

Have You Upset Your World Today?

Acts 17:1-9

Introduction

In 1894, the rhetoric teacher at Harrow in England, wrote on a sixteen-year-old's report card, "A conspicuous lack of success."

That sixteen-year-old was Winston Churchill, who would become one of the great orators of the century.

In 1905, the University of Bern rejected the dissertation of a Ph.D. student and called it, "fanciful".

That Ph.D. student was Albert Einstein.

Sometimes the value of the world is wrong. Most often, in fact, it is.

If you were to grade the mark, or the effectiveness, of the apostle Paul, at the juncture in his missionary journey in Acts, chapter 17, you would not give him a very high grade. He has been imprisoned; he has been stoned; he has been left for dead; he has had people forsake his ministry; he has been left alone. And, the results that he has had have been scattered and somewhat strange. At least that is what it seems like on the surface.

However, the exact opposite is true. I view it as if a tidal wave has just hit Europe and the water is beginning to spread inland – and it will ultimately, trickle its way all around Europe.

God is beginning a revolution through the apostle Paul. We will pick up our story today, and discover not only an interesting passage of scripture that reveals a little more of what this individual was doing, but one of the most interesting descriptions of Christianity.

How To Upset Your World For Christ

So, let us pick our study up at Acts, chapter 17, verse 1.

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

The last city that Paul went to did not have a synagogue, so he went down by the riverside. Well, in Thessalonica, they had a synagogue.

Continue to verses 2 through 7.

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

explaining and giving evidence that the Christ . . .

(“Christos,” in the Greek, or the Messiah),

. . . had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”

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.

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 coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

(evidently, Paul and Silas were staying in the house of Jason.),

When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men . . ."

(Here it is!),

“. . . 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.”

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a direct relationship between upsetting your world and understanding God’s word. Paul’s strategy was simple and we are going to dissect it today.

Paul gave people the word of God. And, the categorical phrase that described him and that ministry was, “He is upsetting the world!” – even though it did not look like it, did it?

Notice, in verses 2 and 3, he reasoned, he explained, he opened the word. If you want to upset your world, the lever is the word of God.

So, the question then, is this, “Have you upset your world? Do you have the kind of relationship with the word that creates a revolution in your world?”

Six things needed to upset your world for Christ

Let me give six things that are needed if we hope to upset our world for the glory of Christ.

A relationship that is spiritual

1. First, begin with a relationship that is spiritual. In other words, you cannot get to know God’s word until you know who God is.

The Bible delivers the revelation that expresses the character and attributes of God. As you study His word, you come to know Him.

I was raised in a non-denominational church that had, hanging on the back of the wall, “To know Him and to make Him known.” They had it all right, because the first phrase was, “To know Him . . .”, and then, “. . . make Him known.”

You get to know Him when you know His word. You go to the word and discover what it says about the Author of the word.

In fact, Paul wrote in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 14, that,

. . . a natural man . . .

(that is, the unbelieving man),

. . . does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

So, until you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, this is a closed book. You might get a little “warm and fuzzy” reading the Psalms, or maybe the Proverbs, or some good idioms of which you can say, “Yes, that makes a lot of sense.”

For the most part, though, this is a closed book. This will not revolutionize your life and, through your life, it will not revolutionize your world. You must begin with a relationship that is spiritual.

A conscience that is clear

2. Secondly, you must cultivate a conscience that is clear.

Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 2, verses 1 and 2,

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow . . .

In other words, he says that before you study and learn the milk of the word, put aside – and he gives this long list of sins. Make sure your relationship with Christ is clear when you come to the word, so that you can grow by it. In other words, harboring sin hinders growth.

A desire that is replaced with a discipline

3. Thirdly, you must replace a desire with a discipline.

Eventually, that longing has to get you into the word, that develops a discipline of study in the word. Desire has to turn into discipline.

How many of you have a desire to lose weight? I will put my hand up, along with all the honest people.

When I was married, sixteen years ago, I had a twenty-nine inch waist. It was like when you suck in air – but then you let the air out and it sags back down! Now, I do not want to blame it all on my wife, but . . .! And, just in the last year and a half, I have had people come to me with ideas and all this kind of stuff. Do not come up with ideas, okay? But in the last year and a half, I have gone from thirty-

four, which is not bad, to thirty-six, and things are kind of tight. Then to thirty-seven, in a year and a half, and I am cutting back. This is not the place to laugh, okay?! I have not had a Krispy Kreme donut in about . . . okay, about forty-eight hours! I have desire, but guess what I do not have? Discipline.

