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**God's Word Turns the World Right Side up**  
**Acts 17:1-15**

In 1977 a story began to circulate around the internet about a man named Larry Walters who tied 45 weather balloons he filled with helium, purchased at a local army-Navy surplus store, to his lawn chair and shot up 11,000 ft. into the air. Was this true? The story is told Larry anchored the chairs to the bumper of his jeep. Satisfied that it would work, he packed several sandwiches and a six-pack of Miller lite, loaded his pellet gun figuring that he could pop a few balloons when it was time to descend. His plan was to float lazily about 30 ft. above his back yard and come back down after a few hours. Things didn't quite work out that way. When he cut the cord, He didn't lazily climb to 30ft or even 100ft. After climbing and climbing he leveled off at about 11,000ft. above San Pedro. Soon he began drifting into the approach path for the Long Beach municipal airport perplexing pilots from a Delta and TWA airliners who alerted officials about what appeared to be a man unprotected floating through the sky in a lawn chair. Meanwhile Larry feeling cold and dizzy in the thin air shot several of his balloons with the pellet gun aiming at a large expanse of grass north of the Long Beach area. Larry came up short and ended up entangling his tethers in a set of high-voltage wires. He dangled above the ground until firemen and utility crews could cut the power to the lines, which blacked out portions of Long Beach for 20 minutes). Larry was rescued. He became an instant celebrity but the Federal Aviation Administration was not amused and charged him with "operating a civil aircraft for which there is not currently in effect an airworthiness certificate" Larry hit the talk show circuit appearing with Johnny Carson and David Letterman.

Some of the versions I heard had Larry drifting out to sea and rescue helicopters trying to get close to him only to have the wind created by the chopper blades foiling their attempts to save Larry. I had heard this story, read about the story in books, even used it in a talk at one point. I had assumed it was true, but in the back of my mind always wondered whether or not it was an urban legend, a made up story.

Have you ever heard an amazing story that seems to wild to be true. Stories about people waking up in a bathtub full of ice remembering they had been drugged in the bar the night before. Then seeing a note taped to the tile saying. Do not get up. Pick up the phone on the chair next to the tub and call this hospital your body part has been harvested. Does that happen a lot? Has it ever happened? Is the story about the ex-Air Force sergeant who strapped a JATO solid fuel rocket to his 69 Chevy Impala in the Nevada Salt flats to see how fast it would go, lifted off airborne and smashed into the side of a cliff 125 ft up. Did that ever really happen?

It seems few people take the time, or know where to look, to check out these stories. So the urban legends keep growing and growing taking on a life of their own. What if three men came walking into our town of Yacolt with an amazing story about a man who was able to heal people. Raise people from the dead. Cause a blind person to see at just a spoken word or touch of his hand. A man who could make food miraculously appear and multiply. A man whose teaching was so anti-establishment. So radically loving. A man who desired to help those who were most hurting. A man who wanted to free people from the prisons they placed themselves in. A man who could teach wisdom never heard before. A man who suffered and was harassed by the governing authorities. Even though innocent of any crimes, he was eventually killed and certified dead by the government officials. But then came back to life three days later. Not only that but he then appeared to over 500 people, eye-witnesses to it really happened. And this man is the answer to all of our

problems. He can take away our guilt and our shame and sin and replace it with hope and life and freedom. Quite a story. Is it simply another urban legend? If it is then we are wasting our time this morning. But if its not then this ought to be the most incredible story we would want to tell others about.

At least 12 men, close friends of Jesus believed it enough to back up their belief that the story is true. Backed it up with their own life in martyrdom for the truth. Three other men were willing to endure all sorts of hardship and eventually they too put their lives on the line because they believe the truth about who Jesus is. They so wanted others to know the truth that they were willing to travel anywhere God wanted them to go in order to spread the news about the truth of Jesus. In this mornings lesson we see that they have just walked in to a couple of European cities found in modern Greece. As they tell this amazing story about what God has done in Jesus, there are people who respond well and receive and believe. There are some who cautiously are open but check the story out against the foundation for truth that they know. There are others who refuse to even consider the claims of Christ. They feel threatened by the whole message because they realize it demands action of them. And they don't want any change. They don't want to be told what to do. They don't want their power or position or prestige to be usurped, taken over in any way. So they fight back. The message of the gospel, the good news turns the upside down world right side up.

