of the cell. The prisoner kept part of the water brought to him each day by the jailer and poured it on the blade of green. It grew until at last it became a plant with a beautiful blue flower. As the petals opened in full blossom, Charney crossed out the words previously written on the wall of his cell and above them wrote, "God cares."

But God had a further blessing for this prisoner and the story ends even more surprisingly. In the cell next to Charney's was a man who had a young daughter who was permitted to visit the prison. The girl was happy to see the beautiful flower in that dark dungeon and told others about the beautiful blue bloom in the darkened cell. The news reached the Empress Josephine, who commented: "A man who so devotedly loves and tends a flower cannot be a bad man." And so she persuaded the Emperor to set Charney free. He carried his flower home and carefully tended it the remainder of his life. It had taught him to believe and trust in God.

If there is any seed of faith in you; any sprout of concern about standing before God on Judgment Day; any sprig of an awakened conscience beginning to grow in the darkness of your sinfulness, turn to God in repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and the flower of new birth will bloom in your soul!

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