



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Scripture Acts 17: 1-9

Spring 2025

"A World Turned Upside Down"

TRANSCRIPT

This morning we're going to consider this truth that we have a living Savior, and we're going to look at Acts chapter 17, and verses 1 through 9. Paul and his companions are on their second missionary journey. They have brought the Gospel to Europe and in chapter 16 we're told about that. They went to Philippi, and now from there they've gone farther in to Macedonia, northern Greece, and we read,

17 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶ When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another

king, Jesus.”⁸ They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.⁹ And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

Acts 17: 1-9

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a great privilege it is to be with Your people, and on this Sunday morning, which is the day we traditionally celebrate the resurrection of Your Son and our Savior, we are particularly joyful to do that, and to do that with Your people—with the church. We should be mindful, and I think we are, that this is really no different from any other Sunday. Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection; that's why the church began meeting on the first day of the week rather than the last day of the week. And we recall that every Sunday.

But really, Sunday is just the first day of the week in which we should remember every day that we have a living Savior: He conquered the grave, He ascended into heaven, He sits at Your right hand, and He's there for us, for Your people, interceding for us constantly at this very moment. And I believe He's praying that we will receive the message that is found in our text, in Acts 17, and we will be built up in the faith. And He's praying that the Spirit of God would open our hearts to receive it and grow through it.

So LORD, I pray that that's what will happen, that we will rejoice in the things that we have read, and as we consider the meaning in more depth, that we would be blessed as we consider what a great God we have, and Your grace, and what is our present possession. We not only have a great High Priest at Your right hand praying for us, and a God who is our Father answering those prayers, but that Priest is within our hearts. He's within our lives. And He empowers us to live a life that's pleasing to You.

Well may our time be pleasing to You. We pray for those who are not here, who are sick, and who are dealing with difficult issues, and some who are here who are dealing with those issues—bless them, encourage them. Give healing, give comfort and encouragement.

LORD, we thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and all that we have in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(Message) When Lord Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington at Yorktown in 1781, the British band played a popular ballad, *The World Turned Upside Down*; it must have seemed that way to them...the greatest army in the world defeated by a rag tag militia of farmers and shopkeepers. The story has been called a legend, apocryphal; (if it isn't, it's a good one).

What isn't legend is what Paul and his friends did in Thessalonica when they came there and declared the Gospel. People complained, 'These that have turned the world upside down have come here also.' (vs6).

The irony is they spoke better than they knew. Paul spoke of it in Romans chapter 1, verse 16, as "...the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." That's what the simple message of the cross and the empty tomb is...power, life changing power that can turn a person's world upside down and make him or her a new creation.

That statement, and the events that caused it, are in Acts 17, when Paul and his friends went to Macedonia in northern Greece and preached, just preached the Word of God. It was Paul's second missionary journey. The chapter begins with the missionaries arriving in Thessalonica, a port city on the Aegean Sea and a commercial center with land routes into the interior of the Roman empire. So it was an important metropolis where a lot of Jewish merchants lived, which meant there was a synagogue there in Thessalonica. That's where Paul began. Luke wrote in verse 2, (Acts 17), that when he arrived, he went there as was 'his custom'; "...and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures." (ibid.)

Paul's preaching has been described as both, '*proclamation and persuasion*'. He "reasoned" with them. (ibid.) God made us rational beings; He has given us minds and wills—and apostolic preaching appealed to these...was directed to these. It was designed to show that the Christian faith is a reasonable faith; that it fits reality. What Paul showed is reasonable, is that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Well, 'Why did he preach that?'

Well, he preached that because the synagogues didn't teach a Messiah that would come to die, but rather one that would come to reign. So Paul reasoned with them; and according to verse 2 he did that, "from the Scriptures." Then he showed them that Jesus, (whom he *proclaimed*), is the Christ, the Messiah.

