

SAVIOR AND KING

ACTS 17



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Savior and King: Acts 17
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Introduction to Acts 17

The ongoing work of Christ, launched into the European theater, follows the same pattern as we have seen thus far in the book of Acts. Preach the Gospel, do good works, gain some converts, start some churches, get in trouble with the authorities, suffer reproach and worse, establish the believers and their churches, and move on to the next town.

This pattern of launch, establish, disperse, and replicate will continue for the remainder of the book of Acts, becoming yet another template for how we should expect the ongoing work of Christ and His Kingdom to progress in places and times beyond the New Testament.

The Gospel knows no limitations of culture, geography, or worldview. It enters all, bringing the light of Christ and His truth to bear against the darkness of unbelief, oppression, and the Lie. And, as we shall see, the power of the Gospel works on the hearts of all kinds of people, in all kinds of situations.

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Reasoning, Explaining, and Demonstrating

Pray Psalm 149.1, 2.

Praise the LORD!

Sing to the LORD a new song,

And His praise in the assembly of saints.

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

Sing Psalm 149.1, 2.

(Toulon: [*I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art*](#))

Sing to the Lord a glorious song and new!

Praise Him you people, to Whom praise is due!

Let us rejoice, let us be glad in Him

Who has created us and cleansed our sin.

Read and meditate on Acts 17.1-4.

Preparation

1. What did Paul do in the synagogue?

2. How did the people respond?

Meditation

Paul and his team moved on to the west and south, stopping in Thessalonica. Because a Jewish community was there, they resorted to the synagogue (v. 1). Even though he had turned to the Gentiles as his primary mission field, Paul never gave up on the Jews.

We note Paul's patient and deliberate approach: reasoning, explaining, demonstrating from the Scriptures – the Old Testament – for three Sabbaths, and we can imagine, during the weeks between those Sabbaths (vv. 2, 3). Evangelism is about communicating, and communicating involves all the tools and methods of reason and human relations. And evangelism is about Jesus, and why He must be received as the Messiah of God (v. 3).

We also note that Paul's arguing from the Old Testament Scriptures was persuasive, not merely to Jews, but to devout Greeks and high-born women. The Word of God is living and powerful. We must always keep it in the forefront of our witness for the Lord.

In his account, Luke seems to focus especially on the cities to which Paul would later write epistles – Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus. Luke would have had the advantage both of Paul's companionship and his writings in putting his history together in a way that would complement Paul's ministry.

The ongoing work of Christ goes on, as more people hear the Good News, and more people believe. Is there a pattern here? One we should be seeking to emulate in our own Personal Mission Fields, and in our churches and communities?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Explaining and demonstrating. Paul did this in Thessalonica and all the other places he went. He was emulating the way Jesus explained and demonstrated all the Scripture pertaining to Himself, after His resurrection.

Luke wrote about how Jesus conversed with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: As they were on their way home, discussing everything that had happened “Jesus Himself drew near and went with them” (Lk. 24.15). They didn’t realize that it was Jesus Who had joined their journey. So, when He asked what they were talking about, they were almost impolitely astonished that He appeared unaware of the events. “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?” (Lk. 24.18) They surely could’ve toned that down a bit; but they go on to tell Him about the crucifixion and the disappearance of the buried Body of Jesus saying, “Him they did not see” (Lk. 24.24).

Then the demonstrating and explaining starts with a rejoinder that mirrors their astonishment with Him: “Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’” (Lk. 24.25, 26)

Now He has their full attention. “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Lk. 24.27) After Jesus had left them, they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk. 24.32)

And that is exactly what we are called to do in our Personal Mission Field. As Moses told the children of Israel: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6.6-9). We are commanded to do it; knowing that the results are always up to the Holy Spirit.

Explaining and demonstrating. As we are going. Wherever, whatever, whenever, however, and with whomever. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4.2).

As Luke taught us: do it just like Jesus and Paul did.