The Word of God forces people to make a decision about Christ. It knocks people off the fence of indecision, knocks us off the fence of complacency. It forces a choice. For if this is true...and I firmly believe it is...then it demands our attention. It demands that we change the way we think, the way we live, our entire affections...and some people simply don't want to change. The word of God is truth. Are you able to share it with others? Are you positioned to receive it? Do you know it well enough

to filter out the falsehood and lies from the genuine and real and truthful? READ with me Acts 17:1-15 (READ)

Three men left Philippi. Note the change back to “They” in v.1 It used to be “we” last chapter so we can assume that Dr. Luke has remained in Philippi to teach and encourage the believers there. Paul, Timothy and Silas walk down the Via Egnatia, or ancient I-5 highway leading west toward Rome. They travel 33 miles to Amphipolis, then another 27 miles Apollonia. Why didn’t they stay longer in these towns? Not sure. It must be another instance of the Spirit guiding these missionary men. Keep going. Or maybe it was simply them using the gray matter brains God gave them and they decided that these towns were not strategic in the plan God called them to be about. So they traveled another 35 miles and came to Thessalonica. This was a larger town. A free town not subjected to foreign authority. It could pass its own laws. It had its own rulers. Thessalonica had a fine harbor and was a center for trade and commerce. One of the things you will notice is that the book of Acts begins at the most important biblical city, Jerusalem, and ends up in the most important secular city of the time, Rome. You will also see the church move from being made up of primarily Jews to the church comprised primarily of gentiles.

Thessalonica has a synagogue and in v.1 we see that Paul took Jesus commands seriously and always took the good news “to the Jew first, even though this didn’t always seem to be the best strategy and often got him in hot water with those in authority. For at least 3 weeks, three Sabbath’s Paul went to the Sabbath v. 2 says and he “reasoned with them”. He explained the Scriptures to them and gave them evidences that Christ, the Messiah they had all been longing for to return had to first suffer and rise again from the dead. And this Jesus, the One whom I am talking to you about. The reason I have walked hundreds of miles to come to your town, it to tell you. That’s Jesus. He is the one you have been looking for.

Paul reasoned with them. That means He selected certain Old Testament passages. The only Bible that were available to them at the time. He gave good reasons for them to believe that the Messiah they needed to be looking for was not just a conquering hero that would come to kick the backsides of the Romans out of power. No, first he would be a suffering servant. Paul probably read many Messianic scriptures that gave them food for thought. I can't imagine that he would miss Isaiah 53:5,6 "But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Paul probably read from psalm 22:1 "My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?" From Psalm 16 "You will not permit the Holy One to see corruption"

Paul then explained the scriptures and made them clear so that people could see that the Messiah must die and rise again. That is what a gifted preacher does; He makes it easier to understand the Scriptures. Its not about flowery, big words and lengthy ragings. Its in being able to take the complex and make it simply. The best preachers I know put all the cookies on the lower shelf.

Paul it says in v.3 also "gave evidence" to back up what he was saying about Jesus. Not only did he show them where scripture backed it up, but he also placed his own illustrations alongside scripture to back it up. There is no greater evidence then the power of a transformed life and few lives had been as totally changed as Paul's. It was because of Jesus that his life was totally new and different. He didn't have to coerce or threaten or hit them over the head with the truth. Sometimes we think we are going to be more effective if we shout louder. Paul didn't. He reasoned with them. He explained. He clarified. He gave evidence and examples of the truth lived out. Paul taught the Word and there was great power in it. He did not entertain them. I believe the Bible is the

most exciting book in the world and to make it boring is a crime, but we do not need to entertain people who come to church. Evangelical Christianity has been swept up in thinking it is in the entertainment business and it is not. It is in the salvation business and the growing Christian to spiritual maturity business. And that is God's business.

Paul knew the power was in the truth of the message. So he was compelled to share it with others. Next week we are going to talk more about how to share truth with other. But this morning I believe this passage wants us to understand clearly the power of the truth that resides in the Scriptures. A truth that demands a response. God's word that forces people to get off the fence of indifference and apathy and choose. The power is in the truth of the message so it would make sense that in order to share that truth, to reason, to explain, to give evidence for that truth...one must then know the truth. In order to know the truth, we must be prepared. Paul was ready. He was prepared to give an answer to anyone who asked, to anyone who was ready to listen. But I'm afraid the majority of us are woefully ill-equipped when opposition comes flying at us.

Paul doesn't seem to be fazed when it comes. And by the way, expect persecution. It will come. At least if you are telling the truth about Jesus clearly you will. Indeed Paul writes in II Timothy "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." If you are not then you probably aren't clearly telling the truth about Jesus. If you are not getting any resistance at all then you are probably not standing for anything close to the truth. Paul expects resistance. So should we. There is something powerful about knowing the truth, living it, clearly explaining it and not being thrown when we are opposed.

I remember sitting at a table in the CUB, the student center at Washington state in Pullman. It was the week before Easter and I was taking surveys that asked questions about peoples belief in Jesus and the resurrection. We wanted to use these surveys to gage the level of

belief of the students at the university but we also wanted to use them to propel us into conversations that would lead toward opportunities to share our own faith. I remember sitting there going through a survey with one man who was an older student, probably late 20's. From the first it was easy to tell he was very intelligent and knowledgeable about Christianity but not at all a believer. He interrupted me about halfway through as I was going through the questions, and calmly said, "Hey, you don't have to be nervous". To which I defensively lied in my calmest voice, "I'm not nervous". To which he replied. "Then why is your hand shaking so much." I looked down at my traitorous left hand and there it was shaking like a leaf. "Oh, that hand". I could always control the steadiness of my voice, but that hand gave me away. There is something powerful about not being thrown. Not being ruffled. Not being rattled and defensive that speaks of strength and confidence. I believe the more we know the truth, better prepared, better pray-pared. The more our confidence is in God. The more we will not be thrown even if we stumble on word or need to say, "I don't know". We realize it is the power of God unto Salvation and not the power of Norm. That breeds great confidence in God.

