

True Nobility

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 September 2021

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Please open up your Bibles to Acts chapter 17. This is after Paul and his missionary companions take a detour with the Spirit's direction to Macedonia.

They preach the gospel in Philippi and Thessalonica, and now they're leaving, going from there.

They preach the gospel in Thessalonica and Berea here in Acts 17.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, you said that you look to those who fear you and tremble at all.

That we want to be people who rightly recognize your greatness as creator, the distance between us, us man and you and God.

We want to be a church that rightly humble ourselves before you. And we ask now that you address us.

[1 : 34] Speak to us in your Word. Exercise your rule, your worship over us in the reading and preaching.

And show us, reveal to us the glory of Christ and His good news and salvation. That we may behold Him, whose glory be transformed.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts 17, verses 1 to 15. Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

[2 : 59] But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason in, and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.

And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things, and when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Many of them, therefore, believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing, as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

[4 : 25] Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. This is the first time I'm preaching with the real pulpit for Trinity Cambridge Church.

And the word pulpit comes from a Latin word that means platform. And it's in the first few centuries of early church history, the pulpit was featured prominently in the church's worship, in the place of worship.

However, during the medieval ages, the pulpit was set aside and replaced with the altar, with the focus of worship shifting from the word of God and being focused more exclusively on the mass. And the pulpit relegated to a lectern off the side of the worship space. It was not until the influence, or due to the influence of the Protestant reformers, that the pulpit started to be restored to its central place in the church's worship.

[5 : 44] So that literally a platform was given for God's word, so that we, as we gather as God's people, we are sitting under the authority of God's word.

And 2,000 years later, here on September 12, 2021, we continue that venerable tradition. Our worship venue has changed, but the word of God has not changed.

And we learn from our passage here in Acts 17, verses 1 to 15, that we must proclaim the word, the word of Christ, from the scriptures in spite of opposition.

And we see how Paul and Silas do that, first in Thessalonica, verses 1 to 9, and then in Berea, verses 10 to 15. Verse 1 tells us that after leaving Philippi, Paul and his companions passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Thessalonica was a major city, the capital of the province of Macedonia. And because this narrative is condensed, it sounds to us like these missionaries are making short trips, you know, forays here and there, maybe going from Boston to Cambridge to Somerville, or something similar to that.

[6 : 58] But the travel from Philippi to Thessalonica, through Amphipolis and Apollonia, was about 102 miles. 165 kilometers for British people and other citizens of the world.

That's about the distance from Cambridge to Portland, Maine. It's not a short distance to travel on foot. Most Bible scholars estimate that Paul traveled over 10,000 miles by foot on all of his missionary journeys, which is longer than going from Cambridge to Los Angeles and back three times to over.

The Lord Jesus commanded Paul to go and proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth, and he took that command, Jesus. He knew that people would perish forever apart from the good news of Jesus Christ, and that they would never hear the good news unless someone were to go to them and tell them.

And so, Paul literally traveled to the ends of the earth, and the known boundaries of the world at the time. And wherever he went, he proclaimed the gospel.

It says in verses 2 to 3, And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

[8 : 32] Paul reasoned with them. He used his rational faculty to have a dialogue with these hearers. But he didn't merely reason with them. He said he reasoned with them from the scriptures.

Explaining and proving that it is necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead. Paul's reasoning was based on the scriptures. The word explain is the same word that Luke used in Luke 24, 32, after Jesus teaches some of his disciples after his resurrection.

And the disciples say to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road? While he opened to us the scriptures. The word open is the same word here for explain.

Paul opens the scriptures, explains it, makes it sensible to his hearers. Later in this chapter, Paul will again reason with people, and there in chapter, starting in verse 17 and beyond, with Athens' intelligentsia, their philosophers, their academics.

And there, Luke's assessment of the Athenian intelligentsia is not flattering. He says in Acts 17, verse 21, Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

[9 : 48] Now Paul's evangelistic approach to them is understandably different because they are pagans. They have no biblical background. So he first, in that context, establishes some common philosophical grounds before challenging them from the truth of scripture and proclaiming the resurrection of Christ.