For reflection

1. Reasoning, explaining, demonstrating. How would you define each of these words?
2. How do these words help you understand what you should be doing in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Will everyone you talk with be persuaded? Will “some” (v. 4)? What should you do for those who are persuaded?

He made both things known from the Scriptures at the same time, that the Christ had to suffer and to rise and that this suffering and resurrection pertained to none other than Jesus of Nazareth. The Venerable Bede (672-735), *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* 17.3

Pray Psalm 149.3-9.

Rejoice in the salvation of the Lord, and prepare in prayer for the ongoing work the Lord will do in and through you today. Pray for an opportunity to talk with someone about the Gospel and to encourage a fellow believer.

Sing Psalm 149.3-9.

(Toulon: [*I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art*](#))

Praise Him with dance, with tambourine and lyre!

To be so praised is God’s one great desire.

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Lord, beautify Your holy ones with grace;
show us the mercy of Your saving face.

Sing to the Lord, exult with great delight!
Sing on your beds with joy to God by night!
Sing praise and take His Word into your hand;
publish His grace and wrath in every land!

2 Preaching the Kingship of Jesus

Pray Psalm 110.1-3.

The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!
Your people *shall be* volunteers
In the day of Your power;
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,
You have the dew of Your youth.

Sing Psalm 110.1-3.

(Aurelia: [The Church's One Foundation](#))

“Sit by Me at My right hand,” the LORD says to my Lord,
“until I make Your foot stand on all who hate Your Word.”
From in His Church the Savior rules all His enemies;
while those who know His favor go forth the Lord to please.

Read Acts 17.1-9; meditate on verses 5-9.

Preparation

1. How did the “evil men” respond to the ministry of Paul and Silas?
2. What did they say about Paul and Silas?

Meditation

The actual charge levied here is that Paul and his team “practice another King, saying Him to be Jesus” (πράσσοσι βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν, v. 7). Their message, their way of life, the nature of their companionship – all these spoke to the people of Thessalonica. And what they lived and spoke was a threat to their comfortable *status quo*. Paul and those who followed Jesus were different. They proclaimed a new Kingdom and a new King, and they lived as though what they preached was true.

They were turning the Roman world upside-down (v. 6).

Jealousy has a way of showing up when leaders see their followers being drained away in devotion to something other than their cause (v 5). Jealousy can lead to lies and all kinds of nasty things. This time they couldn't find the apostles to beat them, so they laid hold on Jason, who had harbored them in his house – the first house church of Thessalonica? – and extracted money from him – also a breach of Roman public policy (vv. 8, 9). The fear is that these people and this message would transform the world as the Romans knew it. As it turned out, they were right.

What we've seen from the beginning continues to be the case: The Gospel is preached, people believe and are changed, but not everybody's happy about it. The ongoing work of Jesus looks a lot like that which He began to do and teach.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The people of envy took evil men from the marketplace, gathered a mob, set all the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of hospitable Jason. Then, not finding Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason and some others

to the magistrates, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17.6).

And how were they turning the world upside-down? Were they using mobs? Were they gathering groups of people to attack unbelievers? Well, no. Not at all.

They were turning the world upside-down by what they were saying. And what exactly were they saying? They were saying that “there is another king—Jesus.” (Acts 17.7).

Are mobs pleasing to the Lord? No. Does He ever use violence to change a heart? Again, no.

What is pleasing to the Lord?

He wants us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (Mic. 6.8). He wants us to supply the needs of those who are in want. This act is “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Phil. 4.18). He wants us to allow Him to make us complete in every good work, as He works in us that which is “well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ...” (Heb. 13.21).

All the violence used by the envious did not change the hearts of people. It never does. It merely creates mayhem.

When we practice the Kingship of Jesus, things happen. Lives are changed. Calmly, and with love. “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3.15-17).

And that is how the world is turned upside-down for Jesus! With a Word.

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him. (Martin Luther, 1529)*

King JESUS!

For reflection

1. What would it take for you to begin turning *your* world upside-down for Jesus?
2. What does it mean for you to “practice the Kingship of Jesus”?
3. What will you do to participate in the ongoing work of King Jesus today?

