

Acts 17:1-15

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- [0 : 0 0] Hello, good evening. May I add my welcome to Robbie's. My name is Jack and I'm a ministry trainee here at St Silas. In a moment we're going to take a look together at Acts chapter 17. So please keep your Bible open there so you can follow along.
- But before we do that, I am going to pray for us. Father God, please be with us now as we look at your word together.
- Please speak by your spirit through your words. Please show us the truth that you want us to see about yourself and about what you're doing. In Jesus' name. Amen.
- Here is the statement that I would like us to think about this evening. Having confidence in the method matters. Having confidence in the method matters.
- This is as true in church as it is anywhere else in life. Here's an example from a film I was watching recently. The film is called Moneyball. It's about baseball.
- [1 : 1 3] And it's one of those films that's kind of supposed to be a true story, but it's not really ever taken significant liberties with the truth. But the story of the film is compelling.
- It's about the manager of a baseball team called the Oakland Athletics, or the A's. Billy Bean, the manager, decides that instead of selecting players to buy by traditional scouting techniques, you know, turning up, watching someone play, assessing how you think they move and their technique and so on, instead of doing that, he is going to use computers and data and statistical analysis to choose the players to buy.
- You know, a kind of scientific method. He doesn't even need to see them play to be able to pick them. And of course, because it's a Hollywood film, everyone hates it to start off with.
- They say it won't work. They say it's going to destroy the team. They say it's going to ruin the season. And if our man Billy doesn't believe in what he is doing, then he's going to give up at the first bit of opposition.
- He's going to give up with the first bit of failure. Having confidence in the system, in the method, in the process, is crucial.
- [2 : 3 6] If you lack confidence in something, then you'll try it for a bit. But when you don't immediately get the results that you want, you'll lose faith in it and quickly move on to trying something else.
- And it's the same for us as Christians. What is the method, what is the way to expand the kingdom of God? As Christians, we want so much to see people to come to faith in Jesus.
- We want to see the church grow and flourish. We want people to receive the amazing benefits that come from belonging to Jesus. And the question is, are we confident in how it is going to happen?
- This evening, as we look at the first half of Acts 17, we're going to take a look at Paul's method. And we're going to see one thing that might knock our confidence in it.
- And then we're going to see a reason to keep on going. So, first point, Paul's method. In this section of Acts, we've been following Paul as he arrives in Europe for the first time.

- [3 : 54] It's brand new territory. The good news about Jesus has never been heard here before. And Paul has just come from Philippi and he comes down to a new town, to Thessalonica.
- So, what does Paul do? How does he get started? What's his first move? Well, he has a pattern. He has a way of doing things. 17, verse 2.
- As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue. He goes where the Jewish people meet, people who aren't Christians and have never heard of Jesus.
- But I have some similarities to Paul. They are Jewish. They have the Bible. And then Luke tells us three parts of what he does. Number 1, verse 2.
- He reasons with them from the Scriptures. Then number 2, in verse 3. He reasons from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.
- [4 : 59] And then number 3, also in verse 3. This Jesus tells them that this Jesus, that he is proclaiming to them, is that Messiah.
- And I would just like to spend a few minutes thinking about that method. Reasoning from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.
- So, firstly, from the Scriptures. Paul starts with the Scriptures. He starts, he would have started with the Old Testament. The first 39 books of the Bible as we have it.
- So, you know, kind of, you know, that much of it. The first half. Genesis through to Malachi. Just as a lawyer might start with their evidence, like the witness of someone who is there at the crime.
- Or a scientist would start with the data that they have collected. So Paul starts, as he always does, with the Old Testament. We get it twice.
- [6 : 04] We get it here in verse 2. And we also get it again in verse 11. The Bereans are looking at the Scriptures. They are examining the Scriptures to see if what Paul says is true.
- Scriptures that presumably Paul is showing to them. That's Paul's method. He doesn't manipulate. He doesn't use force. He doesn't put on an entertaining show.
- He takes them to the Bible. He wants them to see what it has to say. It's not about what Paul has kind of thought up. It's about what the Bible says. And why?
- I guess we think, why does he do this? I think one reason, it's a big question. One reason that Paul does this is that he recognises the Bible for what it is.
- If you have a look at verse 13. But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too.
- [7 : 08] Paul describes, or Luke, the writer of Acts, describes what Paul does as preaching the word of God. In other words, it's not a merely human thing that Paul is doing.
- It is something that comes from God. So when Paul shows someone something in the Scriptures, it's not just that two people are looking at a book just written by people.
- It's God speaking. It's God's word. The Bible is the truth about God. It gives answers to the most important questions like, who is God?
- What is God like? What is God doing? And how do we relate to him? So that's our first thing. Reasoning from the Scriptures. And then there's our second thing.
- He reasons from the Scriptures about Jesus. About Jesus. And here we have the second key ingredient. Paul reasons from the Scriptures and his goal is to show them Jesus.
- [8 : 11] Verse 2, again. Explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise. Paul is using the Scripture to show them something in particular.

