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## The Suffering King

*Acts 17:1-9*

### Introducing God, Part 2

Photograph – taken from just outside the State Capitol building in Oklahoma City . . . the idea of accountability . . . the idea of a divinely inspired law . . . the idea of absolute truth from a supreme Being – too unnerving.

We'd rather believe what we want to believe.

A television series that aired not too long ago attempted to explore humanity's ongoing search to come in contact with something or someone greater than ourselves.

The series was simply called, "Belief" – and it invited viewers – so the promo advertised – to witness some of the world's most fascinating spiritual journeys where cameras have rarely been; to search for the origins of diverse faiths and the heart of what really matters – whether it's the belief of millions who flock to the sacred Ganges for cleansing; a free climber on the side of a mountain who believes his will to climb is the greatest power on earth; a woman engaged in ancient ceremonial cleansing; a search through ancient astrology to find meaning in the stars.

I found it interesting in reading some of the promotional material – just as I suspected – that the idea of – I quote – a monarch-like God is fading and people are now seeking the divine in nature and in their neighborhoods – end quote.

The series continually presents the all-important question, what do you believe . . . what do *you* believe?

Frankly, what you and I believe isn't really a good place to start; simply because we are all finite

creatures with blind spots the size of our own biases and we're gonna be prone to believe whatever we feel fits our own perceptions and lifestyles.

A.W. Tozer wrote in his work, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, "Left to ourselves, we tend to reduce God to manageable terms. We (by nature) want to get God where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him. We want a God we can in some measure control – [making even the Christian God] only slightly superior to the gods of Greece and Rome."<sup>1</sup>

You see, the question to begin with isn't, what do *you* believe about God and the universe. The question is, what has God revealed about Himself and the universe He created?

And the only place to discover that in specific terms is the sacred Book we call the Bible. And by the way, in the opening line of the Bible, God is not explained or defended or proven or even supported – He is simply introduced – ***In the beginning, God!*** Here He is!

And now our search can begin – not on a mountain side, or through a telescope or in the waters of a polluted river but through the pages of scripture which uniquely claim to be the very breath of God (***2 Timothy 3:16 – God breathed scripture.***)

Here is what our Creator God disclosed about Himself.

What I want to begin in our session today, is a study of one of the most loaded chapters in the New Testament that reveals who God is and what God is like.

What I want to show you is the self-disclosure of God – not through an Old Testament prophet, but through the ministry of a converted New Testament attorney named Paul.

So turn to *Acts chapter 17* . . . Acts chapter 17. I think it's going to take us around 10 weeks to get through this one chapter. Some pastors can go through the entire Book of Acts in 10 weeks – I am not that talented.

I want us to travel back 1,967 years ago – and to this very month of January – when Paul arrived in Thessalonica.<sup>ii</sup>

Here's what happened in January of 49 A.D. when Paul came to town . . .

– notice *verse 1* where Paul *arrives in Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.*

Now for most of January – Paul is engaged in at least three primary activities.

### 1. First, he dialogued according to the scriptures

My translation reads, *he reasoned with them.*

The verb is *dialegomai* (διαλεγομαι) from which we get our word, to dialogue.

And that's important to understand to get the right picture here. The word refers to teaching with the method of question and answer in order to stimulate thought.<sup>iii</sup>

He would have had Jews and proselytes and God-fearing Gentiles all present in these meetings – and Paul is engaging them – notice the next phrase – *dialoguing with them from the Scriptures.*

He's inviting questions and provoking their thinking according to certain passages - and notice that in *verse 3* – Paul is intentionally focusing on passages that deal with the suffering and dying and resurrecting of the Messiah.<sup>iv</sup>

He's saying things like, "What about this verse from the Torah" . . . and they'd fire back their answers; and he'd say, "Yea, but what about this passage from our Psalmist David – or from the prophets of our nation's past?"

And they'd be stunned by the implications of these passages as Paul stimulated their thinking.

I'll never forget my father telling me what happened in an airport several years ago. He was in Russia awaiting his flight home and the airport was

crowded with Russian Jews heading to Israel to celebrate Passover. My father was sitting there reading his Bible when a young orthodox Jewish man around 25 years of age sat down next to him. It didn't take my missionary father very long before he asked him, "Son, how will you know when your Messiah comes?" The young man said, "We will know Him because He will perform miracles and become the dynamic leader of our nation."

My father said, "But there have been many dynamic, miracle performing men who've claimed to be your Messiah and none of them were true . . . how will you know for sure?"

The young man said, "Oh, we will know."