Neither rulers nor people need be troubled at the increase of real Christians, even though turbulent spirits should make religion the pretext for evil designs. Of such let us beware, from such let us withdraw, that we may show a desire to act aright in society, while we claim our right to worship God according to our consciences. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 17.1-9

Pray Psalm 110.3-7.

Offer yourself as a volunteer for the Lord and His Kingdom – all your time, energy, activities, relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Serve Him faithfully throughout the day, then rest in what He has done through you as you retire tonight.

Sing Psalm 110.3-7.

(Aurelia: [*The Church's One Foundation*](#))

Filled with the Spirit's power, in holy robes of love,
from early morning's hour they serve their Lord above.
Christ reigns a priest forever, the King of Righteousness
and King of Peace who ever His chosen ones will bless.

The Lord at Your right hand, Lord, in wrath shall shatter kings,
when judgment by His strong Word He to the nations brings.
Then, all His foes defeated, He takes His hard-won rest,
in glorious triumph seated with us, redeemed and blessed!

3 The Word in Their Wake

Pray Psalm 33.1-5.

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!
For praise from the upright is beautiful.
Praise the LORD with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.
Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.
For the word of the LORD is right,
And all His work *is done* in truth.
He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

Sing Psalm 33.1-5.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Sing with rejoicing in the Lord, for praise becomes His righteous ones!
With harps and songs raise grateful words, and let new songs of praise be sung!

Joyfully shout! His Word is true; He does His work in faithfulness.
His love prevails the whole world through; the Lord loves truth and righteousness.

Read Acts 17.1-15; Meditate on verses 10-15.

Preparation

1. How did the Bereans respond to Paul's teaching?
2. Why did Paul have to leave Berea?

Meditation

From 1 Thessalonians 1, we know that Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was effective, even though the situation made it impossible for them to remain. He and his team moved on to Berea and, as was their wont, they went to the synagogue as soon as possible (v. 10).

Paul's consistent and thorough use of the Scriptures drove his hearers to search the Word for themselves, which was good (v. 11). The living Word of God is powerful to penetrate the souls of men, but they must be exposed to it for this to happen (v. 12; cf. Heb. 4.12). Many believed (v. 12), and the word got out, bringing rabble-rousers to Berea (v. 13). Paul departed for Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy to set things in order before joining him (vv. 14, 15).

We note Luke's reference to Paul's preaching as "the word of God" (v. 13). Indeed it was, as his epistles would be also, and not simply because they were consistent with what the Scriptures teach. Paul was inspired by the Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 3.4, 5), and Luke seemed to recognize this even before Paul began writing. This is a hallmark of Paul's ministry. He was *grounded* in the Word, made sure to *use all of it* (Acts 20.27), and was careful not to *go beyond* what was written there in any of his teaching (cf. 1 Cor. 4.6).

Luke emphasizes the centrality of Scripture in the ongoing work of Christ for all aspects of life in the Kingdom of Christ. We cannot expect to fulfill our Kingdom-and-glory callings apart from reliance on and obedience to the Word of God.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Do you want to be fair-minded? Search the Scriptures. Do you want to receive the Word with all readiness? Search the Scriptures. Do you want to solidify your faith? Search the Scriptures. Do you want to have your sins pointed out to you so that you can repent of them? Search the Scriptures. Do you long to discern your own thoughts and the intentions of your heart? Search the Scriptures. Do you want to have your life in line with God's purposes and blessings? Search the Scriptures.

It is a puzzlement that Christians do not read the Word of God more than they do. He did not leave us here on earth wondering what we are to do, how we are to think, or in what way we are to behave.

For many things we attempt, a manual exists to guide us. How to run your computer. How to make your appliances function properly. How much medicine should you take? Where to put the gas or electric outlet to make your car run. What are the functions and demands at our place of employment? We don't just go out into our lives willy-nilly without any idea about how to do things. We read and study to find things out.

So why do we feel we can live like God intends without fully acquainting ourselves with His way?

