

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Monday, November 19, 2018

Acts 17:1-9 “The Impact of Spirit-filled Christians”

Intro. In Acts 17 we see that Paul went on from Philippi to Thessalonica, which was the largest city of Macedonia. It was a city of about 200,000, indeed a large city in that day. As Paul continued to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire, it was not to be the same. Even the opponents of Paul recognized that his message was revolutionary, as we read in v.6. They said, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Word was spreading about the Christian movement. Without violence, deception, or much money, Paul was used of God to plant the seeds that would change the entire Roman world. A few months later Paul wrote back to this new church in Thessalonica and said, “Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Th. 1:5). Oh, what God can do with His Holy Word! (Rom. 1:16). So by the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God these missionaries were making a tremendous impact upon a city.

All over this world there are revolutions going on; men trying to change external governments, and there has been a cultural revolution right here in America. But what this world needs today is the kind of revolution that we find in Acts 17, a change of the inner man. When people are changed on the inside, then society is changed outwardly. God could begin such a spiritual revolution here in this church if we let Him. And if other churches also experience revival and renewal, then we could have a significant impact upon our society. But the fact is most churches are not having much of an impact on their communities, certainly not like Paul and the early churches had. That is a sign that we need spiritual revival!

So let’s look in our text and find an example of how to begin a spiritual revolution. One thing we need to do is to follow Paul’s example in some areas. First, we should:

I. FOLLOW THE MANNER OF PAUL

Everywhere Paul went he followed a certain pattern to reach people for the Lord. And if we are going to reach people today, we need to follow his example. And based on that example, I want to encourage us to do the following:

A. Witness through Weekly Worship – In v.2 we read, “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” Each Sabbath day Paul attended the synagogue when he first arrived in a community. In such synagogue meetings the Jews would pray, sing, read the Scriptures, and usually one or more would get up and explain or teach from a passage of Scripture. This was a weekly habit for godly Jews.

Illustration: In Lk. 4:16 we read that Jesus had the same custom. He attended the synagogue each week. Early in His ministry He was given opportunities to teach in the synagogues (Mt. 12:9; 13:54; Mark 1:21; 6:2; 6:6; John 6:59).

Attendance at church services at least weekly is good for us today. Such was the custom of Paul and Jesus, and we should follow their example. Attending weekly worship is one of the most important habits you can have, and if you get out of the habit, then you will most likely not attend church much at all. I have noticed this from observing the attendance patterns of our

church members. Once a person stops coming to church most of the time, they will slip into coming only occasionally, or not at all. So if at all possible don't ever go more than 2 weeks in a row without attending worship.

There was also an evangelistic and missionary purpose for his custom. Paul's habit was to go to the Jewish synagogue, for there he would find those who were most ready to hear and believe the gospel. Also, he would use the God-fearing Gentiles who were there as a spring-board for his work among the Gentiles.

Even so, you should attend church not only for your own sake, but for the sake of your Christian witness. After all, what kind of witness will you have if you claim to be a Christian, but unsaved people notice that you are not at church on Sunday? Furthermore, at worship you can meet up with people who are being drawn to God, and who are open to a gospel witness.

Church attendance is also for the benefit of other believers. Heb. 10:25 says, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Then, whether in church or out in the community, look for opportunities to:

B. Share the Scriptures – That's what Paul did when he had opportunity. In the last of v.2 we read, "for three Sabbaths [he] reasoned with them from the Scriptures." As a visiting Rabbi, disciplesd by Gamaliel, he was typically given the opportunity to teach God's Word in their synagogue. Paul knew that the power to change lives was in the Word of God. Heb. 4:12 says that "the Word of God is living and powerful...." So he shared the Scriptures with people. In fact, Paul wrote back to the Thessalonians about this aspect of his ministry and their response in 1 Th. 2:13, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." There has never been a great sweeping revival apart from prayer and the Word of God being spread into a community. With these Jews and God-fearers Paul appealed to the Scriptures as the text and basis of his message. He argued his case based upon a commonly held source of authority. Paul no doubt also made reference to his personal eye-witness encounter with the resurrected Christ, but the main basis of his argument was the Scripture. And so should it be today, though today fewer people recognize the authority of Scripture.

