

Sermon on Acts 17:1-15 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Did you know that at this very moment you are engaged in spiritual warfare? Some of us might wonder what that even means - highest level, there is cosmic good, God and worldly bad, an enemy that wars against God and his people to thwart plans or disrupt God's purpose. It is an eternally losing battle for the side of evil... but it wages on.

And right now, as you sit here in church you are participating in spiritual warfare in the most practical sense. We may think of it as being huddled in a dark room in prayer for long hours - but it is also taking a step - ordering priorities and living life in Christ through a Jesus-lens that helps you see the value of worshiping with the saints over the litany of other things demanding your attention any given day.

It is really your world turned upside down. The natural way of ordering things in life giving way to the supernatural. It is warfare to see things rightly, to filter everything you take in by something outside of yourself. (*Don't call you friends that are not here and give them a hard time about losing the spiritual warfare game!*)

If you have yet to put faith in Jesus and you are just kind of checking him out, cool, but you should know and those of us who claim faith in Christ should be reminded...

Jesus will turn your world upside down.

Acts 17:1-15

As we have been studying Acts in these recent chapters I have been working to ensure that we know there is an apostolic or a missionary team at work here. But it is of course led by Paul and we will increasingly see his interactions and preaching as a model for us... Paul is unique, he is living what I would call the "fullness of life." An adventure that is all about introducing people to Jesus and then giving them instruction on how to live in response to his grace - to the the forgiveness he gives.

Paul put everything he had into living (and dying) for Christ. He was alive for Christ! Every nook and cranny of Paul's life is infiltrated by the gospel, the good news of Jesus and he lives supernaturally supercharged. A life that is not only for Paul, but for all of us found in Christ!

Here the second missionary journey is well underway - and we get some really good clues from Paul and his band of preachers on how to undertake evangelism - telling people about Jesus.

Here they are following a pattern - finding the Jewish community, and beginning ministry there whether that is by the riverside or in a synagogue. And there they reason with them from the Scriptures. Reasoning - "In sharing our faith we must give others room to move and think. The gospel dialogued, opened, and placed before others will always stand on its own!

There is a work of explaining the grand story of the Bible, opening the word to others that they could see that Jesus is the One promised from old. He is the Messiah that was promised to reign and free people from the captivity of sin.

It is helpful seeing how to go about it but we also have to think through how people are responding to it.

All of life depends on our response to the news of Jesus. Not only the first time, but as long as we live.

We can hear this message and reject it or obey it - it depends on the lens we look through. What we put over our spiritual eyes to help us see... Not unlike getting the right physical lenses to see through! When I first started wearing glasses, I just couldn't figure out the daily headaches I was getting progressively worse the longer I was working - the more I was taking in. I remember getting my eye exam and the doctor trying on different lenses to find the right one for me, and the moment she put the right lens on, I could feel the relief, my eye eased and I could see without the strain.

Same thing happens spiritually when we discover the right lens.

In our story today there are two lenses being worn that are shaping the response of people to the gospel. A narcissistic lens and a noble lens. Which shall we wear?!

1) Narcissistic Lens

Narcissism is having an excessive interest in oneself. Self-loving, self-obsessed, conceited, self-centered. (Pretty familiar to us as it is the river that culture floats down...)

Self-oriented in shaping my priorities, my self-determined values.

Here the good news of Jesus, that is the promised point of the story, that he is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and that he is the one true King, this news comes to an environment which should have been primed by generations of reading Scripture, all passages of which point to Jesus... but instead of embrace and belief in him, it is rejection that results.

Now some of the Jews were persuaded - as God opened their hearts to hear - and a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. (An aside - women are vitally important in the church - just as they are to the culture of Thessalonica, women are not a second-class in Christianity. From the way the Savior engages women in a patriarchal culture, to the way they are highlighted in Acts as followers of Christ...)

So a ton of people, that would hang around the synagogue probably out of a hunger for God, they believe in Jesus.

But the Jews were jealous. This is not a condemnation of all Jews, as we will see, but this group that seems to prefer things the way they have always been, untainted by needing to associate with Greeks... the last sacred space where they didn't have to accept others was threatened.

They are jealous because in this moment in Thessalonica their identity is dwindling, because they were losing power and influence. So they get some rabble, the unsavory in town to essentially start a riot and in their accusation they give us Christians a goal - to be people that turn the world upside down!

They go after Jason for hosting the people of the Way and things are cooled... but those that viewed the message through a lens of self harbor vehement angst toward Jesus.

This Jesus is not who we expected him to be so we rage - or it might be more subtle than that - we might try to pigeonhole or shape Jesus into our likeness, making him what matches our preference our narcissism.

Ben Todd - *The Common Myth of the 'Gospel of Me'*

At the door of the church I knock with hope
Let me in, brothers, I can set you free!
Just raise up your eyes, I'll let down a rope
You'll find tied to it the Gospel of Me.

My music, my serving, my sunday best,
My preferences and my theology
Lend me your ears and I'll help you find rest
If you'll only hear the Gospel of Me.

My bride, my boy, just watch, I can save you
If you'd worship this man, how you'd be free
My pride, joy, and wants, embrace just a few
Open those ears to the Gospel of Me.

A life built on these shoulders of soft sand
Would feign to carry glory so weighty
A custom-built, white-picket promised land
Awaits you who trust the Gospel of Me.

Dear neighbor this news can be for you too
You're so lucky to have heeded my plea

Bring the gift of praise and I'll make you new
Come one and all to the Gospel of Me.

Come home ye sinners, drink this luke-warm cup
Of religion filled with "thou" and with "thee"
Some good news not quite on the up and up
Can't you just believe this Gospel of Me?