How many of you would love to play the piano, or another instrument, as we have heard played in church? Wouldn't you? I would. Wouldn't you love to be able to sit down in your home and just play?

How many of you have a desire to learn a hobby, or a craft-making ability, or any number of things? We all have desires like that, don't we? We do not have the discipline, however, so we never put them into practice.

Do you want a desire to know the word, so that you can know the Author of the word, so that you can revolutionize your world? That is a wonderful desire, but it will not get you anywhere. Eventually, it has to turn into a discipline.

So, the apostle Paul said, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 15a, (King James Version), to,

Study to show thyself approved unto God . . .

This is not for salvation, the word "approved," or "dokimos" in the Greek, means, "so that you can pass the tests of life". So, study so that you can pass the tests of life.

Do you know what happens when you pass the tests of life? All those watching you in the world, see you passing those tests, and they have to say, "I don't know what you've got, but I don't have it and I want it."

You revolutionize their world.

So, it has to become discipline. It takes more than desire.

An attitude that applies

4. Next, you have to develop an attitude that applies.

As we study the word, it is not just so we can get smarter in the scriptural facts, it is so you and I can become more like Jesus Christ.

James, chapter 1, is a great passage to look at. Verse 22 talks about the person that is a hearer of the word and not a doer. He is a forgetful man. Then, in verses 23 and 24, James gives the illustration of the man who goes up to a mirror. He says, in verse 25,

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

In other words, blessed is the man, in effect, that looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and instead of becoming forgetful, acts on or does what the word says.

The word "intently" is a fascinating word. It talks about the man who leans toward the mirror to see a clear reflection. Did any of you guys do that this morning as you shaved? You leaned into the mirror. That kind of man, who responds in accordance with the reflection that he has been given, is a blessed man.

The word is a mirror. As you and I look into the mirror of the word, we see our reflection.

Responses might be, "I don't like what I see. I'll put the mirror down. That'll fix it." or, "I don't like what I see, but I'm not going to change."

A person who is going to revolutionize his world, is a person who goes into the word and allows the reflection of the word to reveal his true character and nature, and then asks God to change him.

So, you have to have an attitude of application.

Introductions that are intentional

5. Next, you must pursue introductions that are intentional. Introductions of Jesus Christ, that is, that are intentional.

Look at Acts, chapter 17, verses 2 and 3, again.

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 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."

Now Paul, for a living, made tents. But, it was his custom; it was his passion; it was his life to reason.

Three words of introduction of Jesus Christ

There are three words, in fact, that we are given in Paul's introduction of Jesus Christ.

Reasoned

1. First, in verse 2, Paul “reasoned” with them.

You could write into the margin of your Bible the word “dialogue”. It is the Greek word “dialegomai,” which gives us our transliterated word “dialogue”. In other words, he is not standing up and just delivering a sermon, there is dialogue. He is having them ask questions and he is answering them, according to the Scriptures.

You might say, “Isn’t it wonderful that someone can do that? Isn’t it wonderful that someone can hear a question and go right to the word, and say, ‘Here’s the answer.’?”

Has it ever occurred to you that that is what we are all supposed to be able to do? As Peter said, in I Peter, chapter 3, verse 15, we are to,

. . . always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you . . .

It is not just for the professional, which does not exist by the way, to give an answer, we are all to do that.

Paul reasoned with them.

Explaining

2. The second word, in the first part of verse 3, is “explaining”.

Paul explained the Scriptures. You could literally render that, “he opened the Scriptures”.

Luke, uses the same word in chapter 24. Two disciples are walking along the road, that Emmaus road that we talk about and hear about, and Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord, slips in beside them and walks along with them. Later, after He disappears, they realize what has happened, and they say to themselves and to others, in verse 32, as they testify,

. . . were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining . . .

(the same word),

. . . the Scriptures to us?

What this community needs, and what our world needs, are people who mirror the life of Jesus Christ; who slip in beside other people and open the Scriptures to them; who intentionally introduce Christ, the Christ of this Bible.