However, here, Paul's speaking to Jews. He's not at the Areopagus. He's at a Jewish synagogue. And they already believe in the authority of the Old Testament scriptures.

And so he reasons with them from the scriptures to prove to them that, according to their scriptures, that they believe Jesus was supposed to die and be raised from the dead, the Messiah.

We Christians, like the Jews before us, are people of the book. God has already revealed to us all that is needful for life and doctrine, for our salvation.

He's already revealed the salvation plan to us in his scriptures. So it is our privilege to open up the scriptures with each other. We do not rely solely on our imperfect reasoning or finite wisdom when we advise or counsel people.

[10:57] We do not merely speak from our experience or from what others have told us. As people of the book, we should make it our habit when we are in each other's company to say, let's open up God's word.

Let's see what scripture has to say about that issue. Sometimes we're like people who are straining our eyes to see something, to read something in the dark.

When we can simply bring that note over to the light. Psalm 119 verse 105 says, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We should let the light of scriptures shine on our path of life. Christians are not those who have found what's in scripture to be agreeable to their sentiments and opinions. Christians are those who mold their sentiments and opinions to be agreeable with what is found in scripture.

We do not conform God's word to our mind. We conform our mind to God's word. So we should reason with one another from the scriptures. And the most important thing to get from the scriptures is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

[12:15] This is what Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 16, 15 verse 3, the matter of first importance.

That's what Paul is demonstrating to the Thessalonians here in this passage, that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.

Jesus is the Christ. Christ is not Jesus' last name, as most of you know. It's a title. Christ is just a Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, which in English we call Messiah or Christ. He's the anointed one, the prophesied king who was to come to rescue God's people. This was Paul's main contention to his audience, his Jewish fellows in Thessalonica.

This Jesus, when I proclaim to you, is the Christ you've been waiting for. And Paul makes his case using the Old Testament scriptures. We don't know exactly what parts of scripture he turned to, but it's not hard to guess what some of them might have been.

Genesis 3.15 prophesied of a suffering Messiah, that a descendant of the woman who's healed would be bruised by the serpent, Satan, but who will then bruise the serpent's head, lend the fatal blow to Satan's head.

[13:32] Psalm 16.10 prophesied of a Messiah who would rise from the dead. It says, For you will not abandon my soul to shield to the dead, or let your Holy One see corruption.

David, David, who was a type of the Messiah, or a forefather of the Messiah, he's a forefather and a foreshadowing of the Messiah, and he anticipated that this Messiah would die, and you would not see corruption.

His body would never decay. He prophesied that the Messiah would be raised from the dead. Isaiah 53 prophesied of a suffering Messiah. It says, But he was pierced for our transgression.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wound we are healed. All weed-like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth, yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

[14:42] He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills all of these prophecies.

He died on the cross, bearing our sin and our iniquities. It is because of his atoning death that many are accounted righteous and have a pathway to God the Father.

Jesus died with wicked men and he was crucified with a criminal on each side. And then he was buried in a rich man's grave. But he didn't stay there.

After he made an offering for guilt with his own life, Jesus was raised from the dead. God prolonged his days, gave him the spoils of victory, and now he has many children, offspring of faith.

That's what we call the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. To admit that we need the Christ is to admit that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves.

[15:47] God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And he has ordained that the only way of salvation is to give up our pretensions of saving ourselves and humbly clinging to Jesus

alone for salvation.

We have a way of describing, right? People who have delusions of grandeur, people who style themselves as saviors.

We say that they are afflicted with a Messiah complex or a savior complex. But the reality is that this is not a mental health problem that's reserved for a few, but a fundamental spiritual malady that afflicts every single human being.

We always think that we are the heroes of the story, though. We want to solve society's ills.

We want to civilize or educate people who disagree with us. We want to save our country. We believe that we can save ourselves. We deny our need for the Messiah.

[16:58] We seek to be self-sufficient and self-satisfied, but God has already sent us a Messiah. His name is Jesus.

And that means we are not the Messiah. And that means we cannot save ourselves. Friends, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that he's been raised from the dead that he is for your salvation, then you will be saved.