He doesn't want to show them that the Messiah had to be a really nice guy or what he was going to look like. He wants a reason to show them about their death. And their resurrection.

He would show them from the Old Testament that Jesus had to die to make it possible for us to be forgiven by God. The Bible both shows that we need forgiveness.

And it shows us how we are going to be forgiven. He would show them that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The resurrection shows that we can receive amazing blessing from God.

Because God's promises have been kept in Jesus. Jesus only really makes sense within the story of the Bible as a whole. You need God's story of salvation.

[9 : 15] You need God's creation of the world. Our rebellion against him. And then God's promises to fix our rebellion. And to resolve the catastrophic consequences that we have brought about.

So when Paul goes to the synagogue to try and convince people to believe in Jesus, he opens up the Bible. He shows them the Bible story.

And says that Jesus is the one who fulfills it. So there we have our two elements. Paul uses the Bible to explain Jesus.

To show why we need him. To show why he's so important. And you see this throughout Acts. It doesn't matter what their world view or their religion is.

Although Paul is always sensitive to what his hearers are thinking. It's the Bible and its story that leads to Jesus. It's all that Paul needs to conquer the world for Christ.

[10 : 18] Wherever he goes, it's what Paul does. He uses the Bible in Athens. He opens up a Bible in Corinth. He does it in Thessalonica. And he will go and use it in Rome.

He takes the Bible to the religious and to the non-religious. He takes scripture to the philosopher, to the pagan, to the politician. And to the plebs.

People like you. And me. All the way through Acts. Whether he is reasoning with Jews or with non-Jews. Paul is always utilizing the Bible in his thinking.

He's quoting to it. Alluding to it. Using it. I don't know if you've ever watched someone do something. I really wish that you could do it like them.

I wish I had a forehand like Rafael Nadal or Roger Federer. Sadly, that will never be the case. But it would be amazing if just by possessing their tennis racket, that I could be as good as them.

[11 : 20] Or say you really like, tennis isn't your thing. Maybe cooking is. If you really wanted to make a meringue, like your mum makes it.

And all you need to do is to steal the whisk that's at home and be able to make a delicious, light, sweet meringue. I don't know if making meringue is actually difficult.

But that's a remarkable thing about the word of God. The message of Jesus from the scriptures, unlike a tennis racket or a whisk, is that it has power in and of itself.

It is God's word, after all, with the might of the creator of the universe behind it. And maybe we wish we could experience what was happening in Acts.

Experience that remarkable growth of the church. Well, the good news is that we can do what Paul did. We have his method, his equipment.

[12 : 23] We have God's all-powerful word. So, that's Paul's method. The message of Jesus from the Bible. And I guess the question is then, why wouldn't we do that?

Why would we lose confidence in the method? And that's our second point. An unreasonable reaction. An unreasonable reaction.