I was at church recently, picking up my kids. The auditorium was turned into a maze with cardboard boxes and tunnels. The idea was to get all of the kids lost and then, help them get out of it. At

the end, the leaders shared the gospel about what it means to be lost in life and not know which way to go. They had a number of teens accept Christ as their Savior.

I was in the lobby, while I was waiting for my kids to find their way out of the maze. I was talking to a young, single guy in our church, who has only recently decided to sell out to Jesus Christ.

Do you know what I mean by that? He has accepted Christ as his Savior, but he has come to the point where he sees life differently now. He is saying, “I’ve got to do everything I can do to win my world for Jesus Christ.”

I talked to him some time ago about making that kind of decision and he made it. Now, later, he came to me in the lobby and said, “Boy, is God doing some things with my life.”

He is involved in ministry. People at work, he said, are noticing there is a difference. He works with computers and was on the night shift and came back on the day shift. He said the people on the day shift immediately knew there was something different about him. They are asking him questions. He said, “I’ve been praying for God to give me an opportunity to share Christ. Just a couple of days ago, one of the sales people was working near me, while I was working on a computer. He was working with a customer, trying to give the customer a free ‘perk’ along with the package, if he would just buy into it.”

The customer did not buy it and left. The salesman was disgusted and turned to him and said, “Can you believe that someone would turn down a free gift?”

It is like the Lord said, “Okay, here you go, an answer to prayer.”

He thought, “Wow! Here’s an opening.”

He said to the salesman, “Well, it’s interesting, people do that all the time.”

“They do? What are you talking about?”

He explained to him the free gift of eternal life.

He had a lady call him a couple of nights ago and ask him, “How do you become a Christian? You’ve got something I don’t have. It must be Christ.”

William Carey, who was the father of, what we call, modern missions, lived over a hundred years ago in England. He was a shoemaker. He began to view life like that and thought, “I will intentionally introduce people to Jesus Christ.”

Have you begun to live like that? You will revolutionize your world if you do.

Every time someone came into Carey's shoe shop, he would find a way to turn the conversation around so he could tell them about Christ. He did not nail them in a corner or threaten to hit them with a shoe or something, he just took every opportunity he could to present Christ.

One day, a friend of his said, "William, you're going to ruin your business."

He responded with, "My business is advancing the kingdom of God. I sell shoes to pay expenses."

Wow! No wonder that man revolutionized his world.

We need Christians who will consider themselves to not have fulfilled their spiritual service by simply coming to church. I talk to Christians and ask them, "Are you living for the Lord?"

"Yea, I go to church."

I want to tell you, as you probably well know, this is not it. Church is where we, who are living for Christ, come for refreshment and encouragement and edification. We come to be challenged and convicted and changed. We provoke one another unto love and good works, but we have not reached the world in here. There is not a verse in the Bible that tells the world to come in here. There are verses that tell us to go out there and reach the world, and we have not begun in here. We are given tools and encouragement to go do it.

I like the way one man said it, when he said, "This is kind of like a holy huddle, but eventually, we have to break the huddle and go play the game."

Evidence

3. The third word, also in verse 3, is interesting. Paul gave "evidence" of Christ's resurrection.

The word "evidence" means, "to place beside or to set before." When you give people evidence, you lay it out before them.

Verse 3 says that he did this according to the Scriptures. We know he used the Old Testament. We do not know what he used in the Old Testament, but this got me going. I spent a lot of time and will give you a number of references that you can search through and perhaps, give to a friend, especially someone who might be Jewish.

- Perhaps Paul turned to Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 1, where we are told that the Messiah would be a descendent of David.
- Maybe he turned to Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, that tells us that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
- Maybe he looked up Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, and had them unroll that great scroll of Isaiah, their beloved prophet, that tells us that the Messiah would be born of a virgin.
- Isaiah, chapter 9, verse 2, while they were there, says that the Messiah would bring to Israel a great light. You see, when Jesus Christ stood up and said to the people, as recorded in John, ". . . I am the light of the world . . .", He was saying, "I am the fulfillment of that Messianic promise by the great prophet Isaiah. I am the great light."
- Perhaps Paul took them to Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9, that says the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding upon a young donkey.
- Maybe they read Psalm, chapter 22, that describes the crucifixion. It talks about the bones of Jesus being out of joint. It talks about the agony and the mockers who are there. And it even records, in verse 1a, the words, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"
- Perhaps, of course, Psalm, chapter 16, verse 10, that refers to the resurrection of Christ, as it says, the Son of David will not undergo decay.