One of the most important things we can do to lead people to Christ and change lives is to share the Scriptures. No gospel witness is complete without sharing Scriptures. It is good to share your testimony. It is helpful to witness with good works. But apart from the seed of the Word of God, new life will not be the result!

How did he share when he had opportunity to speak? Notice that Paul "reasoned" (*dialogomai*) with his audience from the Scriptures about the Christian message. While at times the word simply means to speak or discuss (20:7, 9; Heb. 12:5), it is associated with using arguments and reasons to persuade (18:4; 19:8). Some scholars suggest that the word is associated with dialogue (Mark 9:34). So we share the Scriptures to give people reasons to believe in Christ. 1 Peter 3:15 says that we should "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...." We can think of Paul turning from passage to passage to prove these great facts.

In v.3 we see Luke's description of Paul's method in reasoning from the Scriptures. Those of you who are Bible teachers need to take special note of this. There are 2 elements of good Bible teaching that are mentioned here:

1. Explanation - The literal translation (of *dianoigo*) is to “open,” but figuratively it means to explain, reveal; like opening the mind to let light in. Paul helped them to understand by explaining the Scriptures. Such exposition of the Scriptures as Jesus and Paul gave would lead to more opening of the mind and heart. Teachers, your first job is to explain the Scriptures, to help them understand the meaning of Scripture. Make sure you are opening people’s minds to understand the Word of God.

2. Argumentation - Literally, the word “demonstrating” [*paratithemi*] means “to place beside,” thus to demonstrate or prove. When you teach, preach, or witness, you must consider whether the point you are making from Scripture needs argumentation to be believed or accepted by the audience (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23). Paul knew that his Jewish audience certainly needed convincing arguments for them to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by their leaders, was in fact the Messiah. So Paul would set fulfillments alongside the predictions in order that the force of his argument might be readily grasped. For example, he could quote the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The prophet foretold that the Messiah would ride on a donkey as king (Zech. 9:9); Jesus rode on a donkey to the Hosannas of the people. The prophet Isaiah foretold of one who would suffer and die for the sins of the people (Isa. 53); Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the people. And literally hundreds of other examples of fulfilled prophecies could be referred to. So I’m sure that Paul was very convincing as he shared the Word of God. Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah.

So we have seen the manner of Paul to follow. Next, in order to transform the lives of people, let’s see next:

II. PROCLAIM THE MESSAGE OF PAUL

Paul used a 3-fold argument in v.3: He showed from the Scriptures that 1) the Messiah that God had promised was to suffer and die for our sin; 2) He would be raised from the dead; and 3) Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled such Old Testament prophecies. This is similar to the summary of the Gospel found in 1 Cor. 15:3-4.

Now let’s discuss each point:

A. The Messiah’s Death Was Necessary – Notice in v.3 that Paul was “explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer....” The Jews were expecting the Messiah, but they were not expecting the Messiah to suffer. In fact, 1 Cor. 1:18, 23 points out that the preaching of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews, so Paul had to overcome a major obstacle and convince his audience that the Scriptures predicted that the Messiah would suffer. In fact, he said that the Messiah “had (*dei*) to suffer.” The death of Christ was not an accident, nor the result of unfortunate relations between Jesus and the Jews. It was indispensable in the plan of God. Why did He have to suffer? We are sinners, the Bible says. Rom. 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death. So the only way we could have been saved was by the death of Christ, a sinless substitute. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to this truth. Scriptures like Isa. 53 and Psa. 22 support the Scriptural support for the concept of a suffering Messiah.

There was a boy whose mother had somewhat ugly, disfigured hands. One day the boy asked her why she didn’t wear gloves over her hands. She replied that when he was a baby, the house caught on fire, and in the process of rescuing the boy, her hands were badly burned. When the boy heard that, he took those ugly hands and kissed them and said that to him, they were no

longer ugly. Well, the death of Christ was horrible and ugly, and most Jews were repelled by it. But for us who believe, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is an act of love and beauty.

The message of the love of God, as demonstrated in the cross of Christ, is still a message that will touch hearts today. We must continue to proclaim the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross!