His method is given in verse 3; he was "explaining and giving evidence". Literally "explaining" is '*opening*'; so he, "*opened the Scriptures*" to them. He made the meaning clear so that they understood what the text taught. He would improve the meaning by "giving evidence", which literally means, '*place beside*'. So he would read a passage from the Old Testament, explain it as a prophecy about the Messiah's death, (or the Messiah's resurrection), then place another text beside it that supported that explanation.

Then he would show from the Lord's life the historical evidence that He fulfilled the prophecy, and would say, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ", (Acts 17:3)... 'The Messiah!', 'The King of kings!'

He evidently spent some time teaching them that Christ will, in the future, reign as King on the earth...but he stressed the Lord's suffering and resurrection because the kingdom is based on that. There could be no kingdom without a cross.

But the cross is meaningless without a resurrection. Sin must first be judged and destroyed in order that righteousness fill the earth in the kingdom to come, in order that there be citizens to inhabit 'that kingdom to come'. That could only happen by Christ's sacrifice; when He suffered the penalty of our sin in our place as our substitute. And that is taught in the Old Testament...all through the Old Testament. So Paul took passages—

a passage like Isaiah 53, I'm sure he went there and picked a passage of 'The Suffering Servant' to prove it.

Let me give you just a few verses from that great chapter. You're very familiar with it, I know.

"Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried." (Isa 53:4)
He was innocent, but He carried those sorrows.

"He was pierced through for our transgressions." (vs5)

He was a substitute for sinners. He was a substitute, according to that context, for the nation Israel.

"The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;
If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering," (vs10)

And He will see His offspring.

"He will see those He came to save." (vs10b)

"As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied,
By His knowledge, the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities." (vs11)

A substitute. In spite of the sufferings, 'The Servant' would be satisfied because God, His Father, would accept His sacrifice for His people. They would be saved, and by His sacrifice made righteous.

Now, 'How do we know that?' The Father demonstrated that He accepted His Son's sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. And Paul likely proved the resurrection from another Old Testament text...(and remember, the Old Testament was their Bible at

that time; they didn't have the New Testament)...so he goes to *the Word of God*, (what we call the Old Testament), and he would have gone to Psalm chapter 16, verse 10,

"You will not abandon my soul to Sheol:

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." (Psa 16:10)

David is writing that; and what he's saying is, 'I have hope. I know You're not going to abandon me to the grave.' There's hope beyond the grave, and he could say that because of what he said next, "Nor will You allow Your Holy One," (that is the Messiah, the Savior), "to undergo decay." (ibid.) And, of course, He did not...He was resurrected. The tomb was empty.

So, "...for three Sabbaths...", Paul, "...reasoned with them from the Scriptures..." (vs2b)...Just the Scriptures.

He didn't appeal to Greek philosophy, (though he's in Greece); he did not appeal to the rabbis in the Mishnah, in their writings, (though he's in the synagogue). No, he went to "the Scriptures"; and the Scriptures *alone*, because the Scriptures are sufficient, putting text beside text. (Numerous texts; we can imagine how many, but certainly Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, and Psalm 22, and Zechariah 12, verse 10, and numerous texts letting Scripture interpret Scripture.)

And his efforts were not in vain. Verse 4, "And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas..."; meaning some of the Jews were persuaded, because Luke adds that, "...along with a large number of God-fearing Greeks, and a number of the leading women." (vs4b). So, a lot of people were persuaded by Paul's teaching: They understood his explanation of Scripture, they believed the evidence, and were convinced that Jesus is the Christ.

Christianity is a reasonable faith. God does not ask us to believe the unreasonable. Faith is not believing what is obviously false; and the Bible is not fables—it is factual and historical. Paul demonstrated that...and people were persuaded—but

not because Paul was so persuasive. People are never persuaded to 'believe' the Gospel, to 'believe' the things of this Book, the Word of God, to 'believe' by the power of persuasion, by logic, and by argument. God may use that, and when we speak the Gospel we should speak it coherently, clearly, and with the evidence of Scripture.

