

PM Acts 17:1-15 Turning the world upside down

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Preacher: Rev Robert Dale

[0 : 00] Well, we have sung how much we love God's Word. Let's now hear God's Word in Acts chapter 17.

! And reading verses 1 to 15.

Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. And saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. And Jason has received them. And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as a security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. And when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica.

They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea. But Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens. And after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

We'll look at that passage a little later. May the Lord... Well, let's turn now to Acts 17.

[4 : 19] We've been looking at Paul's missionary journeys and we've come now to his visit to Thessalonica and Berea. And I want to take as my text what his enemies said at the end of verse 6.

These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. Sometimes happens in the New Testament that the enemies of God say something by way of criticism which later is accepted as a badge of honour.

Jesus himself, for example, was called by his enemies a friend of sinners. They meant it for evil that Jesus must be an ungodly man because he mixed with ungodly people.

But we recognise it as an unintended compliment because Jesus is the friend of sinners.

And more than the friend, the saviour of sinners. The very word Christian began as an insult.

[5 : 52] In Acts 11, shortly after Paul came to Antioch, these people, they were saying, all they ever talk about is Christ.

Christ, Christ, Christ. That's all they're interested in. They're obsessed with him. Well, the disciples in Antioch were quite happy with that.

That was perfectly true. And over time, the word Christian became the accepted word for the followers of Christ.

And we accept it today with honour. Well, here is another example.

The Jewish leaders in Thessalonica were not praising Paul. They were complaining about him.

[6 : 56] They regarded Paul and his companions as troublemakers. They regarded them as revolutionaries, in fact.

Literally. They were revolving the world. Turning the world on its head. They were causing social unrest.

And they needed to be stopped. And they weren't just grumbling to one another. These words were spoken to the city authorities.

And this was part of a legal charge against them. They meant it for evil. But in reality, once again, this was an honour.

They were revolutionaries. In the very best sense of that term. They were changing the world. And changing it for the better.

[8 : 04] Not many people can claim that. Most people make no impact on the world at all. And some people change the world for the worse.

There are political leaders and dictators who have brought war and bloodshed into the world. But Paul was bringing salvation and light into the world.

a good revolution. The world needed to be turned upside down because it was the wrong way up in the first place.

And that's still true today, isn't it? A world where false gods have replaced the true God. A world where good is regarded as evil and evil is regarded as good.

Don't we need a spiritual revolution? And don't we long for the kind of impact that Paul had? I want to speak tonight about these two cities to see in each case how Paul was changing the world and how the world reacted.

[9 : 37] And I want us to reflect how the church can still change the world today and how Christianity should turn our own lives upside down.

So, first then, Thessalonica in verses one to nine. Paul's last stop had been Philippi where he had been cast into prison and the jailer had been so memorably converted.

And he may well have still borne the marks of the beatings he received as he travelled on through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica which was then, as it is now, one of the largest cities in the region.

There he went into the synagogue as his custom was and for three Sabbaths he reasoned with them about Christ.

Christ. As a visiting rabbi he would be given permission to speak to the people and he used that opportunity and he tells them of course about Jesus.

[11 : 01] He's not given up on the Jews notice his principle is still to the Jew first and afterward to the Gentile. now there are two points to notice here his method and his subject his method was to reason with them from the scriptures reasoning with people is important convincing them in their minds Christianity doesn't bypass the mind Jesus said in Matthew 22 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind Christianity claims to be true and we must convince people of the truth here in the synagogue he could do this through the scriptures that they believed in the scriptures so Paul could show them from the scriptures that Jesus was the

Messiah that they themselves had been longing for later when he got to Athens he wouldn't have that luxury people there didn't believe the scriptures he would have to start further back but the basic method would still be the same to reason with them to engage their minds to show them the truth we today must do the same we must win people's minds with some in the church we may be able to do so from the scriptures and even outside the church it's amazing how people will sometimes still listen to the scriptures we may live in a post Christian culture but there's still that vague knowledge of

Christianity rooted amongst many of our people and the scriptures after all are God's word they have a power of their own but sometimes like Paul at Athens we today may have to start further back many people don't believe the scriptures don't even believe in God we have to start sometimes from square one but wherever we start we must persuade them of the truth of course there is more to it than that Paul knew more than anyone that there was a veil over the eyes of these Jews that only the spirit could remove they had the scriptures they'd had them for centuries! And they just didn't understand them just couldn't see what was staring at them only the spirit can remove that veil and open people's hearts to the truth we may begin with the mind but the heart too must be one and that isn't true and that isn't only true of the Jews even today in our own nation you might say that there's a veil over people's eyes sure you've had this experience that you can reason with people from dawn till dusk and they still won't believe they won't believe until God opens their

eyes but we mustn't bypass reason we can't just say to people believe believe believe without giving them a reason to believe the

