

## **Acts 17:1–34 — Turning the World Right Side Up**

### **Thessalonica: Reasoning from Scripture and the Cost of Gospel Fruit**

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

Luke summarizes the journey in one verse, but it was a long walk—nearly a hundred miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. When they arrived, Paul did what he always did when a synagogue was available:

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’”

Paul did not preach feelings. He reasoned. He opened the Scriptures and showed that the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection were not accidents but necessities—written in God’s plan long before they happened. The cross was not a setback; it was the means of salvation. Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. And the resurrection publicly declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Some believed:

“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.”

A strong church was born in Thessalonica—but opposition rose immediately:

“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar.”

They assaulted the house of Jason and accused the believers:

“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”

That accusation is closer to the truth than the mob realized. The world is already upside down—priorities reversed, sin normalized, God ignored, self enthroned. The gospel does not ruin life; it restores it. It turns people right side up by bringing them into a right relationship with God.

They added a political charge:

“These all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.”

That statement is also true. Jesus is King. And the moment a person bows to Him, they discover that His reign does not crush them—it saves them.

### **Practical Application:**

If your faith never disrupts your life, you may be following a religion rather than a risen King. Jesus does not merely improve your schedule; He claims your allegiance.

**Challenge for Believers:**

Are you living in a way that makes sense only if Jesus truly is King? Or do your choices look exactly like the world—with a little religious language attached?

Because the situation became dangerous, the believers sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

**Berea: Noble Hearts and Serious Bible Study**

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

The Bereans listened eagerly—but they did not swallow everything whole. They examined Scripture daily to confirm what they heard. That is spiritual maturity: humility to receive, discernment to test, and discipline to search.

As a result:

“Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.”

When people love truth, they grow strong. When people refuse to examine truth, they become easy to mislead. The Berean posture protects believers from manipulation and keeps the church rooted.

**Practical Application:**

Do not build your life on religious personalities, emotional moments, or popular slogans. Build your life on the Word of God. If something cannot be supported by Scripture, it is not worthy of your conscience.

**Challenge for Believers:**

Be a Berean this week. Set aside time each day to open Scripture, not as a quick ritual, but as a serious search. A shallow Bible diet produces a shallow Christian life.

But opposition followed Paul again. Agitators came from Thessalonica and stirred up trouble, so Paul was escorted to Athens while Silas and Timothy remained to strengthen the new believers.

**Athens: A City Full of Idols and a Message for Thinkers**

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.”

Athens was intelligent, artistic, and religious—but spiritually lost. Paul reasoned in the synagogue and in the marketplace daily. Eventually, philosophers engaged him:

“Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him.”

They called him a “babbler” and said he seemed to proclaim foreign gods “because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.” They brought him to the Areopagus:

“May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?”

Athens loved novelty:

“For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”

That attitude is still common: endless curiosity, endless opinions, endless talk—yet no repentance, no surrender, no transformation.

### **Paul’s Sermon: The God They Do Not Know**

Paul began respectfully:

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.”

He had seen their worship and found an altar:

“To the Unknown God.”

Then Paul said:

“Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.”

He declares the true God as Creator:

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”

God is not contained by buildings, statues, or human systems:

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”

The heart of true worship is not what we imagine we are doing for God, but what God has already done for us. He is the Giver; we are the receivers. When we finally see that, worship becomes gratitude—not bargaining.

Paul then proclaims human unity and God’s purposeful sovereignty:

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

God is not distant:

“So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

Paul grounds it in a profound reality:

“For in Him we live and move and have our being.”

And he presses the logic:

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

Idolatry is not only carved statues. It is any attempt to reduce God to something manageable—something we can control, predict, or use. That includes modern idols too: success, pleasure, power, image, comfort, money, and self-rule.

### **Practical Application:**

What you trust for identity, security, and meaning is what you worship. If it is not God, it will eventually disappoint you—and it cannot save you.

### **The Command: Repent, Because Judgment Is Certain**

Paul reaches the unavoidable conclusion:

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

Repentance is not mere regret. It is a decisive turning—from self-rule to God’s rule, from darkness to light, from excuses to surrender.

Why the urgency?

“Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.”

And God has given proof:

“He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

The resurrection is not an inspirational idea. It is God’s public guarantee that Jesus is the appointed Judge and the only Savior. Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross, and the resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

### **Three Responses: Mocking, Delaying, Believing**

When they heard of the resurrection:

“Some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’”

Mockery hardens. Delay endangers. Both are spiritually deadly if they continue.

Yet some believed:

“However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

God does not need a stadium of listeners to do eternal work. Even a few believers can become the seed of a faithful witness in a hardened city.

**Challenge for Believers:**

Refuse the spirit of Athens—endless talk, endless novelty, no repentance. Be decisive. Obey what you already know God has shown you. The gospel is not a topic to admire; it is a King to follow.

**Invitation to Non-Believers**

If you have treated Jesus as an interesting idea, a debate topic, or a cultural figure, hear what Acts 17 declares: God commands all people everywhere to repent because judgment is coming, and the risen Jesus is the appointed Judge.

But the same Jesus who will judge is the Jesus who saves.

He shed His blood on the cross to forgive sinners. He rose from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Turn to Him now. Confess your sin honestly, lay down your self-rule, and put your trust in Jesus Christ. Call on Him—and He will receive you.