B. The Messiah's Resurrection was Necessary - He also had to have been raised from the dead, as Paul said in v.3. This was predicted in prophecy. The Psalmist wrote in Ps. 16:10, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Rom. 4:25 says that Christ "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." Death is the fruit of sin. Had Jesus remained dead it would have proved that He was a sinner Himself. (See Acts 2:24-31, etc.)

C. Jesus of Nazareth Fulfilled These Prophecies – Notice that Paul concluded in the last of v.3, "This Jesus... is Christ." Like no other man that has ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth has fulfilled so many of the Old Testament prophecies. The likelihood that all these prophecies would be fulfilled in one person is practically impossible.

Can you share and explain the gospel, the good news of salvation? We must tell it for people to be saved and transformed. Any Christian ought to be able to share these basics of the gospel.

So as we bear witness and share the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus, notice with me that we should:

III. EXPECT SIMILAR RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

The effects of the faithful preaching of the gospel are as uniform as the method. It does one of two things to its hearers—either it melts their hearts and leads them to a faith commitment, or it stirs them to rejection, and even open opposition. It's like the sun: the sun will melt the snow, but it will harden the mud. The difference is not in the sun but in the object the sun shines upon. If Christ is rejected, it is not a problem with the Son of God, but with the person who rejects.

So let's look at the responses to the gospel proclamation that we see here in our text. One common response that we read about is:

A. A Refusal to Believe – As we see in v.5 that after 3 weeks many of the Jews just refused to be persuaded by Paul's arguments from Scripture and eyewitness testimony. That word in the original Greek (*apeitheo*) often refers to disobedience. The problem was not lack of credible evidence, but hardness of heart and a refusal to repent.

So as we share the gospel, we should expect that rejection of the gospel will be the typical response. None of us likes rejection, and that is especially true of some, but we must not allow that to keep us from sharing the gospel.

Notice one reason they rejected and opposed the gospel. In v.5 we see that they became full of:

B. Envy - You see, during the next several weeks Paul was having great success in converting some of the Jews, many of the God-fearing Gentiles, and even many of the Gentile

idol worshippers (1 Th.1:9). The synagogue attendance was no doubt down, and wherever Paul and the new Christian church were meeting, the attendance was greatly up. The new church in Thessalonica was growing by leaps and bounds. This is very similar to what we read about back in 13:44-45, “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy....”

Jealousy and envy are extremely ugly qualities, but the ugliest and most subtle of all jealousy and envy is found in the field of religion. The leaders of Israel crucified Christ because they were so jealous of Him. And allow me to let you in on a secret. Did you know that religious leaders get jealous of each other? Jerry Vines came to Rome, GA in 1969 and in just 6 years West Rome Baptist Church grew from 300 in attendance to over 1,000. Quite a few churches lost some members to my home church. Needless to say, many preachers were jealous of Dr. Vines.

Do you ever get jealous of other Christians? “I can’t stand her. She sings so well. She gets to sing the solos and I don’t.” Or, “So and so’s class is really growing. In fact, someone transferred from my class to their class. That burns me up.” Listen, jealousy is a sin (Gal. 5:21). Instead of being jealous, you should rejoice with those who rejoice. You should be thankful for what you *do* have. Don’t be like the jealous unbelievers that we read about in v.5.

So watch out, because the sin of jealousy will often lead to other sins. It caused the leaders of Israel to murder Jesus and others. And here in our text we see another example of how envy lead to another sin:

C. Actively Opposing the Gospel (vv.5b-9) - They weren’t content to be unbelievers themselves. They wanted everyone else to be unbelievers also. So they opposed the Gospel, as we read in v.5. They incited a mob from the rabble in the marketplace against Paul and Silas. It gave them something to do. With this mob they tried to seize Paul and Silas, but since they couldn’t find them, they seized Jason and some other leading Christians and dragged them to the marketplace, where the rulers met, and made several false charges. In v.6 they said, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Actually, the word [*anastatoo*] means that they were accused of causing a disturbance and unrest in the inhabited world. Strange talk from men who themselves had set the city in an uproar! In the Old Testament King Ahab accused Elijah of being the one who was troubling Israel, but Elijah responded that it was Ahab that had brought trouble upon Israel. Too often people hear the preaching of God’s Word and they don’t like what they hear and they get mad. Well the Bible is like a mirror. If you look at yourself in the mirror, and you don’t like what you see, don’t get mad and angry at the mirror! Or don’t get mad and never go back to the mirror. You need to change what the mirror reveals.

