

Acts 17:1-15

Turning the World Upside Down

Learning Objectives

- To better understand Paul and the apostles' ministry in the book of Acts
- To identify and work to replace idols you might have in your life with Jesus
- To think about how the Gospel practically affects your daily life, the way you work, and the way you interact with others

Pray for your time together as a group.

? If you could do one thing to change the world (in any way), what would you do?

Read Out Loud: Acts 17:1-15 (NIV)

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. 4 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.

5 But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

10 As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Berean Jews were of 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. 12 As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

13 But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

? In verse 2, it says that Paul's custom was to go to the synagogue. Why do you think he would always start there whenever he went to a new city?

Possible Answers: To Paul and the early church, Christianity was simply the truly fulfilled version of Judaism. For that reason, Paul would start by proclaiming that the Jewish vision had been fulfilled in Jesus, and that the things they had been waiting to happen had come to fruition. The Jews should have known who Jesus was and expected him. Paul reflects that belief by traveling to synagogues first.

? It says that Paul had to reason and explain and prove why he believed what he believed. What are some of the big questions people wrestle with in our culture that we might have to reason or explain to other people?

Possible Answers: If God is real, or he loves me, or he's all powerful, why do bad things happen to me and others? Why do the wicked prosper? What should I do with my life? Is God real? Why does he punish sin? Why is there a hell and why do some people go but not others? Where is hope in the world?

? In verse two, it says that Paul reasons with the Jews using Scripture. Why do you think Paul chose Scripture as his way of reasoning with the Jews?

Possible Answers: The Jews already believed in the authority of Scripture. They based their decisions about how they lived their lives off of what they believed Scripture said. If Paul could convince them using Scripture, it would be like convincing them in their own language.

? Paul contextualized his reasoning to meet the Jews in their own culture and even in their own synagogue. How would you describe the culture of some of the people who you interact with on a regular basis who don't know the gospel? What are some of their main concerns in life?

Possible Answer: You could describe your work culture, school culture, family/friend culture. Examples of concerns could be desire for success, justice, tolerance, love/relationships, etc.

? How might you explain your beliefs in a way that resonates with the people of the culture you just described? How is Jesus the ultimate answer to their concerns?

Possible Answers: Talk about how the gospel impacts that culture. Ex. For a culture driven by success, you could talk about how Jesus lived a perfect life for us and took our punishment so that we are not defined by our accomplishments but his.

? The Jews accuse Paul and his companions of saying that there is another king besides Caesar. Why was this such a big deal to the city officials?

Possible Answers: Because it would have been treason to say there was another king. It would also have been considered madness. Everyone knew Caesar was king because he had taken over most of the known world, his face was all over the place on coins, and cities were named after him. And for the city officials, even the hint of there being another king would mean, they thought, that a bloody revolution would follow, where armies would try to come and displace Caesar through force. The city officials did not want to have a revolution start in their city.

? In our culture, we don't have a political king like Caesar. What are some of the other people, things, or ideas that we give king-like authority in our life?

Possible Answers: In America today, we are all told that we are our own king. We should be making sure that everything that happens is in our own best interest, advertisers cater to us, we are told that whatever is right is what we want it to be, that we should do what makes us happy, do what our heart tells us. We also make family or friends into kings over us.

? What practical difference does it make in our life if we say that Jesus is our king instead of anyone or anything else?

Possible Answers: It changes the way we live. When someone or something is lord of your life, you live according to their rules, to live in a way that pleases them. Even though we don't realize it, we're all trying to impress someone or live according to some standard in all that we do. It could be family, friends, the cultural norms or some kind of standard or image we try to meet. It may be trying to be a successful person, or be like some famous person we want to emulate. Or it may be living in a way that makes us feel the most personally happy. Whatever it is, it's like a king reigning over us, and when we have Jesus be that lord, it changes our actions, our beliefs, how we interact with others, etc. It changes everything.

? Why does Jesus deserve to be the ultimate king in our life over everyone and everything else?

Possible Answers: God has made him king, raising him to that role in the resurrection (Eph 1:20-23) to be above all things. And Jesus, being God, is thereby the Creator of the world, and it belongs to him (John 1:1-5). Beyond all of that, Jesus is a loving king, one who is far greater and far more loving than any earthly king or ruler. He loves us so much that he gave himself for us! (For more on Jesus as King through his actions on the cross, see Revelation 5:1-7)

? In verse 11, we are told the Bereans are noble because when they heard the word Messiah they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. In what ways can we search the Scriptures to learn about Jesus's Kingship in our own lives?

Possible Answers: We learn how we live if we're under Jesus' Kingship, how he's a better king and what his power is like. We learn how much of a loving king he is, and what it's like to live in his kingdom versus other kingdoms.

? The ESV translates verse 6 to say “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” The Gospel was turning the world upside down! How do we see the Gospel doing this in our own lives or in the lives of others when they first hear the good news?

Possible Answers: It flips the way we work. When some people may be content to cut corners or see their job as just something they do to make money, Christians should see it as a chance to bless others, bless their context and add their work to the work God started us doing in the garden. It changes the way we act in our marriages. In a world that tells us to look out for ourselves first, it changes the way we treat our spouses, giving ourselves up for them instead of looking out for ourselves. But imagine it going further. Imagine it affecting how you ran your business. Imagine it affecting how you interacted with the poor people in the city, even seeking them out! Imagine how it would affect the way you thought about looking for a job, trying to find something that brought glory to God instead of something that would get you a nice healthcare plan.

? How does the gospel impact or “turn upside down” the ordinary, everyday aspects of your life, like the way you work at your job or the way you treat your friends?

Possible Answers: It makes us work in a gospel-oriented way, so that we work hard but don’t put our worth or identity in it. It makes us better friends because we love like Jesus loves us. It makes us want to imitate

For Discussion and Accountability

? What are other “kings” in your life? Who do you follow instead of Jesus?

? How can the members of your small group help you dethrone these false kings in your life and replace them with Jesus?