Ultimately though, it is the power of God Himself that produces persuasion—as He did with Lydia in chapter 16, (Acts), the previous text, where Paul comes to the first city that he visited in Europe, in Philippi, and was speaking to this group of women by the riverside. And we read in verse 14 that, "...the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Persuasion and conversion are God's work in connection with His Word.

Paul explained it to them later when he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians; he explained what happened when he came and 'all were persuaded'. 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 5, he said, "Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction;" ...With, 'the power of God' it came to them. That's what he wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 6, "God...is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of *Jesus Christ*."

"God shone!" He takes the initiative. It's His work.

But, He uses *us* to do that. He used Paul in that synagogue in Thessalonica when, 'He shined into the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike', to give them the knowledge of the glory of God. And what 'they were *persuaded* of' is glory indeed: First, Christ suffered the wrath of a holy God in the place of sinners. He completed that work—and the proof, the historical proof, is the resurrection of Christ; God raised His Son from the dead to demonstrate that He accepted His sacrifice on our behalf.

Isaiah wrote that 'The Servant' would be "satisfied". (Isa 53:11), (and He was).

He declared from the cross, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30). That means, 'Nothing more needs to be done.' Justice has been satisfied; He paid our debt in full and the payment has been accepted. We can add nothing to it.

Now, at the moment of faith, the sinner is forgiven and justified.

We are now and *forever* accepted by God—and He will never reject us!

But more, we have a risen Savior, a living Savior, Who is for us—not a dead martyr, whose memory only inspires. (He is an inspiration, of course, and an example—the highest example.)

But He's much more...Much more; Christ is God's eternal Son, almighty, all powerful; and He is seated at the Father's right hand and praying for us; and through the Holy Spirit living in us to guide and protect us, daily...every day, all through our lives. He is ruling over us personally with the greatest of care, and at the same time He's in complete control of this world that seems to be in chaos.

And He's coming back! The synagogue is right about that...The Messiah will rule the earth. And through the preaching of the Gospel and teaching of His Word, God shines His light into dark hearts to give them knowledge of that hope of His future coming—but also, (and first of all), an understanding of His sacrifice and the salvation that it obtains for all who believe.

But of course, what Paul also told the Corinthians is also true—what is to some, (to us who believe), 'an aroma of life', is to others, 'an aroma of death.' (2Cor 2:16). That is universally true: You'll find it true in your neighborhood, or at the office, or among your friends as you give and speak the Gospel. And it was true in the synagogue; not only were many converted, many persuaded—but there were many who were disturbed.

They "became jealous", Luke wrote in verse 5, (Acts 17), and went down to the marketplace where there were some idle men hanging out, some 'riffraff,' some 'thugs', and they stirred them up...and they started a riot. The mob moved through the city to the house of Jason, (a recent convert who hosted Paul, and Silas, and Timothy), and they broke in to the house looking for those men, but they weren't there. But Jason and the others were, these young Christians, so they dragged them down, "...before the city authorities shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also; and

Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." (vs6-7).

Well, that was all half-truths—and no truths at all. Paul didn't preach politics; but their charge, that they, "have upset the world", was true. The King James Version says, "have turned the world upside down", (I like that expression).

The Gospel does that because it is contrary to what the world believes. Nothing unsettles the world, nothing upsets the world like the Gospel because it is the message that, 'You're guilty, you are a sinner, and you need a savior...and the only Savior is Jesus Christ. You cannot save yourself; you can only receive the salvation He's obtained.' That unsettles the world.

But God's Word is powerful. It shakes the individual; it shakes society. It shook the Roman empire. About a century and a half later, Tertullian, a theologian and apologist of the early church, wrote to the pagans of his day, "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled all the places that belonged to you—cities, islands, forts, towns, markets, the military camps themselves, town councils, the palace, the Forum; we have left you nothing but your temples."