This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ. He is the Messiah. The only Messiah. And this message of Jesus is always polarizing.

It says in verses 4 to 5, And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas and did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

Some people, including a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women, were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. And those who put their faith in Jesus for the beginning of their sins also included some of them, meaning some of the Jews of Thessalonica.

[18:19] But there were not as many of them. Most of the Jews did not believe in Thessalonica. A lot of the Greeks believed. So it says in verse 5, But the Jews were jealous.

And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. Why did the Thessalonian Jews oppose Paul and his missionary companions?

Of course, there's a number of factors that we could conjecture, but the primary reason is here in the text. Luke gives it to us. It was not a concern for the truth. It was not a sincere disagreement with their point of view.

No, the primary reason was jealousy. They didn't like the fact that Jesus and his gospel was gaining a following due to Paul's missionary work.

They didn't like the fact that Gentile God-fearers, as well as influential patronesses from the city who used to visit their synagogues and come to hear them speak and teach, were now going to hear Paul speak.

[19:21] They didn't like the fact that Paul told these Greeks that they did not need to become a Jew in order to be saved, that they can be saved as Gentiles.

They were jealous. And their malice is seen in their hostility and violence. They recruit some ruffians, organize a mob, and then rabble-rouse the city, and they attack the house of Jason. Poor Jason's not done any teaching. All he's done is host these people, and now he's getting stormed. The house is getting destroyed.

He's getting tried and beaten. But when they can't locate Paul and Silas, it says in verse 6, they drag Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

And Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. This is a remarkable accusation, isn't it?

[20:26] In one sense, these Jews are being polemical and slanderous. They're making exaggerated claims that make Paul and Silas look like a menace to society. The accusations that they have leveled against them is baseless.

They've turned the world upside down. They haven't even been to the whole world yet. All they have done was preach. They have not organized any protests or marches.

They have not vandalized any property. They have never clamored for a political revolution. They're not doing anything to turn the world upside down in one sense.

But in another sense, their accusation is quite accurate. Without swords, guns, or missiles, without microphones, blogs, and social media, without money, and without political connections, these men

have turned the world upside down.

Simply by proclaiming the word of Christ, by proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Messianic King, the Son of God, whom God the Father has appointed to reign over His kingdom forever.

[21 : 40] These men have shared this good news, and in doing so, have turned the world that was in rebellion against God, a world that was upside down, right side up.

Starting to do that. Bringing it under the lordship of Jesus. So they were right that these men have turned the world upside down. Everywhere Paul preached the gospel, there were some who responded with faith, but others responded with unbelief and active opposition.

More often than not, Paul was driven out of the city that he preached at, by the hostile crowds. Why was the gospel message so polarized? It's because it's the message of King Jesus.

The King who ascended to the cross to redeem His people from slavery to sin and death. The King who was raised and ascended to the right hand of the Father. The King who now sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father to rule over His people forever.

Because the gospel demands that we bow before this King, that we submit to this King, pledge allegiance to this King, in order to be saved. That's why the gospel is polarized.

[22 : 56] Look at their charge in verse 7. They are all acting against the decrees of season, saying that there is another King, Jesus. After the reign of Julius Caesar, the term Caesar became a title for the Roman emperors, and Roman citizens were required to pledge reverence and obedience to the emperor, their king.

Proclaiming another king would have been considered treasonous. In one sense, the governments should never feel threatened by the church, because Christians will not seek to usurp their rule, the throne of the kingdom of man.

Jesus said in Luke 20, verse 25, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. In saying this, Jesus told His Jewish followers that they should dutifully pay taxes to Caesar.

You should be subjected to your governing authorities, as Romans 13 says. But when Caesar demanded worship, when He demanded total allegiance that undermined the Christian allegiance to Christ, they would in no way submit to the wishes of Caesar.

The Acts of the Silicenten Martyrs, it's the oldest extant document from the Latin church, the Latin-speaking church.