God of truth wants people to know the truth as to the subject it's summed up in one word Christ who is the truth explaining and proving it says that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ Christ it's possible that these were his three subjects for three separate sabbaths or maybe he went over the same ground covering all three subjects each week maybe focusing on different parts of the scriptures the law the prophets and the writings we don't know quite what way he selected his texts week by week but he's following the same method here as

[16 : 37] Jesus himself you remember in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus Jesus asked was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer and to enter into his glory and then beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself isn't that exactly what Paul is doing here in Thessalonica in the synagogue or again in the upper room in Luke 24 45 he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning at

Jerusalem exactly the same subject matter isn't it Christ suffering and rising from the dead you know sometimes we can drift a long way from that central message of the gospel people I think sometimes in our own churches we've heard the main message of the gospel so often that we're rather drawn to looking at more obscure parts of scripture and we can get bogged down in Old Testament prophets verse by verse by verse without ever seeing how they relate to Christ the whole of the Bible is the word of God by all means go to the most obscure passages of the Old Testament but always look to see Christ there that's the true focal point of all true preaching notice what it says here it was necessary for the

Christ to suffer this wasn't just a human tragedy it was all planned it was necessary because the scriptures said it must happen it was necessary because God had decreed it it was necessary because salvation was impossible without it he had to die as a sacrifice for sin to satisfy God's justice so that we might be forgiven to make this point Paul must have spoken of our need of salvation and of God's perfect provision of salvation in Christ that is the gospel it was the gospel then it's the gospel now the good news that Jesus has come as our Lord and our Savior and that everyone who believes will be saved this is the gospel that changes the world wherever this gospel is believed the world is turned upside down in the very best sense people stop living for themselves and start living for

Christ that's turning their lives upside down isn't it people stop trusting in themselves they start trusting in Christ that's a spiritual revolution if you're a Christian here today you will know how the gospel has changed your life old things have passed away behold all things have become new you ever seen one of those clocks sometimes you see them in town centers where something comes out of the clock at the turn of the hour and it turns right the way around and you see something different come out at the front that's how it is when someone believes the gospel all our self trust all our desire for sin round it goes and out in place of it comes love for

God trust in Jesus a desire for holiness individual lives are changed by this gospel and when enough people believe even communities are changed so how did the world react to this gospel in Thessalonica well some of them believed in verse four some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas as did many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women there were always Gentiles in the synagogues often in large numbers attracted maybe by the simplicity of Judaism with its one God or perhaps attracted by the very idea of a Messiah and they were often more open to the gospel than the

[22 : 21] Jews themselves some of the Jews believed and some of the Greeks believed their lives were changed their lives were turned upside down but many didn't believe there's always that divide wherever the gospel is preached some believe and some don't we can always expect when we share the gospel there will be some who will say no and those who don't believe are often very violent in their opposition and so it was here in verse five the Jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason seeking to bring them out to the crowd presumably they'd been staying in the house of Jason

Paul and his companions are not there so next best thing they drag Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities and they make their accusation these men who have turned the world

upside down have come here also and Jason has received them and they're all acting against the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king Jesus it's a wearily familiar pattern in the New Testament remember how they treated Jesus they brought him before Pilate and they made very similar accusations Luke 23:2 we found this man misleading the nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar saying that he himself is Christ a king and then they stirred up the crowd to demand his crucifixion similar things had happened to Paul before in Pisidian Antioch for example Acts 13:50 the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city stirring up persecution against Paul and Barnabas or again in Philippi Acts 16:20 they brought them before the magistrate saying these men are Jews and they are disturbing our city they advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice and the crowd joined in attacking them now the charges that were brought against them here were a mixture of truth and falsehood it was true they were saying there was another king Jesus but as far as we know they were not acting against any of the decrees of Caesar these people had misunderstood what Paul was saying

Christ is a king he has a kingdom but that kingdom is not of this world and it is not a threat to Caesar on the contrary Paul wrote in Romans 13 that the powers that be are ordained of God and even Caesar therefore must be obeyed quite true they are turning the world upside down but again not in the sense that these people mean they're turning the world upside down spiritually but they're not causing social unrest that mob in the street that wasn't stirred up by Paul it was his accusers who were responsible for that they were the ones causing trouble not Paul but try to see it from their point of view and you can understand why they were angry the synagogue in Thessalonica was flourishing before Paul and his companions turn up the Jews were quite content in their beliefs there were large numbers of Gentiles coming to worship among them just imagine if it were here every seat is filled people are coming in from the town we'd be quite happy with that wouldn't we we wouldn't be too pleased if two Christians came along and started telling us that everything we were saying was wrong that's basically what Paul and his companions were doing these men had spoiled everything for them and they knew about these men they'd heard what had happened in other cities they knew what was coming that people were going to start leaving the synagogue they'd start joining this new Christian sect and they were angry about it