Application: If you stand for truth, and we all ought to be, expect resistance. Don't water down the truth in order to try and avoid opposition, but don't go out of your way to be obnoxious and pick a fight either. Get used to it? When peoples worldly values and ideas are challenged there will be an inherit desire to fight against it. And fight they do it Thessalonica.

Certainly we see in v.4 that some of the Jews were persuaded and believed Jesus was the Messiah. Quite a number of Greeks did as well as a number of influential women. There it is again, just like the chapter before we see that influential women seem to respond well to the truth about Jesus. Someone told me the reason was that if you really wanted to spread the word, then the fastest way is to tell a ...

A large group of Jews don't like it. They see the gospel quite correctly as a threat to their position power and prestige. They have exhausted their bag of tricks to oppose it. They cannot reason with Paul because it is so clearly in scripture so they resort to violence. I guess its pretty telling how easily they will link arms with the evil bums of the town to help them do their dirty work. V.5 they probably have to hire these wicked men to form a mob and set the city in an uproar. They rush down to the house of Jason where Paul and the gang were lodging. But Paul and Silas, Timothy they weren't there. Probably went down to Starbucks for a latte'. They found Jason and grabbed him and dragged him off to court, stirred up the crowd. Look what it says in v.6 they accuse these men of "turning the world upside down." And that is exactly what the word of God will do. It will turn right side up a world that has been turned upside down. The world has been turned upside down at the Fall and has been operating in reverse ever since. That is why it never seems to work right, it always seems to fall apart. Jesus came to reright the wrongs and to turn it right side up again.

Do you know the truth? This is the truth that will set you free. You must know it in order to share it. And we must share it regardless of the response we get.

Look down at v.10. Paul and Silas leave by night and head down south now off the main east-west highway, the Egnatian way 50 miles south to the town of Berea. Again they go to the synagogue in Berea and reason with the Jews. In v.11 we see the author of Acts draws up a sharp contrast between the those here in Berea and those back in Thessalonica. The Jews in Berea Luke writes in v.11 were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. What made them more noble-minded? The Word of the gospel was received in a whole different way. They were eager to hear the word. They wanted to listen to it. Daily they examined the scriptures. They were looking to see if in fact what Paul was saying was backed up by the Scriptures, the Word of God. These

Bereans characterized Judaism at its best, the way God intended. They were looking for the Messiah and they only needed to be convinced that this One named Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Those in Berea checked out this amazing story for themselves to see if it was indeed God's truth. That is the way we ought to receive the powerful truth of God's word. Eagerly, daily examining. Not content to be spoon-fed whatever anyone tries to pour down our throats. We need to ask and decide, 'how does this match up with what the Bible says.'

Many of the Thessalonians outright rejected the truth, they didn't really want to know the truth. They refused to examine and embrace truth simply because it would force them to change and it threatened their worldly values. The Bereans were cautious but open-minded as long as they were grounded in God's word. They used the bible as a filter to keep out the junk, the religious urban legends, the heretics, the religious snake oil salesmen. That is what the word of God will do for us. It is our truth filter. That is why we need to know the truth. It will help us to filter out all the junk that gets thrown at our ears. It will help us determine what to receive and what to reject. The Bible is like an air filter on your car that keeps out the junk that could shut me down and cause me spiritual sputtering. Daily keeping in the truth helps keep out the junk in my life. God wants to transform us so that we are able to prove what is right and acceptable, so that we are able to determine what the good stuff is.

So what do I need to be doing? I need to study the Scriptures on my own not just at church. Like the Bereans, they were not content to let Paul do all their thinking for them. They acted on God's word not mans. If you have been a believer for very long, you need to be able to get to the place where you can determine truth from the scriptures for yourself, not just because some preacher says so. Be careful of reading just one mans books, or listening to just one guys tapes. This is a dangerous practice. You may be misled by his errors and not know how to recognize them.

Don't ever limit yourself to the ministry of one man, including mine. Check them out with scripture. See what the word of God says. The bible talks about getting weaned off baby spoon fed truth. Some of you have been on formula far too long. Come on step up to discipline yourself to spiritual maturity. It's about time.

You are probably still wondering about Larry Walters the lawn chair balloonist. Urban myth or actual event. Well, I thought it was going to be another tall tail but checking it out at snopes.com they said it actually did happen and gave proof to its authenticity. May you also check out the amazing story of Jesus and find that also to be true and may its truth change your life.