The people of Berea were far more noble and fair-minded than the folks in Thessalonica because they received and searched the Word daily. Many were not even believers at the time, but they became believers because they searched this holy Word out (Acts 17.11).

In this Word is all the truth we need – living and powerful, able to equip us for every good work (Heb. 4.12; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). Let your eyes roam over Psalm 119 and see how powerful and essential the Word is for our lives. Search the Scriptures daily, and live as the Lord intends. You'll leave a wake of truth and grace wherever you go.

For reflection

1. Why do you think so many Christians find it hard to read the Word of God daily?
2. What have you found helpful to keep you searching the Scriptures daily?
3. Whom will you encourage today to read and search the Scriptures daily?

The doctrine of Christ does not fear inquiry; advocates for his cause desire no more than that people will fully and fairly examine whether things are so or not. Those are truly noble, and likely to be more and more so, who make the Scriptures their rule, and consult them accordingly. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 17.10-15

Pray Psalm 33.10-22.

Praise God that He watches over you as your soul waits on Him. Call on Him to give you the strength of His Word, that you may serve Him faithfully today, keeping your eye on Jesus as He keeps His eye on you.

Sing Psalm 33.10-22.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

He nullifies the nations' plans; forever stands His sov'reign Word.

All they are blessed who with Him stand – the chosen people of the Lord.

God from His throne looks down on men; He knows our works and made our hearts.
Let not Your Church, let none depend on strength or skill or human arts.

God watches those who fear His Name, who hope upon His grace and love;
He keeps their souls from death and shame who trust in Him Who reigns above.

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God is our Helper and our Shield; upon us let Your grace descend!
We hope in You; to You we yield; we trust in Jesus to the end.

4 Seeking the Lost

Pray Psalm 71.1-3.

In You, O LORD, I put my trust;
Let me never be put to shame.
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save me,
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

Sing Psalm 71.1-3.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

In You, O Lord, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be.

Read Acts 17.1-21; meditate on verses 16-21.

Preparation

1. What bothered Paul in Athens?
2. How did he learn about this?

Meditation

Paul sought the lost, just as Jesus did (Lk. 19.11), because he had been sent into the world just as Jesus was sent (Jn. 20.21). Later he would tell us to imitate him as he imitates Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1).

Paul “reasoned in the synagogue” and “in the marketplace.” In the marketplace Paul might have expected to find philosophers from various schools of thought, milling about with their students, debating one another, expounding on this, that, or the other. Here he would have had plenty of opportunities to continue the ongoing work of Christ. Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him” over the rampant idolatry of the city, but he did not let that keep him from his work. He *might* have concluded that the Athenians, given all their idols and worldly philosophers, would not be interested in the Gospel. Instead, *he went straight to them*, reasoning and preaching as often as opportunities allowed. What idols are people clinging to in our day?

The Athenians could only barely get the gist of his message – “this new doctrine” – so they sent a delegation to invite him to make a formal presentation at the Areopagus.

Paul launched the ongoing work of Christ among the Athenians, bringing the light of truth into a very dense fog of rationalistic philosophy and pagan religion. After his visit there, we hear no more about Athens and the few hearers converted by Paul’s ministry. But this does not mean that Paul’s labors there were in vain. Sowing the Word of Jesus and His Kingdom *never* fails to accomplish what God intends (Is. 55.10, 11).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Now while Paul waited for them [Silas and Timothy] at Athens...” (Acts 17.16)

In a musical composition there can be variations on the theme of the music. So it is with Biblical waiting. It seems to me that waiting can either be done passively, or actively. And Biblical waiting is always active. Maybe not always physically active, but spiritually in motion.

Here are some variations on waiting:

“Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!”

“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.”

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry...” (Pss. 27.14; 37.7; 40.1)

“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Is. 40.31).

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.” “...but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8. 19, 23).

“...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time...for salvation” (Heb. 9.28).