Luke, the writer of Acts, records one of our biggest fears. What if people hate it? What if we try to take God's word to them?

To try and persuade them of its truthfulness. And they just detest it. If you're anything like me and you care what people think about you and you don't like conflict, then this could really put you off trying to share God's word with people.

And more than that, it might even stop you from wanting to even be associated with people who are trying to do that. You know, a kind of, oh, you go to that church.

[13 : 29] I hear they're Bible bashers and fundamentalists. Or doesn't that Bible that you believe have some awful things in it?

A God who commits genocide and hates women. And if we had Paul in the room, we might say something like, But Paul, it was so much easier for you.

Everyone was religious back then. They were much more likely to accept Jesus. You don't understand how much our society hates the Bible.

And how ridiculous it seems to them. I think we need to start with something different. But Luke wants to reassure us by showing us how unreasonable the opposition to God's word is.

Let's have a look at what happens in the first city he goes to in Thessalonica. We get two groups. Our first group in 17 verse 4.

[14 : 30] Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. As did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

A whole cross-section of people are persuaded by Paul's message. They hear him and are convinced that they need to believe in Jesus. They trust in him and they receive forgiveness.

Great, we think. That's the sort of thing I can get on board with. Count me in. People believing. Wonderful. But there is another reaction. A second group.

Look at verse 5. That other Jews were jealous. It's not the first time that Paul has provoked a jealous reaction from Jewish leaders. When Paul comes along and teaches about Jesus and people believe in Jesus, it often makes the people whose kind of thing, these people who now believe in Jesus, the thing that they are leaving, jealous.

These people, they've lost their crowd. They don't have the attention that they were getting before. So what do they do? They get some bad characters. Verse 5. They rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace.

[15 : 44] You know, they should be a bit like going and hanging around Celtic Park on match day and getting a loudspeaker and telling that some Rangers fans are burning a picture of Kenny Dalglish just down the road and trampling a Celtic jersey into the mud.

Just to be clear, that would work the other way around. So they form a mob and they start rioting and they tell them that Paul and Silas are the bad guys. But they can't find Paul or Silas.

And they rush to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials. They can't find Paul and Silas, so they settle for the next best thing and drag poor Jason, a believer in Jesus, whose main crime is having Paul and Silas around for dinner before the city officials.

And what is their accusation? Look at verse 6, the second half of verse 6 into verse 7. What's wrong with this?

Well, firstly, it's not Paul and Silas who are causing trouble. It's the Jewish leaders who have gone and found the troublemakers and wound them up to cause trouble.

[17 : 19] So it's pretty ironic. And then secondly, it's the actual nature of the thing that they are accused of. They are accused of proclaiming another king.

And against Caesar, it's exactly the same thing that Jesus was accused of in his trial before the Roman governor, Pilate. Let me read it.

It's Luke chapter 23, verses 1 to 4. Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. So Pilate asked Jesus, are you the king of the Jews?

You have said so, Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, I find no basis for a charge against this man.

Simply put, it's not true. Broadly speaking in Acts, Christians either get accused of one of two things. They get accused of blaspheming God. Or they get accused, like they do here, of blaspheming the state.

[18 : 37] Particularly from Jerusalem and from typically Jewish sources, the charge is blasphemy against God. But here the resistance takes a new form that is just as unreasonable.

The resistance is that the gospel is making them guilty of treason against the king and against their political powers. It is true that Jesus is the king.

But his rule is one that is characterized by forgiveness of sin. Not a rule that necessarily contradicts the rule of kings and governments now. So it has some truth, but it is a massive distortion of that truth.

The Jews, out of jealousy, are causing trouble and distorting the truth just to suit their own agenda. And I think it's important for us to see that this accusation misrepresents them.

Paul and Silas aren't the ones causing trouble, they're innocent. I think in our current situation in Scotland, we are increasingly in a situation where clear Christian teaching from the Bible is said to be harmful.