Homework for today. I want this to be a kick in the backside to read God's word. In order to share it, we have got to know it. In order to know it we have got to get in and read it. I have found I am far more wise and able to encourage people when I have been in the word. It comes to mind. It helps give me wisdom and I can help others. Get into the word, share and receive it. Kirby has challenged the youth to spend 15 minutes a day reading the Bible. Do it. Put the Bible in the restroom if that is the only alone time you can get. Get into LIFE groups. There is a great Adult class on Obadiah starting up next Sunday. Be there and learn and study and examine the scriptures. At the back is a plan to read through the Bible in a year. Pick one up and this time next year, or maybe two years from now, you could have read the entire Bible through. That would be a worthy goal. Getting into Gods' word builds up your truth filter. God's word is a guide to what is true and what is false, right and wrong. God's word reveals God's nature, we get to discover who God is and what He does. God's word is able to fully equip us for good service, gives us wisdom for life. Read the Bible because it has the power to turn the world and your life, right side up.



## Acts 17

1. The group now travels along the coast of the Aegean Sea through a couple of towns and end up at Thessalonica. Why didn't they stop in these other towns? Amphipolis was about 33 miles west of Philippi. Apollonia was 27 miles further west and then Thess was another 35 miles. The first two were past over? Spirit guidance? Or human planning? To concentrate efforts on Thess. Did and its just not mentioned? Can't mention everything or everywhere they went in the Acts account.

Its quite probable that Luke stayed behind in Philippi to help the Christians there as we see a change from we back to they as if Luke were saying they went on, but I stayed here in Philippi.

They followed the main highway, the Egnatian way down the coast to Thessalonica. It crossed Macedonia and connected the Adriatic Sea with the Black sea

The book of Acts begins with the most important biblical city in the Bible Jerusalem and ends with the most important secular city of that day, Rome.

Timeless truths of group

The power is in the truth of the message.

Applic. So I need to know the truth. Prepare yourself.

The power of the truth will divide.

Get away from the Christianese fluff talk. Be real with people. Its hard because you have to be vulnerable. It takes courage.

Expect persecution if you join up to the gospel. If you stand for the truth you are likely to get resistance. Don't freak out if you get some negative feedback. Get used to it suck it up. What can they do to me?

Don't water down the truth. But don't pick fight or go out of the way to be obnoxious. Avoidance of all conflict should not be your highest virtue.

There is something powerful about not being thrown.

Witnessing to the guy at the Cub Washington State University. My voice was steady but I didn't know the hand was not behaving. It was shaken.

Norm you don't have to be nervous. I'm not nervous. Your hand is shaking. Oh. Stop that hand.

When your worldly interests are challenge there is an inherit desire to fight against it.

Thessalonica was a free city, not subjected to others authority. It could pass its own laws, had its own rulers. It had a fine harbor and was a center for commerce.

v.2 In Thess. There was a synagogue. More Jews here to tell the good news of Jesus. Paul's custom (m.o. He went for three straight Sabbaths and reasoned with them from the scriptures.

If you wonder what Paul did the rest of the week, II Thess 3:7 tells us he made tents all through the week but on Saturday he went into the synagogues and taught the Scriptures.

Where do we find the basis for our reasoning, debates? Scriptures. God's word.

v.3 He explained the scriptures and gave evidence that the Christ (messiah ) had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Paul told them. This Jesus, this is the Christ, the messiah you have all been waiting for.

Reasoned = to select, distinguish, then to revolve in the mind. Selected dipping into the OT scriptures that were available to them at the time. He gave reasons for people to believe. Sometimes we think we can simply give a few verses and that's it. HE brought up key Messianic scriptures that were food for thought.

He Explained them = He made them clear so the people could see that the Messiah must die and rise again.

"Gave evidence" = He placed his own illustration alongside scripture to strengthen the argument

Then concluded. "this Jesus who I am talking about is the Christ.

He did not coerce them or hit them over the head with it. Sometimes we think we are more effective if we shout louder and that we can compel people with threats. Paul didn't, he winsomely reasoned with them. He did not try to entertain them. Evangelical Christianity has been caught up in thinking it is in the entertainment business. It is not.

? I wonder if they asked why they missed it?? Why didn't they hear about it when he was alive?

v.4 the reasoning must have had an effect. Some of the Jews were persuaded. But a "large number" of god fearing Greeks, and a number of leading (read "influential" women too were convinced of what God had done.

3 groups responded: A large number of Gentiles, a number of influential women, and some of the Jews.

v.5 A large group of Jews don't like it. Some of the Jews saw this as a threat. They got jealous of the hype, the attention. They were at the end of their bag of tricks...sound desperate. They were more interested in power, position, then backing up the truth. So they linked up with some wicked men from the city, (I guess that tells you what kind of men they were that they could so easily link arms with evil.) they incited a mob. They set the city in an uproar. An exaggeration with an element of truth. They rushed upon the house of Jason (where Paul was staying) and they were seeking to drag them out and wail on them. But they couldn't find them. Bad or old information

v.6 So they decided someone was going to pay and Jason seemed like a good candidate to drag through the city. He had welcomed them into his home. They didn't want to leave anyone out so they also grabbed some of the other brethren believers. They took them to the city officials shouting. These men who have upset the world have come here also.