Patiently. Eagerly. Courageously. Earnestly. Now while Paul waited...his spirit was provoked within him. But even in the provocation of spirit Paul found a way to be working in his Personal Mission Field. He didn't just fume over the idolatry, he actively and daily reasoned in the synagogue and in the marketplace with those who happened to be there (Acts 17.16, 17).

And just so we don't get discouraged in our own spirits about not being as eloquent as Paul, Luke tells us what the Athenians' response to his speaking was: “What does this babbler want to say?” And “he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods” (Acts 17.18).

Maybe not something he put on his next job resume?

But seeking the lost is a matter of our hearts. And telling the Good News doesn't depend on eloquence. Therefore, waiting on the LORD to lead, guide, and empower us is all we are called to do. Albeit faithfully. So we eagerly and actively wait. We read the Word daily. We pray. We babble. We proclaim.

The Holy Spirit is quite able to handle the rest!

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory, and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24, 25).

For reflection

1. Paul demonstrated a very active “waiting” on the Lord as he waited for his friends. What will waiting on the Lord look like in your life today?
2. We can imagine that Paul didn't wait too long to start conversations that led to the Gospel. With whom might you begin a conversation about Jesus today? How will you do that?
3. Paul was regarded pejoratively as a “babbling.” But that didn't stop his “babbling.” Rather, he jumped at the opportunity to babble on about Jesus. What can discourage you from talking about Jesus today? How will you overcome that?

The zealous advocate for the cause of Christ will be ready to plead for it in all companies, as occasion offers... Time is precious, and we are concerned to employ it well, because eternity depends upon it, but much is wasted in unprofitable conversation.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 17.16-21*

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Pray Psalm 71.12-18.

As you pray these verses, think of the day ahead and the people you will encounter as you work your Personal Mission Field. Be ready with a word of witness or encouragement. Call on the Lord for His strength. Pray that He will give you an opportunity to talk with someone about Jesus.

Sing Psalm 71.12-18 and verse 3.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

O God be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!
Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.

Refrain, v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be.

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain

O Lord, I praise Your righteousness Who me from youth have taught and blessed.
Forsake me not when I am old, 'til I Your mercies all have told!

Refrain

5 The Word to the Worldly

Pray Psalm 100.1-3.

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He *is* God;
It is He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Sing Psalm 100.1-3.

(Truro: [*Shout for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Shout to the Lord with joy, O earth! With gladness serve His matchless worth!
Before Him sing with joyful words, and know that God alone is Lord!

Read Acts 17.1-28; meditate on verses 22-28.

Preparation

1. How did Paul begin his address?
2. To what did he appeal in making his points?

Meditation

Paul's message is instructive. First, he commended the *sincerity* of their religion (v. 22). They were *wrong*, but they were *sincere*. Paul gave them credit as worshipers and did not chide them for their idolatry, which would only have put them on the defensive and been the end of his address.

Second, Paul was impressed by their honesty in acknowledging an “unknown” deity (v. 23). They didn't pretend to have *all* the answers, and they were open and honest about the limits of what they understood about life and the world. Paul saw in this admitted ignorance an entry point for the Gospel.

Next, while Scripture is the foundation of his message, Paul quoted from two Greek poets to support *his* teaching (vv. 24-28). Every worldview provides resources for pointing *beyond* that worldview to the teaching of Scripture.

Paul led his hearers to compare the majesty and greatness of the God of Scripture – the God Who needs nothing from men (vv. 23-25) – to the gods of the Greeks, which needed to be placated by temples, devotions, and other accoutrements (v. 24). It is folly, Paul explained, to think that so great a God as the One Who exists beyond human knowing should be dependent for anything on mere mortals.

Paul was not trying to use philosophy to *reason* his audience into accepting Jesus. He was preaching the Word to these worldly Athenians and using their own philosophy to show that the wisest among them had intuited the truth, to some extent, of what Paul proclaimed.

