

Gospel Triumph: The Unsettling Gospel – Acts 17:1-15

This past week I was at summer camp with our teenagers. We really had a good time. The camp was held at Cedarville University in Ohio, and we were staying in their dorms. Any time you put 1200 or so teenagers together, away from home, and with access to sugar and energy drinks, there will be some late nights.

There were several nights that I found myself in the hallway well past the start of quiet hours, which theoretically began at 11pm and went to 7am, telling groups of teens to settle down and go to bed. One of our adult leaders said he walked into the hall late at night and there were two teens from a different church standing at the ends of the hallway throwing a golf ball back and forth. He assumed they would stop as he walked to the centrally located bathroom. They did not.

Now, I use that phrase “settle down” because I want you think about what you mean when you say, “settle down” and what that implies about the opposite “unsettled”. To be unsettled is to be actively disrupted, changing, not fixed. We wanted the teens to settle down into a somewhat normal activity of going to bed.

I used the word “unsettling” in the title of the message today because the gospel confronts typical human patterns of belief and life and disrupts them. It breaks us out of the norm and what we simply assume to be true about ourselves and life. It will not allow us to stay the same. If the message of the Gospel is true, life cannot remain on the same trajectory. We can’t keep loving the world, and living for ourselves, and following the typical cultural understanding of the good life. The gospel will disrupt and unsettle that. And unlike teenagers in the hallway at 2am, we don’t want the disruption brought by the gospel to settle down. We want it to continue to transform and change us and those who hear it.

So, here’s what we will see in Acts 17:1-15 this morning. **3 Reasons the Unsettling Gospel Transforms Lives.**

1. It’s Reasonable (vv. 1-4)

In Acts 16 we followed Paul’s journey to Europe for the first time. The Spirit kept he and Silas from continuing in Asia Minor and instead directed them across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia. They made their way to Philippi, which was an

important city and a Roman colony. Acts 16 recounts the way the gospel made inroads in that city and eventually how Paul and Silas ended up in jail for the night. After being released and encouraging the new believers, they set off from Philippi and continue on the Via Egnatia, which was the main Roman highway that connected Rome to the east. Look where this leads them. Verse 1.

If you are familiar with the New Testament, you have probably heard of Thessalonica. In fact, Paul eventually writes two letters to the church at Thessalonica. 1 and 2 Thessalonians. We have the origin story of how that church began here in Acts 17. Verse 1 tells us that Paul, Silas, and Timothy made their way to the synagogue in Thessalonica, which is a continuation of the typical strategy they have used on their missionary travels. Look what happens in verse 2.

3 straight Sabbath days Paul goes into the synagogue and notice the different words used to describe what he did. Verse 2 he reasoned with them. This means to discuss or argue in a formal speech. Essentially, he preached to them from the OT in such a way that he tried to convince them of something. What? Look at verse 3.

Two more words used. Explaining and proving. To explain means to open up something that has previously been hidden to people. To prove is to establish something as true. So, Paul is opening up the OT and establishing certain truths from the OT. Notice their reaction in verse 4 and the word used to describe it. They were persuaded. In other words, they were convinced. They came to a particular point of view after hearing Paul teach.

So, Paul reasons, explains, and proves something with the result that people are persuaded. What is the content of his message? 3 parts. Look back to verse 3. First it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and the OT shows this. Second, it was necessary for the Messiah to rise from the dead and again, the OT shows this. Third, Jesus is this promised Messiah.

It's a very simple and straightforward message and one that has been preached before. Peter proclaims exactly this message in Acts 3:18. Paul will preach it again

throughout his ministry and he's still preaching it in Acts 26:22-23. And they both proclaim it because this is what Jesus proclaimed. Listen to Luke 24:25-27.

We don't get a lot of detail here about where in the OT or how this message unfolded, but from other passages in Acts we know this included God's promise and plan for redemption from the OT and how the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled this plan. This also included the great need that brought about the need for this plan. Human sin and rebellion against God. Along with the resulting benefits, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Notice the reaction again in verse 4. A diverse group is convinced and comes to faith. Listen to how Paul describes this response in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2, 13.

This message was reasonable. It made sense and fit together and was accompanied by the power of God. And therefore, it always disrupts, whether a person is persuaded or not, because it's a revolutionary message.