A great deception, a house built of cards
A little king who cannot bend his knee
To Jesus who all of his glory guards
From each whisper of the Gospel of Me.

*A little king who cannot bend his knee... this is me... this might be you... this is certainly the
Jews in Thessalonica.*

That's the point isn't it? Jesus is the King of the universe, and your only hope is to bend your
knee to him. To submit to his rule, to his care. And it is glorious, forgiveness, life, eternity. But
warring against "Yo," seeing Jesus through a narcissistic lens we miss his benevolence, his
goodness. How dare he encroach on my kingdom...

An image like Thessalonica, China Inland Mission missionary fleeing the communists burning of
Shanghai:

*Tonight Shanghai is burning
And I am dying too.
But there's no death more certain
Than death inside of you.
Some men die of shrapnel
While some go down in flames.
But most men die inch by inch
While playing at little games.*

The narcissistic lens leads to death - missing the source of real life. Your world turned upside
down as you are outside what you are meant for.

There is another way - another pair of specs we can put on...

2) Noble Lens

The church sends Paul and Silas in the night to Berea. And the evangelists follow the same
pattern, going to the synagogue to preach Jesus. To keep reasoning from Scripture.

But these Jews were more noble, because they received the word with all eagerness... they were hungry for what is right and for what Scripture actually promised. Aggressively searching Scripture daily to see if what was preached was right. Many of them believed and again with a multitude of Greeks and women and men of high standing. Culture change before our eyes as people in important places submit to King Jesus.

They are eager. Eagerness makes all the difference in the flavor, quality, and nobility of our Christian lives. Being people of the word - searching and subjecting their preference to truth - to the Christ.

Acceptance of teachings without discernment is not a Christian virtue.

There is a defining truth to the universe. It is revealed by God in Scripture - and friends this is why we make a big deal of the Bible - that is be cherished, studied and held ever before us, especially because it declares who the Savior is, that Jesus has come to save and to reign, and that you can get in on it.

This is what we are invited into, this is where joy and purpose are found. This is where we get proof of the living God who loves us and gives himself up for us.

To submit news, proclamation, our preference, our experience to the word of God. To the word of his grace, his goodness.

And the world turns for those that believed in Berea. Nothing stays the same in Jesus.

“The noble life has been turned upside-down, or, more accurately, right-side up. God’s princes and princesses had their lives revolutionized. They kissed the doctrines they once despised and now see themselves and life as it really is. Once their thoughts were devoted to this world, but now they looked upward.” Hughes

The word of God had come alive. They rushed to taste it, and it satisfied their souls.

These are the type of people that turn the world upside-down.

Your lens matters. Whether you see everything through a pair of self-tinted goggles meant to shield out anything that challenges your little kingdom or you are wearing “hungry glasses” that lead to eagerness to find the truth and to submit to it. All of life will be shaped by how you take in this news of Jesus.

Either way, Jesus changes everything.

Jesus ends our pursuit of self-as-savior... it is only through belief in his life, death and resurrection that we are saved, not by our behavior or even our emotional sense at any given

moment. To know you are forgiven and stand before God blameless because you wear Christ's righteousness.

He is your approval, he is your source of strength, he is your advocate and nothing can change your status in him.

Jesus retrains, transforms our lives. Not left in narcissism but made noble in pursuit of him.

We see it from the lives changed in our text and those that keep on preaching.

Paul and the Philippian church. This swing of ministry, and the hardships only steel his resolve to live this full life in Christ.

Philippians 1:19–21 “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (ESV)

“**To live is Christ, to die is gain**—this is the message of the letter. Therefore, our lives should be lived to Him, through Him, for Him, with Him, about Him—everything should be about Jesus.” Chandler

Bonhoeffer writing about setting aside the narcissistic self for Christ... “It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. ... When Christ calls a man, he **bids him come and die.**”

All that we might truly live in him.

His grace really is so amazing that we can give our lives away for his glory. It is no sacrifice considering what is gained in Christ.

Here is the kicker, you might fall of the horse... but there is One that was noble for you... when we slip when we don't bring our A or B game, Jesus sustains. His nobility becomes ours and we can get back up and go again. We can put back on the glasses of nobility and look at life and see Jesus.

Jesus will turn your world upside down.

This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ. He is the hope. He is the king. He is Lord.

What then shall we do?

Believe - Jesus is the Messiah. He is the way of forgiveness and salvation.

Search - be noble - look to Jesus, find him in Scripture. Ask the Spirit to open the word to you, find people in community that will help you and stoke your eagerness for more of Jesus. "We open the Bible not just because we are pursuing God but also because we believe an open Bible is the way God pursues us." Jason Meyer

Live - Let Christ set the competing values of your life in order. Be free in him - and let him turn your world upside down. "It's important to remember that grace doesn't offer you an easy life, but rather a forgiven and transformed life." Paul Tripp

Embrace the things Jesus desires for you to live for, the people he has called you to be family with. And be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live fully. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

May it be so with us!

Jesus will turn your world upside down.

You might be the person who tried to numb your life with drugs but experienced the greatest of rushes only when Christ found you.

You may be the person that never really had a father to love and protect you but you met the Father in meeting Christ.

You could be the perfect person that finally realized it wasn't your rags of good behavior that bought your way but the blood of Christ.

Or maybe you are lost in self, and this morning the glasses are chipped and a little light has come in... waiting for more.

Turn to Jesus. Be forever changed. He will turn your world upside down.

*A great revelation, a house built of rock
A true King to whom we bend our knee
To Jesus who all glory goes around the clock
From each shout of the Gospel of the free.*