Paul engaged the Athenians on their turf. He affirmed as much as he could of their worldview, and he graciously pointed out inconsistencies they perhaps had overlooked. He used whatever resources he could from their view of life and the world, yet he drove his argument straight to Christ, the resurrection, the coming judgment, and repentance and faith, as we shall see.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Often, we neglect to share the Good News of Jesus because we think we must have all the answers. Or, we must have just the right words of rebuttal, or convincing truths to shake unbelievers at their core.

Happily, the Holy Spirit knows all the ins and outs of the faith and can handle all the places where we might draw a blank. It just really isn't about our cleverness. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with having a lot of knowledge about our faith and the ability to point out inaccuracies and inconsistencies where we find them, just as Paul did here at the Areopagus (Acts 17.22-31).

But at the heart of working our Personal Mission Field is our faithfulness and utter dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth, who will "guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (Jn. 16.13, 14).

As we read what happened in Athens, we can trust that the same timely help will be available for us (Heb. 4.16). Our babbling and proclaiming will lead some to "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..." (Acts 17.27, 28)

For the truth is that all people everywhere know God. Paul wrote that to the church in Rome and to us: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1.18-21).

We can confidently say with Paul, to those in our Personal Mission Field: the UNKNOWN GOD, the One Whom you are worshiping, is the God Who made heaven and earth and everything in it. He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And this same God demonstrated His love toward all of us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5.8).

And that is the best Word to the world that could ever be told. Grand apologetics not needed.

For reflection

1. Paul assumed that those Greek thinkers had some knowledge of God. Why did he assume that? What's the importance of that for working our Personal Mission Field?
2. Why must we be good listeners to earn the right to talk about Jesus?
3. Review Acts 1.8. How does the power of the Spirit work in us to make us witnesses for Jesus?

Then Paul says, "Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything." Even this affirmation by Paul, that he is in need of nothing, is not enough. For although this is a mark of divinity, something else must be added. Paul adds, "He himself gives to all people life and breath and everything." These are the two proofs of divinity Paul points to, that he is in need of nothing and that he gives to all people everything. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 38

Pray Psalm 100.3-5.

Give thanks and praise to God for His salvation, mercy, goodness, and truth. Ask Him to show these through you to the people in your Personal Mission Field today.

Sing Psalm 100.3-5.

(Truro: [Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns](#))

Savior and King: Acts 17

He made us all, and not our hands; His people, we before Him stand.
A faithful Shepherd, He will keep and care for us as His own sheep.

Enter His gates with thanks and praise; extol His Name through all your days!
Give thanks to Him, and bless His Name! His praise forevermore proclaim!

Good is the Lord, so good and kind; His love we evermore may find.
His faithfulness is ever sure; to every age it shall endure!

6 The Worldly Respond to the Word

Pray Psalm 96.1-4.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.

Sing Psalm 96.1-4.

(Mit Freuden Zart: [All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above](#))
Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised –
fear Him, and sing His glory!

Read Acts 17.1-34; meditate on verses 29-34.

Preparation

1. How many different responses did Paul receive?
2. Explain each one of those responses.

Meditation

Taking off from a quote by the Greek poet Aratus, Paul questioned the reasonableness of men imagining God as a Being Who could be reduced to some concrete, portable form (v. 29). People are the fruit of God's imagination. God is not the product of the imagination of people; or, if such a god is, it is a false god (v. 30). Paul was trying to lead the Athenians to see that their best thoughts about truth and the good life could not compare with what God has revealed in Jesus Christ (v. 31).

In the imagination of God, He has ordained the salvation of benighted men by coming in *their own form* to proclaim the day of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (v. 31). We note in Paul's address the promise of redemption, the offer of salvation, the warning of judgment, and the call to repentance. Nothing philosophical here; this is pure *theology*.

The results are typical: Some believe. Some are piqued and would like to talk further. And some are just scornful and doubting (v. 32). Paul was as effective in Athens as he had been anywhere else, because like everywhere else, he stayed true to the Word of the Gospel. That some believed and joined Paul mirrors what we see in Jesus' own earthly ministry (vv. 33, 34).