I wonder if their reputation had preceded them. Heard what happened in Philippi? "Upset the World" Now that would be a label to have. The world was already upside down, the gospel turned it back right side up again. Problem: The act contrary to the decrees of Caesar talking about this other king named Jesus.

They did all they could to stir up the crowd. More emotion and passion then any weight of evidence behind it.

Paul was preaching that a man executed by Rome for proclaiming himself to be king of the Jews was in fact lord of the world.

v.9 They received a pledge (posted a bond) Paid a fee and guaranteed the group would leave and not return or else risk confiscation of property and even life. from Jason and the brothers and let them go.

What was the pledge? We won't let Paul sleep in house any more? Will ask Paul to leave the town? I promise not to be disruptive to the city? I renounce Jesus?

v.10 Answer: The brothers immediately sent Paul and S by night to Berea. Not safe here any more. They left by night to avoid confrontation. Why it seems there are times when God wants us to stand and confront to publicly protect the relationship with the city officials and other times to avoid confrontation and escape. It seemed in Philippi Paul went out of his way to stay in the face of the city officials. They let him go and he wanted them to come down personally and let him out. How do you know its time to take a stand and when is it right run away and escape by night?

BEREA: Continued 50 miles south instead of going along the logical route of the Egnatian way if Paul was heading to Rome, instead, they

detoured south to Berea. When they arrived they went into the synagogue. "To the Jew First...seems a common plan. Remember they are also explaining to the believers that God has welcomed gentiles into his family with open arms. Bereans had a standard for truth whereas the Thess. were upset about the jealous problem and threat.

They were eager. Hungry to know God's word. They were more concerned with knowing truth than power position.

Illust. Like a kid doing homework. They were desirous of using the homework not just to finish a task but they wanted to really learn. Maybe go the extra mile to get the truth done.

God seems to keep using these Jews to keep Paul moving. God uses hardship to move the gospel through.

These Jews received the word with a different approach. They were eager to hear the word...then they daily examined the word to see whether these things were so. In Thess only some of the Jews believed but here in Berea, many of these Jews in Berea believed.

Along with a number of PROMINENT Greek WOMEN and MEN. There it is again 3<sup>rd</sup> time it speaks of prominent, influential women here added to it the men.

Timeless truth: I need to study the Scriptures on my own, not just at church. I need to be able to determine truth from the scriptures for myself not just because some preacher says its so.

When taught ask the question: Is that true? How so? Where in the Bible would I back that up? More than moralistic teaching. More than Christianized pop psychology. Where does it say that???

Be careful of reading just one mans books, or one mans tapes, messages. This is a dangerous practice. You may be misled by his errors and not know how to recognize them. I Cor 1:12 "I am of Paul, I am of Apollo's. You follow each but all are provided for you instruction. You need us all. Don't ever limit yourself to a single mans ministry, including mine. Check them out with scripture. See what the word of God says this is the authority, not me.

They were cautious but remained open. They avoided consuming predigested food. If we listen uncritically to one preacher or author we are in danger. Test always against the scripture to see if this is true.

v.13 The Jews at Thess. Find out he is down in Berea and making a major impact. So they chased Paul down to Berea and agitated and stirred up the crowd. I suppose they are going to blame all that agitation on Paul again?

v.14 Even in the face of good response. They send Paul away. “out to the sea”. However Silas and Timothy still stayed there. Was Paul too controversial? His presence was hampering to the gospel, not a help, so he left. A group took Paul to the big city of Athens. When Paul got there he told the other two Silas and Timothy to leave Berea and join him in Athens. Paul took the 200 mile trip to Athens.

Its fine to be a Christian as long as you don't get too passionate about it and take it too seriously. ### This is what Paul faced in Athens. One of the most fiery passionate Christians who ever lived collided face to face with dispassionate intellectualism of Athens.

v.16 Paul waited for his team to arrive in Athens. He was alone. Led by God how? His spirit was provoked within him as he toured the city and saw all the many idols.  
Provoke = “ to incite a feeling of anger or challenge; to stir up emotion

v.17 Here it is again. Paul reasoning in the synagogue in Athens with the Jews and god-fearing gentiles. He also went out into the streets, the marketplace to reason with whoever happened to be walking by. Here they shop for the latest fashions and philosophies.

Why aren't there as many Jews in the church? Its not because Paul was against the Jews. He was one. It was not because he didn't tell them the message. He went out of his way to go there first even when it didn't seem to be as productive as the gentile crowd. There aren't as many Jews in the church because they rejected the message.