[24 : 19] It's a second-century account of 12 North African Christians who were executed for their faith on July 17, 180 A.D.

by Emperor Marcus Aurelius. What was their crime? Their crime was refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to the emperor. As they were being tried and sentenced, the proconsul Saturninus is recorded to have said this, We too, Greeks, are religious people, and our religion is a sinful one. We swear by the genius of our Lord, the emperor, and we offer prayers for His health as you also ought to do. The Silicenten Martyrs refuse to subscribe to such religion.

Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 24, No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

The person who tries to serve two masters is called a spy or a traitor. And he is executed as soon as he is found out because his ultimate allegiance lies with one and not the other.

[25 : 39] The gospel is polarizing because it admits no neutral ground. You can serve only one master. Totalitarian governments throughout history have always persecuted Christians.

Why? Because they understand this reality. They knew that the Christians' ultimate religions lay not with them, but with the Lord Jesus. Look at verse 8.

It says that the people in the city authorities were disturbed when they heard that Christians proclaimed another king named Jesus. When a person reveals who they truly are, we have an expression for that, right?

We say that they're showing their true colors. That expression has an origin in sailing. It has a nautical origin.

The flags that ships were raised, that ships raised, were called colors of the ship.

[26 : 43] Sometimes a ship would lower its colors or even fly the enemy's colors in order to stay undetected and to gain an advantage in a naval battle. But when the time came for the ultimate confrontation, when the time came to show their true loyalties, they would take down their counterfeit colors and show their true colors by raising the flag of the sovereign to whom they

pledged the Jesus.

Christian brothers and sisters, have you raised your flags? Have you shown your true colors? Does the world know which king you serve?

Is it apparent to your neighbors that you are citizens of another heavenly kingdom? Are your purposes and priorities governed by the Lord Jesus?

Or is it governed by another prince, another Lord, rulers of the spirit? You cannot fly two colors at once.

You can't serve two masters at once. Have you made the choice to follow your king, Jesus? We must proclaim the word of Christ from the scriptures in spite of the opposition.

[28 : 23] Jason and some of the Christian brothers who were dragged to the city authorities are then released after posting bail. I mean, they ultimately didn't want anything to do with Jason. They wanted Paul and Silas. And since they can't catch him, they let him go.

And the Christians in Thessalonica, seeing the imminent danger that Paul and Silas were in, they send them by night under the cover of darkness as a safe precaution.

In verse 10, they send them away to the river. When they arrive in Berea, they don't hide and keep quiet. A little bit foolish. Foolish for the Lord's sake.

They preach the gospel again. But thankfully this time they get a better reception in Berea. He says in verse 11, Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica.

They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. What comes to your mind when you think of a man or a woman of nobility?

[29 : 24] Someone who has a noble bearing or an upbringing or an heritage. Wealth? Titles? Parental lineage?

Educational pedigree? In God's perspective, what makes one noble is not any of those things. What made the Berean Jews more noble than the Jews in Thessalonica was this day received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

It's such a telling verse. It reveals the heart of God, what He values in us, what He cherishes. What is your posture toward His word?

Those who accord to scripture the proper authority as the word of God, those who handle God's word with care, those who are eager to receive God's word, those who diligently examine the scriptures, such are the man and woman of noble bearing.

You might have no status or privilege or prestige in this world, but if you are such man and woman, you are noble in God's eyes.

[30 : 48] And we should strive to do this more and more. Verse 11 says that Berean Jews received the word with all eagerness.

They weren't reluctant, inattentive listeners because they knew that God Himself speaks in His word. Think about it.

They didn't even know who Paul was. Paul said, Newcomer in town. Who is this guy? And yet they listened, received the word with all eagerness, not because of their reverence for Paul, but because of their reverence for God's word.

The reception of the word, however, was not passive or undiscerning. It involved examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Because preaching involves human interpretation, human application, and human proclamation of the divine scriptures, it is not infallible, the preaching.

It can be the case that even when a preacher preaches from the Bible, that what he's saying is actually not biblical. That happens. And so it is incumbent upon all of us as God's people to keep our Bibles open as we listen to a sermon and examine the scriptures to see if the preaching is saying what really the Bible is saying.