My father said as he opened his Bible, "I know how you will know. In your Old Testament scriptures, the prophet Zechariah spoke of their returning King – and look here – it says, "They will look upon Him whom they have pierced."

The young man said, "That's not in my scriptures." Oh, yes it is. He said, 'wait, let me write that reference down.'

My father then said, "Let me show you a passage from your Hebrew scriptures that you've never heard read in the synagogue – and he turned to *Isaiah 53* and read, "**He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him.**"

He said, "Let me write down that reference too." My father showed him *Genesis 49:10* where the scepter will not depart from the tribe of Judah and when He comes – this Messianic prophecy records, **He will tie his young donkey to a vine;**" which is exactly what Jesus did when he entered the city on that unbroken donkey.

The young man said, "I've never seen that verse before either." My father said kindly, "It's in your Torah."

Then he turned to *Zechariah 13* and showed him *verse 6* where the nation Israel asks their Shepherd King, **What are these wounds in your hands?" Then he will say, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.**

The Apostle Paul was doing the same thing here in Thessalonica centuries earlier. Paul not only dialogued with them, secondly;

### 2. He explained the scriptures

The word Luke uses here in *verse 3* for Paul **explaining** is a word that refers to something *being opened*.<sup>v</sup>

In other words, Paul was taking the scriptures and opening them with clarity and simplicity and fervency – so that not only were the scriptures opened, some of the eyes and hearts of his audience were opened as well to the truths of scripture.

I can remember at a Senior High student being told that J. Vernon McGee was preaching every night for a week at a church in Virginia Beach, not too far from my home. I was hungry for the word – having committed my life to Christ as a 17 year old – so I decided to drive out to hear him each night. I can't remember if I went with friends, or if I went alone.

But I do remember sitting on the front pew in the balcony as J. Vernon McGee took us through the Book of Ruth, verse by verse. I will never forget how he opened that Book up – using biblical history, culture, language, customs of the day . . . he literally opened to us the word of God.

This is Paul in the synagogue – opening one passage after another – showing how they tied together to show who God was.

### **3. Third, Paul not only dialogued and explained, he gave evidence for scriptural integrity.**

The verb there in *verse 3* for Paul **giving evidence** literally means to *lay things alongside*.

Paul is taking the scriptures and laying one passage along another passage; in other words, Paul is taking eyewitness accounts of Christ's resurrection and laying them next to prophetic scriptures from the Old Testament.

He's literally connecting the dots – he's tying it all together. We don't know exactly what passages Paul used, but we can imagine that he could have started the dialogue by asking the congregation what it meant for their great King Solomon to write in his famous collection of *Proverbs, at chapter 30 and verse 4 - Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or the name of His Son?*

And Paul would stop and ask them – Solomon is obviously telling us that God – the sovereign Lord of the universe has a Son? *What's His name?*

Paul could have then referred to the eyewitness account of Matthew and that incredible moment when Jesus began His ministry at His baptism by John the Baptizer and as Jesus was coming up and out of the water a voice spoke from the Heavens saying, ***"This is my Son – in whom I am well pleased."*** (*Matthew 3:17*)

And then I can imagine Paul saying – "Look, let me tie these passages together in the only way they can be tied together; let me introduce you to the Son of God – the same man who was crucified and rose from the dead – the Son of God Solomon wondered about is the Son of God confirmed by eyewitness accounts – and His name is Jesus Christ.

Helen Keller was born without the ability to see, hear, or speak. I cannot imagine the challenges that little girl faced growing up in such a dark world. She didn't do well either. She was uncontrollable, terrified . . . disturbed. But then a dedicated teacher named Anne Mansfield Sullivan came into Helen's life and refused to be pushed away. Anne Sullivan slowly, painstakingly taught Helen Keller to communicate by pressing into the palm of her hand the alphabet.

For more than two years, Anne Sullivan was dedicated to Helen Keller learning how to communicate, and she persistently taught Helen letters and words.

Finally, after two years, the light dawned, so to speak, and Helen connected the pressing of her hand with the letters that described the world around her. She quickly learned how to communicate back as well as receive more and more information.

And then, Anne Sullivan sent for a preacher of the gospel. And they brought the preacher in and he, through Anne's interpretation, shared with her the gospel of Jesus Christ with Helen Keller. And, as he was sharing it with her she broke into a smile and then quickly communicated back those stunning words that validate the truth of Romans chapter 1; Helen pressed into Anne's hand the words, "I have known about Him for a long time. I just didn't know His name."

General revelation told Helen Keller that there was a created world, even though she couldn't even see it – she could feel it; she could breathe it; she could touch it. Her conscience also told her when her actions were sinful.