Next, Paul and Silas were accused of treason against Caesar. We read in v.7, “these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” Paul did preach about another King, another Lord besides Caesar, but Luke uses the word *herteros*, another of a different kind. Jesus is a heavenly king. He himself said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Again, these Jews added to their sin by such hypocrisy. The Jews would at best only pretend to be loyal to Caesar, and certainly not push loyalty on other Jews! They believed in a coming Messianic King. They would also place loyalty to God ahead of loyalty to Caesar. Yet when it suited their purposes they would feign loyalty to Caesar.

Let me conclude this part of my message by pointing out the seriousness of opposing the spread of the gospel. I don’t think that anyone here today it is actively opposing the spread of the gospel. However, this could apply to someone hearing this message on TV or the Internet. And you remember this in case you ever deal with someone who does oppose the Gospel. By

definition an *evil* person is one who not only is evil himself, but one who actively seeks to make everyone else evil, and prevents anyone else from becoming good in Christ. Listen! One of the most evil things you can do is interfere with someone coming to Christ. Jesus said it is better for a person to have a millstone placed around their neck and cast into the sea, than for a person to cause a little one to stumble. Paul wrote about this type of sin in 1 Thessalonians 2:16, “Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always; for the wrath of God is come upon them to the uttermost.” If there is a husband listening to me who tries to prevent your wife and children from Christ, you are only adding to the full measure of the wrath of God that you will face someday if you do not repent.

Though we can expect unbelief to be an all-to-common response to the Gospel, another response is:

D. Saving Faith – In v.4 we read, “And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” Notice that “some” were persuaded to believe in Christ. That is a word of encouragement. We can pretty much count on at least some believing in Christ when we share the gospel with enough people. A fisherman may only catch a few fish, but the one who does not go fishing and all will certainly catch none. “Were persuaded” (*peitho*) means “to be convinced, persuaded, won over.” It can even be translated “obey.” Some were obedient to the clear call of salvation. It is noteworthy that here, as in Philippi, leading women took a bold stand for Christ. Thank God for Christian women who will believe and stand for Christ even when their husbands or fathers do not! And when they believed, there were several results:

1. They Joined the New Church. Notice in the last of v.4 that they “joined Paul and Silas.” That word (*proskleroo* - here passive) means to be attached to, to join, no doubt for the purpose of discipleship. This joining is the way it should be. Christ commanded us to go and make disciples. We are not just to win people to Christ, but the converts should also join themselves to a church where they will be baptized, taught, and encouraged in the Christian life, and thus become true disciples. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in my Word, you are my disciples indeed.” But without an active involvement in a Bible teaching, loving church, you will find it very difficult to live for the Lord, if not impossible.

2. They in Turn Spread the Gospel - Paul was not in Thessalonica very long, and you might think, as the opposition must have, that when Paul and Silas left, the newly formed Christian Church would fall apart. Now many God-fearing Gentiles were saved through the synagogue ministry of Paul. But what about the reference in 1 Th.1:9 to idol worshippers who were converted? Probably the converted God-fearing Gentiles spread the message throughout the city. They did not keep it to themselves. In fact, from that verse, it is implied that most of the church were idol worshippers at the time of Paul’s writing, several weeks after he left Thessalonica. From Paul’s letters to the church there, we can infer that the church continued to grow, even without Paul. In 1 Thess. 1:8 Paul wrote, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place....” That’s the way it should be. Every member should have a part in the outreach ministry of a church, not just the pastor and perhaps a few others. This is how we will have an impact upon our community. We will not have an impact if all we do is huddle behind the walls of this church building and proclaim the gospel here, especially if few of us invite unbelievers to join us for worship. We need to be more like the Thessalonian Church. That is how we are going to impact our city for Christ!

Conclusion: So I want to encourage all of us to bear witness to Christ by our church attendance, and by sharing the Word of God with others. Will you make a commitment to do so this morning? And even though perhaps most will not believe, and least some will. God has given us His Word. Let us share the truth about Jesus Christ, that He died for our sins and rose again! There is power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us use that power to change our world one soul at a time!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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