He was waiting in Athens but not passive. Something may bother you what are you going to do about it? Pray about it? Action?

Athens: Much like the Oxford of last century. Home to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The entire city was a showcase of intellectual achievement, a cradle of democracy and education. Rome respected the city for its highly develop culture so much that it left Athens free to carr on her own institutions as a free but allied city within the roman empire...but the people were hungry for spiritual things. While waiting for Luke to join him from Philippi and Silas and Timothy from Berea something greatly disturbed him. Ten of thousands of idols had been cut into the buildings, along streets. Even the ancient historians were amazed saying that it was easier to find god then a man in Athens. The population at the time was about 10000 people and there were 30000 statues of gods. Magnificent temples of the Parthanon and Acropolis.

v. 18 Epicurean=Those given to luxury or gratifying the senses. Taught that pleasure (not sensuality) is the only good and thus pleasure is the moral basis. Pleasure was a peace of mind and freedom from disturbing cares. Pleasures of the flesh should be minimized as they often lead to pain. So one should live without sticking ones neck out. Their goal was to attain the maximum amount of pleasure and the minimum amount of pain. We think of Epicureans as hedonists abandoned to pleasure. But that is not it exactly. Here the Epicureans sought to balance between pain and pleasure. They were materialists that said, "This life is all there is you only go around once. So if it feels good do it and if it doesn't feel good, stay away from it. Avoid what hurts. Don't take on any responsibility that might prove difficult. Enjoy yourself, because this life is all there is.

Stoic Philosophers = Collanade. Grk. Zeno was the teacher of this philosophy and taught under a stoa or covered porch in Athens. Pantheists that believed the world reveals itself. Reality is found in the material stuff, things you can touch that God was in everything, trees, rocks, people and everything was God. Man is completely a part of nature. They were fatalistic and unemotional and considered apathy to be the highest virtue. They saw that just as creative reason governed the order on matter, reason ought to govern a persons life. Fate is unavoidable so a person ought to submit to destiny. Self-sufficiency is of highest virtue. The wise man should be free from passion, not held by joy or by grief in order to be submissive to the natural law. And conform to whatever be his destiny.?? Men are responsible for their actions. Founded by Zeno taught that life is filled with both good an bad that you cannot really avoid the bad so what you have to do is "grin and bear it" I can't control what happens. There are some things that will happen that I won't like. But I am still in charge of myself so I am going to stand tall and take what is thrown at me. There are stoics all around us who have no sense of a divine presence or guidance in their lives. They do the best they can. If bad things come, then they just need to be strong and endure it.

Their idea of who God was shaped the way they lived, their philosophy. What we believe about God is the most important thing about us, because it shapes the way we think and that shapes the way we act. If we have a high idea of God that is helpful, holy and loving that is the philosophy of life we will have. If we do not have a knowledge of the true God, instead we have made a god who is merely in the image of men then our idea of what man will descend to that level and our philosophy will become despairing and negative.

Paul looked around and was idols everywhere. He saw idolatry as a fundamental problem in Athens. Is it fundamental in our society as well?  
Breakdown of the family

Lack of moral values

No commitment in relationships

Irresponsibility

Do we see the breakdown of our society as being spiritual?

If people had a noble view of God we would do much better, but if we lose sight of God, we will lose sight of the only thing that can lift up ours or any other society.

They listened and taunted Paul as an “idle babbler” “strange deities”  
Babbler = literally “seed picker” an Athenian slang term for a bird that goes about picking up scraps in gutters. Slang for a person who hangs around lectures and picks up scraps of learning and parrots them without understanding.

It was fashionable at among cultured persons all over the empire to write and speak in classical Greek spoken by Greek people 4-8 centuries earlier. Paul spoke the common or koinonia Greek and didn't use the complex grammar pure accent of the genteel philosophizes so he was obviously a boor from some backwater province.

Why is it so hard for sophisticated people to accept the gospel?

Have you ever been in a place like Paul? Addressing well born, well dressed intellectuals of our age? How could Paul face those people with such confidence? (Katy Culburtson Freshman in a group of Senior class officers.)

because he was speaking about Jesus and the resurrection.

They had never heard this before. It was different, new, strange and yet Paul seems to be proclaiming this with such passion and conviction...they were curious. What is this? We have never heard these things before. They were desirous of something new. Entertain me. Tickle me. Don't give me any of that old stuff. I'm not interested so much in truth, I want novelty. (convicting eh?)

v. 19 They brought him to the Areopagus and said, “Explain this stuff to us”

Areopagus: Grk for God of war, the Roman equivalent of Mars thus Mars hill. Limestone outcropping about 380 ft. high. It overlooks the marketplace of classical Athens. Originally it was a court of judicial matters but by the 1<sup>st</sup> century it exercised a general censorship in matters of religion and education. It was like a philosophical review board that investigated ideas and intellectual persuasion. They were always eager for argument and debate. Here the court of the Areopagus would exercise censorship in matter religious. . This seems to be a hearing rather than an actual trial. Paul was examined to determine if he

should be allowed to circulate freely in the city. The Areopagus is still the name called the Supreme court of Greece.