2. It's Revolutionary (vv. 5-9)

As we've come to expect, the message does not only receive positive results. Look at verse 5. The Jews probably means religious leaders and they were upset that many would end up leaving the synagogue because of this message and joining the church. We don't have a lot of info about Jason, but it does seem clear that Paul and Silas were staying with him. Continue into verses 6-7.

These Jewish leaders had probably heard about the disruption caused in other cities by Paul. The word they use "turned the world upside down" means to trouble and disturb. It's the same idea as a revolution. You have upset the norms and status quo and stability of our way of life. And it's true that this message does that work. Look at verses 8-9. They were disturbed by it. What about this message is so unsettling?

Look again at verse 7. The heart of the problem that they articulate is that Paul is proclaiming Jesus as another king. Now, is this true? Not exactly in the way they are complaining about it. Were Paul and other early Christians going around telling everyone that Jesus was going to replace Ceasar as the Roman Emperor? Of course not. But this message is fundamentally true that Jesus is King, and it does

have revolutionary implications for Ceasar and every other earthly authority and cultural system.

The message of Jesus as King is revolutionary because he becomes your highest authority. He does disrupt political authority and cultural values. Ceasar claimed full allegiance and the message of Jesus said that ultimate Ceasar would bow the knee to the true Lord of all.

There's no way to accept Jesus as King and not be transformed into a different person that will put you at odds with much in the culture you live in. One author described it this way. *"That is, the kingdom of which Jesus is King is not simply 'spiritual' but also material and social, which is to say that it takes up space in public."* – Dean Pinter

In other words, allegiance to king Jesus will shape how you live socially and politically. I love that image of the kingdom of Jesus taking up space. If there's 100 square feet of room and all of it is dominated by the belief in the Roman pantheon of gods and all that goes with that, then when Jesus starts to grab square footage, it doesn't go well.

It will change what you love and how you spend your money. It will alter your relationships. It is a revolutionary message, just not in a march into Rome and overthrow the government sort of way.

The revolution of Jesus is a slowly building wave, not a flash in the pan. We have the amazing vantage point of reading these words 2000 years later and watching the results of King Jesus vs. Ceasar. The Roman empire would last a few hundred more years, and now most of us only care about Rome as a historical moment to gawk at. Rome holds no sway in my life or yours today and my allegiance certainly isn't to Ceasar. Ceasar has no space in my life. But the revolution of Jesus has been building for all these centuries and continues to unseat authorities and powers and alter lives. And this is because it's rooted in the truth of how things are.

3. It's Rooted (vv. 10-15)

A few minutes ago we read verse 9 and let's look back there again. What this probably indicates is that the authorities gave Jason an "exclusion order" where

he couldn't associate with Paul and Silas anymore and they must be arrested. So, they take quick action to get them out of Thessalonica. Look at verse 10.

It's amazing to watch Paul's dogged consistency in Acts. He's right back into the synagogue in the next city. But notice the reaction of these Jews in Berea. Verse 11. The Jews in Berea are described as "noble". They weren't believers, but they came to Paul's teaching and explanation of Scripture with an open mind to evaluate what he said fairly. They looked carefully but not with an immediately critical spirit. They let the evidence take them where it would.

And the evidence was quite clear because Paul's teaching was rooted in Scripture. We already saw this in Thessalonica, and we see it again here. In fact, we've seen the same thing throughout Acts. The message of Jesus is based on the OT. The OT is what the Bereans were examining, checking, and evaluating to see if the explanation of the life and ministry of Jesus fit with the promises and plans of God.

One author said this: *"A characteristic of the true religion is that it suffers itself to be examined into, and its claims to be so decided upon."* – Bengel. In other words, hold the claims of Jesus up to scrutiny and they will pass the test. And we certainly see that in Berea. Look at the result in verse 12. You can see how verse 12 gives the logical outcome of verse 11.

But a lack of open-minded engagement with Scripture can certainly harden a person in their unbelief. Look at verse 13. Certainly, a contrast with the Jews in Berea. Look at how Paul and these new believers respond in verses 14-15. Silas and Timothy stay at Berea to continue to encourage and build up the new believers there.

So, you can see throughout this passage the way the message of the Gospel unsettles, both to new life and to anger, antagonism and ultimately judgment. For you, this week, my encouragement to you would be to give the Spirit space to do this transforming unsettling work in your own life. Recognize the privilege you have to hold a copy of God's Word in your hand and follow the method of the

Bereans with the perspective Paul said was true about the Thessalonian believers.
1 Thess. 2:13. Let's pray.