Paul learned the worldview of the Athenians, then he used that worldview as a platform on which to frame out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some believed, some scoffed, and some wanted to hear more. Many believers are reluctant to share the Gospel because they don't think people will believe. Look at Paul's example again, and the results of his preaching. Expect the same from your own Spirit-powered witness (Acts 1.8).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul, no doubt, offended some by his view of art and of God's preeminence over it. They liked their stuff,

and Paul was taking issue with it: “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” (Acts 17.29).

As the psalmist David wrote: “Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;
Oh sing praises to the Lord, to Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old!
Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice. Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel,
and His strength is in the clouds. O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places.
The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!” (Ps. 68.32-35)

God is to be worshiped, not art in any form. Art should always lead to worship of God. Creation shouts of beauty; beauty should always echo back God!

God had overlooked people’s ignorance, but now commanded all men everywhere to repent from their incorrect view of art and life. (Acts 17.30)

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19.1).

We are without excuse. And really, so is everyone else. We dare not exchange the truth of God for the lie, and worship and serve the creature, or the created thing, rather than the Creator (Rom. 1.25).

As Solomon encouraged, “Remember now your Creator...and hear the conclusion of the whole matter: ‘Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil’” (Eccl. 12.1, 13, 14).

“...He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17.31)

We who believe, are a new creation of God (2 Cor. 5.17); so, every word and every deed should echo back God to those in our Personal Mission Field. We are *His* works of art, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2.10).

God’s Word to the world.

For reflection

1. What do you expect when you share the Gospel with someone? Why do you expect that?
2. God says we are His *poems* (Eph. 2.10, Greek: *poema*) – His workmanship. How has God been shaping and perfecting you of late?
3. How can we as believers encourage one another in our witness for the Lord?

Observe what glorious things Paul here says of that God whom he served, and would have them to serve. The Lord had long born with idolatry, but the times of this ignorance were now ending, and by his servants he now commanded all men every where to repent of their idolatry. Each sect of the learned men would feel themselves powerfully affected by the apostle’s discourse, which tended to show the emptiness or falsity of their doctrines. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 17.22-31

Pray Psalm 96.5-13.

Pray for the coming of the Kingdom, the reign of King Jesus, in all the nations of the earth. Pray that God will bring His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit more fully and visibly in your own Personal Mission field today.

Savior and King: Acts 17

Sing Psalm 98.5-13.

(Mit Freuden Zart: [*All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*](#))

All other gods are idols vain; the Lord created heaven.
Splendor and strength with Him obtain; to Him is glory given!
All fam'lies, praise this mighty Lord! Give strength and glory to His Word;
exalt the Lord of heaven.

Bring off'rings sweet to Him, our Lord, in holy garments praise Him!
Tremble before Him, all the earth; among the nations raise Him!
The earth is fixed, it will not move; the peoples will His justice prove.
Exalt the Lord and praise Him.

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!
Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness.
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

7 The World Turned Upside-Down

Pray Psalm 46.1-3.

God *is* our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
Though its waters roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains shake with its swelling.
Selah

Sing Psalm 46.1-3.

(St. Chrysostom: [*We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought*](#))

God is our refuge and our strength; He is our help in times of need.
Thus though the earth beneath us should change, the sea consume the mountain range.
Waters may roar with raging speed; yet God will rescue us at length.
Read Acts 17.1-40; meditate on verses 5-7.

Preparation

1. What did their opponents claim about the apostles?
2. What was the main threat they posed?

Meditation

People in Athens or Rome may not have been too troubled about strange new beliefs stirring on the fringes of the empire. Palestine had always resisted Roman beliefs and ways. And Asia Minor, where all those Greek ex-pat syncretists had settled – well, it wasn't surprising that, though the old Greek gods still had worshipers there, the new beliefs from Palestine were beginning to be established.

But for the faith of Jesus to gain a foothold on the mainland of Greece? That was troublesome, especially because of the implications of the Gospel, which some had rightly discerned. A new King was on the throne. A new economy was unfolding. The old ways of morality, cult, social stratification, and order were being turned upside-down. And now the blight had come to the heartland of Greco-Roman life and culture.