[32 : 23] The Greek word translated examine here refers to a careful study of an issue or a question. The word is often used to describe what a judge does. A judge examines the evidence of a case.

many of you are students or have recently been students and you have excelled in your studies. What if you apply that same industry and resourcefulness with which you apply yourself to the subject of your specialty to the examining of God's word?

What if you believed what was preached not merely because the pastor said it but because you yourself also see it in the scriptures with your own eyes?

That inspires so much confidence and enthusiasm when you see and understand the truth of God's word firsthand not merely secondhand. Don't despair of understanding God's word. Don't be discouraged that competent godly pastors disagree on certain things. As you saw in chapter 15 godly people do at times disagree with each other because our knowledge this side of heaven is partial and imperfect.

[33 : 40] Most of the Korean Jews likely didn't have Paul's academic training Paul had an impeccable pedigree.

If you remember he was a Pharisee he said according to the strictest party of his religion he was trained under Gamaliel the most prominent rabbi at the time who was himself trained by the famous Rabbi Hillel presidents of the Sanhedrin the highest ruling Jewish body ruling authority Paul in every sense of the word had the Ivy League Jewish education he belonged to the strictest Jewish sect he was advancing beyond the people beyond his peers in Judaism and yet you don't see the Korean Jews kind of throwing up their hands in despair and saying well that's settled well Paul said he's smarter than me he's more learned than me so he must be right there's no need to search the scriptures no look at their response they're ordinary Jews they were noble not because of their intelligence or academic pedigree they were noble because though they were ordinary Jews they had a sincere commitment to the authority of God's word and because they had a humble disposition and faith that they can't understand God's word

I want to encourage you with this quote from J.I. Packer's classic Knowing God he says John Owen and John Calvin knew more theology than John Bunyan or Billy Bray but who would deny that the latter pair knew their God every bit as well as the former all four of course were beavers with Bible which counts for far more anyway than a form of theological training if the decisive factor was notional correctness then obviously the most learned biblical scholars would know God better than anyone else but it is not you can have all the right notions in your head without ever tasting in your heart the realities to which they refer and a simple Bible reader and sermon hearer who is full of the Holy Spirit will develop a far deeper acquaintance with his God and Savior than a more learned scholar who is content with being theologically correct of course if you undertake your formal theological education with the same humble posture you can also develop a deeper acquaintance with God but that's a privilege that is not restricted to formal education all those who are as Patrick calls them eager beavers for the Bible all those who like the Bereans receive the word with gladness and search the scriptures thoroughly can know God personally profoundly isn't that such a wonderful invitation every Christian can understand the Bible if you study it diligently and prayerfully depending on the Holy Spirit in the nation in our day and age we are likely to assume after a verse like that we're likely to assume that this kind of diligent study only involved personal Bible stuff sitting at a table with your own Bible open maybe putting your headphones on and listening to a podcast or YouTube comment there on a topic or on a passage but that's that would be not a completely accurate picture of what the

Bereans were doing in this case why because remember that Jews at the time didn't have personal Bibles like all of us the printing press hadn't been invented yet most scriptural manuscripts were hand copied which means they were very rare and expensive so there was one place that they could go to search the scriptures synagogue where they kept for public use the scroll of scripture so they're not doing this independently they're studying the scriptures with their fellow community they're searching scriptures together this is an aspect of Bible study that often is lost on us modern our modern individualistic sensibilities when we study the Bible with other brothers and sisters the diverse gifts of the spirit come to bear and we gain more insight and we benefit and we are edified

[38 : 31] I found this time and time again when after preaching a sermon that I spent 20 or so hours preparing studying a passage and then I go to a community group that week and I'm talking to brothers and sisters who haven't spent the same amount of time studying and yet every single week if there is active participation and lively discussion I am learning new things and I'm being edified by the body of Christ and when we study the Bible as a community we also check one another's most errant impulses if we are in our own heads when we're studying the Bible without input from other people that's really a dangerous ground to incubate Harrison you can think about it this way when we didn't have this happen today which I'm thankful for but sometimes when you have microphones and speakers you get feedback right feedback happens when you speak into a microphone but then the sound that's coming off the speaker is so loud and so close to the microphone that the microphone picks up the sound that's coming out of the speaker again and