And it wasn't long before the temples were abandoned. That's the power of the Gospel. That's the power of the Word of God, "sharper than any two-edged sword", as the author of Hebrews wrote. (Heb 4:12).

And that has been repeated down through the centuries. Whenever and wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, things happen. God's Word, 'Doesn't return to Him empty', as Isaiah wrote. (55:11). Society is unsettled and changed, but not without resistance; we see that wherever it is preached.

It happened in Thessalonica and we see that here; but it happens everywhere. The Reformation changed Europe, but it was met with fierce resistance...and the Great Awakening in England and America was as well. But where the Gospel takes root, by

God's grace, change happens. Societies are transformed; they are blessed; they are 'set right'.

But first and foremost, that happens in the hearts and the minds of people—of individuals. The fear of the Messiah, the Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection...and their lives are changed—so much so that they become "new creatures", (2Cor 5:17), "a new creation", (Gal 6:15), in whom Christ lives. That's an amazing truth.

That's the truth that Paul wrote of in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20; "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself up for me." He did that as our *substitute*, as our *representative*.

Charles Spurgeon put it this way, "Whatever Christ did, if you belong to those who are in Him, He did for you. Beloved, when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, all His elect were nailed there. When He was put into the grave, the whole of His people lay slumbering there in Him. When He rose, they rose and received the foretaste of their own future resurrection."

All of that is applied to a person when he or she believes. At that moment we are forgiven, we are accepted as righteous by God; and Christ, the living Savior, lives in us—actually, and never leaves us. We have His life, (which is resurrection life), to enable us to live well—with the power to overcome destructive habits, and live obediently, and live to God's glory with the desire to do that...new desires, new motives, new abilities. We have new life with liberating power.

As Jesus put it in John chapter 15, 'We are like branches in a vine.' Just as a vine supplies life to the branch so that it bears fruit, so too, Christ supplies His life to us constantly, so that we bear the fruit of righteousness. He gives power to resist temptation, and recover from failure when we succumb to temptation, (which we do). We do that every day; we fail continually, but He is merciful and ultimately He will bring us to glory in the future resurrection.

That is the life Christ promises to all who come to Him—who believe in Him. Do you have that life, eternal life? Do you want that life, transforming life? I ask that because many people don't want that life, as those men of Thessalonica demonstrated. Jews wanted to stay in the synagogue, and pagans wanted to stay in their temples.

In John 5, Jesus went up to Jerusalem and entered the Sheep Gate, where the pool of Bethesda was. Lying around it were invalids—the sick, the blind, the lame. It was a really pitiful sight. Tragic.

Jesus found one of them, a man who had been lame for 38 years. Jesus asked him a question. He said, "Do you wish to get well?", (Jn 5:6), and that seems like a strange question to ask a man who's been lame for 38 years, (all of his life).

But really it's not so strange. Some people, many people, are content with their lives in that condition: Lie around the pool all day, being ministered to by others. But even on a more profound level, people are content with their lives—broken morally and blind spiritually, ignorant of the love and grace of God...and resistant to His rule over their lives.

But if you wish to get well, come to Christ, Who suffered and rose from the dead. He will receive you, and He will turn your world upside down...which really means, 'right side up' to His glory, and to your eternal joy. God help you to do that.

And help all of us who have, to rejoice in the life we have in our Savior.

Now let's close in a word of prayer,

(Closing prayer) Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for what you accomplished through Your Son on the cross—complete atonement, satisfaction. The debt has been paid, and You've received the payment that Your Son made in our behalf. And You've demonstrated that by raising Him from the dead...and not only that, seating Him at Your right hand where He prays for us, intercedes for us continually as our great High Priest.

And not only that, He lives within us through the Holy Spirit, to guide us and protect us and empower us. And we thank You for that. We live a supernatural life by Your grace; help us to appreciate that.

We thank You, Father, for this time, this day in which we give special recognition to the resurrection. But it's great to know, and it is a necessary fact to know, that we live every day in light of the resurrection. May we do that. May we do that to Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)