Paul started where they were: Not beginning with creation or the Old Testament scriptures or sin. Subjects that were totally foreign to his audience. Instead he opened with the subject close to his audience. In this case it happened to be religion. He wasn't trying to flatter then but simply to state the obvious. In a city displaying so many idols, the people who lived their must be religious. He was able to adjust the method without changing the truth.

Aplic. The Divinci Code. Several people who want to talk with Shelley about this book. The Lord of the Rings. Talk about the movie. Have a target in mind teaching the truth of Jesus.

1. Introduction
  2. God is creator of all things
  3. God is sustainer of all things, He is not served with human hands that is bad news to the self suffiecient. If you feel strong and morally self sufficient, this is bad news, because there is nothing you can do to negoitiare a good deal with God. Paul was a very successful Pharisee but had to admit even the best was not good enough. His whole identity was based on his resolve and strength to serve God, So this shattered his world. But this is good news to the weak. If you are weak and sinful and helpless and you know that any good you do you need God's help to do then this comes as the best of news. This God cannot be served but loves to serve. It takes away our basis for boasting. Maybe a God who doesn't need me would be willing to be for me what I need.
  4. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. Was he here to recruit servants for God like an employer headhunter at a job fait? No He came to serve. We need him the ransom to die in our place. Its our greatest need far more then health, or wealth or marriage repair or job or obedient kids. We need someone to die in our place and ransom us from the penalty and power of sin so that we escape God's judgment and enter eternal life.
  5. God is the ordainer of all things
  6. we should see him.
- We need to repent because we haven't sought God as we ought to.

Know your culture your dealing with. Don't have to wallow in their falsehood but..

v.20 In the middle Paul stood. I see you are very religious. Walking through your town I observed many objects of your worship. I found one alter inscribed "To the unknown God" Unknown in Greek is agnostw. It is

the root we get the word agnosticism “without knowledge” it is one who simply says I can’t decide truth. I will stay on the fence. I don’t think its possible to know truth. The Athenians were supposed to know everything and they didn’t...they came up short in their knowledge about God. What you worship in admitted ignorance. I proclaim to you. Paul was bold in proclaiming their ignorance esp. they who prided themselves on great wisdom.

Paul goes back to the very beginning. Resets their engines. Start up at the back.

v.24 The God who created the world, all things in it. The Lord of both heaven and earth, does not need a temple crafted by human hands for a place to live. God cannot be contained. Which told the Athenians that all the temples and shrines just won’t do. Since God was the originator of all things, He has no needs. There was nothing they could give God, to tell God that he didn’t know. He is self sufficient. He does not even have need to be waited upon by humans as though God were needing something that only humans could provide. Remember God is the one who provides life and breath to all things. He created all peoples, all nations who live on the face of the earth. God is the one who decides when they are born and when they die. God determines what country they live in.

Now the fact that God is the creator does not seem earth shattering to us, but it rock the Stoics and epicureans foundation of belief system. The stoics believed everything was God and God was everything. The Epicureans were practical atheists. God is the life giver, He made the whole world and all that is in it. From God we have our breath.

v.26-27 Being intelligent God has a definite plan. He is accessible and approachable  
God did all this for people so that we would SEEK God.  
From our perspective it seems like we could only look blindly for him without much direction, but its quite possible to stumble upon the truth about God because of all that God has done to point us to Himself. He is not far off. He is reachable for each of us.

v.26 God is the maker of ethnic groups. They do not just come about by chance but by God’s design and purpose.  
God made all ethnic groups from one human ancestor. This is especially powerful when spoken to the Athenians as they were fond of boasting that they sprang from their native soil and were not immigrants from some other place or people group. Paul confronts this ethnic pride head on. God made all peoples out of common stock, Cut from the same cloth as those despised barbarians.

All members of ethnic groups are made in the image of God. Gen 1:27 No matter what their skin color or hair texture is all people have a soul made in the image of God. A mind with unique God like reasoning powers. A heart that has the capacity to make moral judgements and can respond spiritually and has a potential to have a relationship with God that sets man apart from all the animals which God has made.

I think we would do far better to focus on that fact in our diversity training rather than some half hearted attempt to tolerate another's cultural identity. They missed the major point of why they ought to be racial reconciliation. The common point of all is a unique standing among creation as persons created in the image of God.

The body of Christ has a black hand and white wrist and a yellow arm and a red shoulder. We have many members in one body all are one body in Christ Romans 12. The white wrist cannot say to the black hand, I have no need of you. Etc.

The other image is family I John 3:1 We are all children of God.

Colosians 3:11 There is not Greek or Jew, barbarian or Scythian slave or free. Christ is all and in all.

v.28 God is the sustainer. We are dependent on Him, not he on us. For in God we live, we move, we exist.