My father was flying back from Russia recently. The ministry he has been involved with for forty years, Missions To Military, is expanding. They are going to open a Serviceman's Center on the coast of the Black Sea.

What a fascinating place, especially when you think of prophetic scripture saying that the bear will march from the north. You just know that that will be one of the key strategic places where they will mount up to march against Israel one day.

At this time, that area is a place where there is no other gospel ministry like this. There is a large naval base there and they have invited them to come.

My father was flying back and flew through Odessa, in the Ukraine. He had a layover in Odessa for awhile, and said that the airport was filled with orthodox Jewish men. He found out that they were flying to Israel to celebrate Yom Kipper. They were

dressed, if you have seen orthodox Jewish men, in black hats, long hair in ringlets, and boxes on their foreheads that encase the Ten Commandments. They take literally, that they are to put the Law in-between their eyes.

My dad was sitting there and had his Bible open and was reading in the terminal. A young, twenty-five year old, orthodox Jew sat down beside him. It was one of those situations. My dad started talking to him and eventually, worked it around to where he was able to ask him a question. He asked him a great question, I thought. He asked, "Son, how will you recognize the Messiah when He comes?"

That young man said, "Oh, we will know Him. He will perform miracles. His personality will be dynamic. We will know Him."

My father said, "But there have been many messiahs who have come claiming to be the messiah of Israel, and they have been false messiahs. How will you know for sure that He is the true Messiah?"

"Oh, we will know."

My father said, "I know how you will know. In your Hebrew Scriptures . . ." and he turned to Zechariah, chapter 12, verse 10, where it says that the nation Israel will look upon their returning King, the Messiah, and they will look upon Him, whom they have, what? Pierced.

"That's not in *my* Bible."

"Oh yes, it is."

"Let me write that reference down."

He wrote that reference down.

Then my father turned to Isaiah and said, "I want to turn to a chapter that you have probably never heard in the synagogue."

He turned to Isaiah, chapter 53.

"I ought to write that reference down."

He wrote the reference down.

He turned to Genesis, chapter 49, verses 10 and 11, where we are told one of the first messianic promises that the king's scepter will not depart the tribe of Judah and when He comes He will tie His young donkey to a vine.

"I've got to write that down. I haven't seen that before."

And that was right out of the Torah!

He said, "But I believe in the oral Torah. We trace our beliefs back through our father's generation back . . . we trace it back to Abraham and Moses."

My father said, "That is the difference. You believe in the oral Torah more than you believe, as I do, the written Torah."

Then, my father showed a verse to him that has moved me as I have thought of it. He turned to Zechariah, chapter 13, verse 6, where the nation Israel asks their king,

. . . What are these wounds between your arms? . . .

And He will answer,

. . . Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

Who knows whether that man has gone back to his Hebrew Scriptures and studied that intentional introduction of Jesus Christ that may indeed, revolutionize his life.

Opposition that is embraced as opportunity

6. Finally, if you want to upset your world, you must embrace opposition as opportunity.

Look at verse 5 of Acts, chapter 17.

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 . . .

Now stop here. Isn't it interesting how easy it is to incite opposition to Christ? It does not take much and they are there, ready to form a mob. They just say, "We're ready to march."

Luke does not "pull any punches" as he talks about this. He calls them, "wicked men from the market place". They were just ready, available.

We have them in our marketplace, as well. They are available at any moment to stand against the truth.

One translation describes them as, "wicked fellows of the rabble".

Another one translates it, "unprincipled loungers of the marketplace".

Another translation says, "worthless fellows from the streets".

A. T. Robertson, a Greek scholar of almost a hundred years ago, simply translated it, "bums"!

One commentator, by the name of Adam Clark, who lived over a hundred years ago, was convinced that these men were lawyers! He, obviously, was not a lawyer, to come up with that kind of conclusion.