What that Thessalonian mob saw as a blight and a threat was indeed transforming the world. Jews would slander the messengers and distort their teaching. Pagans would try to absorb the new faith and, that failing, turn in violence against its proponents. Threats of bodily harm, imprisonment, and worse would increase. But the ongoing work of Christ would continue because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe (Rom. 1.16, 17). And those who truly believed would allow nothing to keep them from practicing the Kingship of Jesus in love for God and their neighbors.

These days *proclaiming* Jesus as King is easy. Christians do it all the time, mostly among themselves. Rarely do today's believers proclaim the Kingship of Jesus to their neighbors, co-workers, or friends. We proclaim Him King as we gather to worship; but do we *practice* His Kingship, His moment-by-moment-all-encompassing-rule, throughout the course of our days?

No one outside the pale of faith today seems too concerned about their world being turned upside-down. Not by Christians, anyway. But if we were *known* as a people who *practice* what we *proclaim*, that could quickly change.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

But really, what if we were known as a people who practice what we proclaim?

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: He is the One we follow as our prime example. So let's see what He's been doing for a very long time:

“The LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
The LORD raises those who are bowed down;
The LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the strangers;
He relieves the fatherless and the widow;
but the way of the wicked
He turns upside down.” (Ps. 146.8, 9)

And how best do we practice what we proclaim? By keeping God's commandments (Ex. 20.1-17).

“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,
but such as keep the law contend with them.” (Prov. 28.4)

And that is how we turn the world upside down for our King Jesus! No need to have a boycott of some worldly product or nail the Ten Commandments on the front of the local courthouse or put up our cozy nativity scenes in all the wrong places.

But if you name the Name of Christ, and count yourself a follower of Jesus, then by all means, keep His Laws. It is, after all, how we show Him that we love Him (Jn. 14.15).

It is only when our lives and our words match up, that our light so shines before men, that they see our good works of obedience and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5.16).

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...” (1 Sam. 15.22).

The world will be turned upside-down for Jesus when we, as His Body, keep the Law (Matt. 5.17-19).

For reflection

1. In what ways would you say Jesus has turned your world “upside-down”?
2. Do you think our world today needs a little “rightside-upping”? Explain.
3. Why is the Gospel so powerful to change for good everything about our lives?

We are to preach concerning Jesus that he is Christ; therefore we may hope to be saved by him, and are bound to be ruled by him.
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Act 17.1-9*

Pray Psalm 46.4-11.

Praise God for His greatness and His sovereign rule over all the earth! Thank Him for being with you always, even to the end of the age. Draw close to Him and wait on Him to make His Presence known to you. Sink in and rest in His glory.

Sing Psalm 46.4-11.

(St. Chrysostom: [*We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought*](#))

God's everlasting, joyous grace gladdens the city where He dwells.

Safe in Him, we will not be moved; when morning dawns, His love will be proved.

Savior and King: Acts 17

Fears and distresses Jesus dispels for His beloved, chosen race.

Kingdoms arise and rage and roar, threat'ning the earth with sore distress.
Nations may fall, earth melt away, His Word is yet our hope and stay.
God is among us, ever to bless; He is our stronghold evermore.

Come see the works of God's Right Hand! He breaks the nations of the earth,
Shatters their foolish weapons and pride, sets all their sinful strength aside.
Them He will show His infinite worth as they before His judgment stand.

Rest in the Lord and be at peace, all who are mired in sore travail.
Lift up our God, praise Jesus our Lord; proclaim to all the earth His Word!
God is our stronghold, never to fail: thus may our hope and joy increase!

Savior and King: Acts 17

For reflection or discussion

1. How many ways can you see the power of the Gospel at work in Acts 17?
2. Why were the Bereans commended? What does this suggest for you?
3. Which aspects of Paul's life and witness would you like to see more of in your own life? Explain.
4. What next steps for working your Personal Mission Field can you derive from our study of this section of Acts?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 17?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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