God once asked Jonah do you do well to be angry he might have asked them the same question and the answer of course is no these men were bringing light and life to the synagogue what they preached was the fulfillment of the Old Testament they preached the Messiah that these Jews had been longing for the salvation that they needed if only they had listened it would have been good for them and good for their synagogue but they don't listen they cry out against Paul the city is troubled the authorities are troubled but they don't actually have Paul in their hands so they can't imprison him the best or the worst that they can do is to take money from Jason and the rest and let them go presumably

[28 : 58] Jason promised not to cause any more trouble maybe not to house Paul anymore either way they felt discretion was the best part of valour and Paul and Silas are sent away by night but the truth couldn't be sent away it was there to stay a church was established in Thessalonica which proved faithful under persecution which Paul described in his letter to the Thessalonians as his crown and joy and so we come now more briefly to Berea in verses 10 to 15 undaunted by his experience at Thessalonica Paul presses on Berea is about 45 miles from Thessalonica and it was and is still a much smaller city but Paul follows exactly the same procedure goes into the synagogue and although it doesn't say so the implication is that once again he reasoned with them from the scriptures but what a difference in reaction in verse 11 these Jews were more noble than those in

Thessalonica they received the word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so there are three things here three marks of spiritual nobility we might say they received the word with all eagerness they talked about it all week and they examined the scriptures to see if it was so they didn't just blurt out their own opinions without thinking about it they didn't just ask the rabbis they studied the scriptures as the authoritative word of God how preachers today would love a reaction like that often we preach to weary looking congregations who look as if they would rather be elsewhere and at best we get the odd comment afterwards how wonderful if people were talking about it all week and actually searching the

Bible to see if what was said was true I'm sure when I was younger that there was a Bible study society called the Bereans when I looked for it on the internet all I could find was the Lincoln Berean church and for a moment I wondered if there was a new church in my old city but it turned out to be Lincoln Nebraska but it doesn't require a new church or a new society all Christians should be like this searching the scriptures daily and the result of their searching verse 12 many of them therefore believed with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men but persecution was not far behind in fact it was following them literally along the road when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also they came there too agitating and stirring up the crowds they must have really hated the gospel traveling 45 miles just to go and disrupt a meeting like us going to Carlisle or even further just to break up a meeting that we disagreed with while the brothers in Berea also decide to play safe and they send Paul away again this time to the sea and on to Athens Silas and Timothy remained for a while but receiving a command to come to Paul as soon as possible they left as well in due course but no doubt a strong church had been established how could it not be strong founded upon the scriptures so as we draw to a close there are two questions we have to face today the first is has the gospel changed your life

Christianity is not a spectator sport you know I can watch and enjoy a football match and admire the players and never once kick a football in my life and some people treat Christianity!

[34 : 25] like that they find Christianity interesting they admire these great preachers they're cheering them on from the stands as it were but they've never really believed for themselves Christianity has to be personal if Christ died for our sins as the scriptures say and rose again if this Jesus is the Christ then we must believe in him we must trust in him for the forgiveness of sins and follow him forever following the lamb wherever he goes and that will change our lives it will turn our lives upside down as we turn from sin to the saviour from self righteousness and self dependence and self indulgence to a life whole heartedly lived for

Christ alone I know my life has never been the same since I became a Christian and it doesn't necessarily all happen at once in fact it seldom does there is still some turning upside down to be done years and years later I've been a Christian over 50 years now and I know that I'm still turning as often as we see sin in our lives we must turn from that sin and turn to Christ as often as we find our eyes turning to the world we must turn again to our saviour the second question is can the church change the world today can we turn the world upside down well strictly speaking theologically the answer is no and nor could

Paul we can't change the world only the spirit can do that I'm sure if Paul had been there to answer these charges he might have said no no it's not me who's changing the world it's the Lord but can we be agents of change as Paul was it has to be said that it seems that in Scotland at this present time that is not the case the church doesn't seem to be having very much impact at all and we may well lament ourselves that we don't seem to be having the impact we should no one would level this charge against us that we have turned the world upside down and yet we have the same gospel as Paul and if we're faithful to that gospel then we will see lives changed maybe not as dramatically as in

Paul's day the times and the seasons are in God's hands the harvest may vary from age to age yet the gospel still has a life changing power and we should pray that it will have an impact today indeed a great impact may we see God's power at work in Scotland even here in Dumfries even in our days Amen continue continue!

continue! continue continue continue