How did you get from God to Christ? Write out your story on a 1/2 sheet of paper. Be able to share that with others.

**Paul kept their attention with relevant illustrations:**

Paul quotes Greek poet Aratus, to convince them that God is their Creator by hosing that even their own poets believed in a creator God. Paul took this poem written about Zeus and revealed that its true subject is Christ. We are God's offspring. So why ought we think that the nature of God is confined to gold or silver some creative art project thought up a sculpture??

**Paul applies the message personally.** He brings the truth close to home and it became uncomfortably close for some. God was not only their creator, he was also their judge. A judgment awaits beyond the grave where the resurrected Jesus waits. This was a stumbling block for the Athenians because since childhood, they had heard a motto. Once a man dies on the earth drinks up his blood there is no resurrection.

v.29 What does it mean that God "overlooked the times of ignorance" Does this mean ignorance was bliss? They didn't know the truth of Jesus therefore it didn't count against them in eternal judgment? Since they didn't know the truth and could not respond to such, does this mean God is going to forget about it? But now you know the truth and are then

without excuse since God has made it very clear all men must repent.  
(change their sinful ways and follow God.)

**God has been patient**, overlooking ignorance for a time. Our land is as corrupt as the Athens yet God has not destroyed America for its sins. Why? God is patient. He has also been patient with you. For a time He has overlooked your ignorance. Pay attention and let God's patience lead you to repentance.

God commands repentance. When he tells us to do something we had better do it.

He has appointed a final day of reckoning when Jesus shall be the final judge.

v.31 God will pick a day sometime in the future and will judge the world. It will be a righteous judgment. Through a Man (Jesus whom He raised from the dead as proof)

Paul calls them to repent. Of what Idolatry. Anything that men may set above God as the object of their time, thought, affection, energy. Since we are made in the image of God it is insulting to God and degrading to us to make an idol of him. Don't do it. And don't worship any other idol above God.

v.32 The resurrection from the dead started some to sneer and ridicule. But others wanted to hear him out and have more dialog. This ended the dialog. It was too much for them. They all smiled and listened calmly at times encouraging you with interesting thoughts. Fascinating philosophy. This makes me think. But when you speak of resurrection from the dead and life after death, they lose their patience and cut short the audience. "Enough of this we will talk to you another day." I've heard enough.

As long as it remains theoretical, everything is fine, but once we call men to actions and decision it gets very uncomfortable for some.

Paul had said what he needed to say and simply left them to debate and discuss it among themselves.

v.34 There were a few men who joined Paul and believed.

Some accepted.

Some rejected.

Some put off their decision. It is still true what Paul told the council, "He is not far from each one of us."

But also Dionysius and Areopagite. This was not small victory as was one of the 12 member of the council. Historian Eusibius claims that he

became the bishop of the church at Athens and was martyred for his faith.

A woman named Damaris (Another prominent Woman)

Most of us are able to talk comfortably with non-Christians about almost any subject except Jesus Christ. If His name enters the conversation we freeze up. "My comments sound so trite." I'm not even making sense"

Think about Paul's example can boost our confidence to share. Think about a friend a relative someone whom you would like to witness to.

Take a look around...who is in your marketplace?

How can you start where she is?

What are this persons primary concerns? Family? Future? Health?

How could you use those as a bridge to the unfamiliar subject of Christ?

What facts can you give about Christ that will clearly explain the gospel?

What situations from your own experience can you draw upon to

illustrate Christ? His love mercy, salvation?

What can we learn from Paul's methods as we share our faith?

Determine where they are at and connect them to the gospel.

Find some point of common ground or inroad to crack open their consideration. (the worship of the unknown God)

Don't be afraid to confront. Make the truth clear

Expect that the gospel will divide.

What is the danger of changing and adapting our approach to fit the audience. (Seeker driven/sensitive services)

Max Lucado quote Charles Colson from The Body.

We assume every one is coming from a Judeo Christian perspective, and they are not. The prevailing world view denies the existence of absolute truth. So when the Christian message which is primarily historical and propositional is told, the modern listeners hear what they interpret as simply another persons preference, a choice of lifestyle, a choice of belief.

So to evangelize in this time we must address the human condition at its point of felt need. Guilt, dealing with others, finding a purpose for living.

We must be familiar enough with the prevailing world view to look for points of contact and discern points of disagreement. Our handy prepackaged God talk won't do. Before we tell them what the Bible says, we may have to tell them why they should even believe the Bible. Our case for Christ must begin to alter the view of their reality.

TRUTH: People who follow Jesus do not always have it easy. Store up strength for the difficult times?

Remember that determination is at the heart of any accomplishment???

Paul stayed the course despite the beatings public slander and rejection.

Rejection is expected if the truth is proclaimed. The gospel tends to force people to make a choice. In fact if nobody is rejecting then we probably are not telling the whole truth. Remember they are really rejecting God and not you.