And then special revelation came in the form of the gospel message – and that introduced her to the

Savior, and she believed that message and was saved. Now, she knew His name.

Paul draws it all together at *verse 3* and says, I happen to be introducing you to God the Son – this ***Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ (the Messiah)***.

It isn't long before the Jews recognize the threat Paul represents to their religion and their tradition and customs. *Verse 4 tells us that some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.*

The word for *joined* here in the text reveals that God is creating and forming of a local church in this city.<sup>vi</sup>

Suddenly the attendance at the synagogue is disappearing; well respected women – a multitude of Greeks – and even Jews have now joined this community of followers and they are all naming this Jesus as their Messiah.

Paul has introduced God to a city that knew nothing of Him – and now what is this city gonna do about it?

Notice *verse 5* – the middle part – ***they 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 the believers had moved from the synagogue into the home of a leading man by the name of Jason who evidently had a large enough home to accommodate this new church along with hosting Paul and Silas.

Jason was a man who put his life on the line for the Apostle Paul and the gospel of Christ. He became known as the man who was associated with others who were upsetting the whole world.

What an interesting description of events – I want you to notice the two charges against the Christians.

- **One was breaking up the status quo.**

Look at *verse 6b*. ***And they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also.***

Catch that – they are upsetting the world. They are literally turning the world upside down! They are ruining everything!

Listen, if you do not disturb anybody's status quo . . . if you swim in the politically correct stream . . .

if you keep your opinions of right and wrong to yourself.

If you don't ever suggest that Christianity is the only true faith and all others are speculations, then all might go well with you. But if you don't – you are inviting trouble into your life.

Why? Because you are tampering – you are impugning – you are disagreeing with the status quo – and they will accuse that you are turning the world upside down.

The truth is, you are not turning the world upside down as a committed Christian. You are actually turning the world right-side up!

By introducing your world to who God really is and what He's really like, you actually setting things, by means of the gospel, right side up!

Paul and these early believers are not only charged with breaking up the status quo;

- They are accused of **committing the crime of treason.**

Notice *verse 7b*. ***They all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.***

This is treason. Jesus is not only the Messiah, but He's the King; in fact the word used by this mob can be translated Emperor – Monarch. They got it. The world might chisel the reminders out of the cement, but Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Monarch – the Emperor of all that is.

***Notice, and they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.***

Receiving a pledge is a reference to posting bail. Has it ever occurred to you that wherever Paul went a riot broke out – how's that for speaking out for the glory of Christ?

Here's Jason posting bail; the city infuriated over the gospel claims of Jesus Christ. Can you imagine this in the average church today? Hey you wanna join our church? Great – go down the hallway and pick up your riot gear! And here's a sheet of paper explaining how to post bail! We're starting a new series of studies tonight entitled, “Church planting in a town where almost everyone will hate you.” Great – sign me up!

Listen, our gospel should produce a reaction – heartburn; shock; guilt; shame; repentance; forgiveness; peace; joy!

You can't chisel away the truth – Jesus Christ is God the Sovereign Son – He suffered and died, but He rose and is going to return to earth one day as the Emperor of all there is. Now that's a little bit more about who God is and what He's like.

Let me draw a conclusion for us as believers as we wrap up our session.

Pastor Ray Ortlund, now with the Lord once wrote these convicting yet encouraging words: Your heart and mine prefers to be multi-divided. As if our heart is a boardroom; imagine: a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a whiteboard. There you have your committee members all seated; there is your social self, your private self, your work self, your sexual self, your recreational self, your future planning self; your religious self, and others. The committee constantly argues and debates and eventually votes its will and pleasure. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision.

We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is that we're just divided in our loyalties to Christ.

We have two options; in our daily lives, we can invite the Lord onto the committee and give him a vote too. But then He becomes just one more complication and just one more opinion equal to all the others. The second option is to invite the Lord daily to come into the board room of our hearts and fire all the members of the committee – every last one of them. And we can simply submit every part of our hearts and our lives to the single rule of Jesus Christ.

I couldn't help but think – now that's the way to treat Jesus Christ as the sovereign Monarch and the King of Kings.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (HarperCollins, 1961), p. 13i

<sup>ii</sup> Eckard J. Schnabel, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts (Zondervan, 2012), p. 699

<sup>iii</sup> Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 305

<sup>iv</sup> Schnable, p. 703

<sup>v</sup> Rienecker & Rogers, p. 306

<sup>vi</sup> Schnabel, p. 705

<sup>vii</sup> Adapted from Ray Ortlund, "Christ Is Deeper Still" (blog), (6-4-10)