[19 : 55] Where to be clear on what sin is, and to be clear on the fact that Jesus will judge as king is thought to be backwards and hateful.

So we need to know and we need to be convinced that this message about the lordship of Jesus is good. It's not the message that it's fault.

The Bible doesn't incite people to harm other people. The truth about sin and judgment and forgiveness and Jesus is good for us and it's good for others.

I think we do see here that, actually, yeah, it's reasonably likely that at some point in your life, if you tell enough people about Jesus, someone will hate it.

Perhaps your boss might ask you to stop speaking about Jesus at work, or the Students' Union might prevent you from having certain speakers on campus.

[20 : 59] And it might be costly for you, like it was for Jason, to be associated with Bible ministry. And it's important to understand it's not because there's something wrong with the method or the message.

The problem is with those who hear it, who have rebellious hearts, who are spurred on by jealousy. We need to be willing to stand with and to join in with ministry that looks to take God's word to the world.

So, because of the riot, Paul and Silas have to pack their bags and go 45 miles down the road to Borea. And here we see something different.

Here we see a reason we really should be talking about Jesus from the Scriptures. Point three, a reasonable reaction.

A reasonable reaction. What would you and I do? I think if I'd been Paul and Silas, I think I just wanted to lie low for a bit and have a bit of rest and relaxation.

[22 : 07] But the story of Acts is the story of the advance of God's word to advance the reign of the Lord Jesus to save the world. So, they don't cower, they don't hide.

They go straight back to the synagogue. And they do the same thing with the same message and the same scripture. Paul trusts his method, not because it's particularly clever, but because it's a message and the methods that was given to his church by Jesus to advance his kingdom, to bring forgiveness of sin to all the nations.

And then look at the results. Verse 12. As a result, many of them believed, as also did a number of prominent Greek women and many men.

What did they end up believing? Look at verse 11. The Berean Jews were of a more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Here we see the scripture, the Bible, and the message about Jesus creating belief. The result of Paul's methods is men and women, Jews and Greeks, coming to have eternal life in Jesus.

[23 : 34] And they have the reasonable reaction. They look, they see if it's true. They don't react with jealousy and outrage. I've often heard this passage, or previously heard this passage, being used to tell us to be Bereans.

I was actually once in a Bible study group called Bereans. To encourage us to be of noble character and to examine the scriptures every day to see the truth of the gospel.

To want to read the Bible on our own. To want to be at small group and at church. And on a Sunday, to want to be there. To want to examine the scriptures.

To think for ourselves about what the Bible is saying. And to want to delight in what it says. And that is something that, as believers in the Lord Jesus, we should be doing.

We should want to look at the Bible for ourselves. And to hear from God through it. We shouldn't be just passive recipients of what we hear. We should be looking at the scriptures.

[24 : 40] But I wonder if the emphasis here is less on being Bereans. Although we should want to be them. Than going out and finding Bereans.

And how do you find Bereans? To find some Bereans, you find some people. And you aim to get the Bible open and to talk about Jesus. Finding Bereans could be as simple as asking someone whether they wanted to read the word one-to-one with you.

We'll be hearing more about that at our church prayer meeting on Wednesday. And I can't think of a much better way for us as a church to get on board with this.

Earlier I said that having confidence in the method matters. And we need to realise this isn't irrelevant. It's not kind of take it or leave it.

God is working his plan to bless the world by giving people forgiveness and new life in Jesus. And when the message of Jesus is proclaimed from the Bible, then that can happen.

[25 : 48] God's word will bring people life. It will make progress. If all we got was grief, we might think that it wasn't the right thing to do.

But the amazing news here is that God's word will progress. It will do what he wants it to do. Let me pray. Father, thank you that you have given us your powerful word.

Thank you that it witnesses about Jesus. Please give us confidence that your word is what we need to reach the world for Jesus. Please give us boldness to endure opposition for you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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[26 : 54] atra easy to once. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.