I believe that these were men who actually made their living off of the agora; that is, the open area where they had the rostrum. When politicians would speak, these men could be hired to either heckle or applaud. They were available to do whatever the person wanted, if the money was right. So, here they are, evidently hired by the Jews.

In fact, Cicero, the first century Roman statesman, called these men who made their living this way, “subrostrony,” literally, “those under the rostrum”. They were there to be hired and so, they were hired. They were hired guns in Macedonia’s capital city.

Continue to verses 6 and 7.

When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason . . .

(we do not know anything about him, by the way),

. . . and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, . . .

(I love this next phrase),

. . . and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar . . .

In other words, these men are not politically correct. They go against the tide of popular opinion. And, “We don’t like the fact that they upset the world and they make us feel like we are wrong. Who do they think they are?”

There was all that kind of jargon that you have probably heard.

They are not following the party lines. I Thessalonians, chapter 1, is the sequel of this event. Paul encourages these believers and praises them, as he writes in verse 9b,

. . . you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God

Now there is a volume in those words because the Thessalonians are Greek and their Greek idol worship was their business and their heritage. You do not turn your back on your heritage; you do not turn your back on your family. You are a Greek and you are living in the city named after Alexander the Great’s sister, Thessalonica. This is who you are. They turned from it and followed the living God.

Now go back to chapter 17 of Acts, and continue to verse 8.

They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

The word “authorities” is “politarches” in the Greek, which gives us our word “politician”. Now the authorities are involved. This is really turning into a major brew.

It is like the riot that was nearly started in Kansas, some years ago. Did you hear about that? It was in their House of Representatives. They start their session, as we do in our state, with prayer – to who knows who. Well, the guy praying knew who. The pastor’s name was Joe Wright. Let me read what he prayed, as he opened the assembly that day.

Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek Your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, “Woe to those who call evil good”, but that’s exactly what we’ve done.

(I feel the fidgeting now starting),

We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and we have inverted our values. We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it “moral pluralism”. We have worshiped other gods and called it “multi-culturalism”. We have endorsed perversion and called it an “alternative lifestyle”. We have exploited the poor and called it “the lottery”. We have neglected the needy and called it “self-preservation”. We have killed our unborn and called it “choice”. We’ve shot abortionists and called it “justifiable”. We’ve neglected to discipline our children and called it “building self-esteem”. We have abused power and called it “political savvy”. We have coveted our neighbor’s possessions and called it “ambition”. We’ve polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it “freedom of expression”. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it “enlightenment”.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; try us and see if there be some wicked way in us. Cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas and have been ordained by You to govern this great state. Grant them Your wisdom to rule and may their decisions direct us to the center of Your will. I ask it in the name of Your Son, the living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Isn't that great! Somebody in the arena finally stood up and said, "The emperor has no clothes."

By the way, this prayer was read by Paul Harvey on his radio program and it produced his largest listener response ever.

I'll bet the guy's church grew by a thousand.

It is interesting that, according to the article I read, it probably would not have gone any further than the House of Representatives, but, by the time he finished his prayer, there were representatives rushing for the microphone to begin their angry tirades against this man and his prayer and it made national news.

"You have upset our world."

Has it ever occurred to you that the world is already upside-down? And we, as believers, are really trying to set it upright? When you impact people for Jesus Christ, you are not really turning them upside-down, you are setting them upright.

Solomon said, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, verse 29,

... God made men upright ...

David said, in Psalm, chapter 40, verse 2,

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock ...

There is more that I could say, but we will stop at this point.

Conclusion

The church of Jesus Christ today needs men and women who will be willing to:

- begin with a relationship that is spiritual;
- cultivate a conscience that is clear;
- replace a desire with discipline;
- develop an attitude that applies;
- intentionally introduce Jesus Christ;
- embrace opposition as opportunity.

Let me quickly say what that means. Paul left Thessalonica, never to return. He started something totally new. If you debate the chronology of the epistles, many believe that he did something that he had never done before. He could not go there to honor the pledge of Jason, in chapter 17, verse 9. Right or wrong, he did not go back, but he sat down and wrote two letters to them. You have them in your Bible. A brand new way of discipling and encouraging and training was born.

May we be people whose business it is to advance the kingdom of God, while everything else pays the expenses. Let us be people that break out of the huddle and go play the game.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/9/1997 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1997 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.