

How to turn the world upside down

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Sunday, October 14, 2018

Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

You know, this morning if you actually believe what you just sang, that makes you a very dangerous person. You say, "What do you mean, dangerous?" Because that means that the life after this life is more important to you than the life you're living right now and when the life of the future is more important than the life of today, you become very dangerous to the world and its system that surrounds us. Today the Lord is going to call us, if not already, to be very dangerous people. In fact, we're going to see a phrase in the word of God today that 2,000 years ago a group of believers turned the world upside down. They were dangerous people. We've been called to be dangerous people because we see our relationship with the Lord as lasting longer and being greater than just what this temporal existence gives us.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of worship, as we open your word, may we be dangerous people. May we rely on you more than the world that is around us. May we trust in your word more than all the communication we get every day of our lives. Lord, may we have a perspective that says eternity is more valuable than the temporary. May we know that our relationship with you is immensely more important than anything else this world offers. Lord, bless the reading of your word, the teaching of your word, the preaching of your word, more importantly may you bless the doing of your word this day. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 17. As you're turning to Acts 17, for those of you that are guests or visitors, we continue as a family of faith, we're just walking through the Scriptures at a very steady pace and we find ourselves this season in the book of Acts, in fact, these last few days if you've been reading through the book of Acts, you have discovered that it sounds, for lack of better terms, just kind of more like an itinerary of life than anything else. You've got a whole list of individuals, you've got a lot of places that they're going, they're traveling from this place to that place, but today as we come to Acts 17, we come to one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible and here's why: because you and I live in a world that, at least I hope I'm not the only person in the room today, we live in a world whereas a believer in Jesus Christ, I'm frustrated with what I see. I'm frustrated with what I'm experiencing. I'm frustrated with what I hear and I see the world that is around me and I see the culture that is enveloping and if you ever wanted things to change, if you ever wanted the message and the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ to have preeminence in the world that is

around you, I've got good news for you. Today we're going to read the game plan for that to happen because 2,000 years ago a group of believers just like you and just like me, saw the entire world turned upside down. And here's what I want to share with you: they didn't have the resources of the buildings that are around us; they didn't have the resources of technology that we have today; they didn't have a lot of what we have and yet they still saw the world turned upside down. Allow me to challenge you before we even read Acts 17, the only thing keeping us from being what we're about to read is us.

Acts 17, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

So here you are 2,000 years ago with his early believers, in fact, we find ourselves in Thessalonica and that's critical to the story because what we know as the letter to the church at Thessalonica chronologically speaking is the first communication the Lord gives us through whom we know as the Apostle Paul. So these are early believers. They have not had the benefit of the Scriptures in totality as you and I have today and yet they turned the world upside down, the question is how did they do it and how do we follow their lead?

Well, the first thing I think we need to recognize is the priority that they had. Notice what it says in verse 2, "as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." If we speak about turning the world upside down, our priority in life, we must identify what must be of the greatest priority. The greatest priority must be the word of God. Now let me be honest with you, in the book of Ephesians 6, it says that you and I are engaged in a warfare. It's a warfare that oftentimes we can't see and we rarely can hear. It says it's not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness. It says because of that, we are to garner what we know as the armor of God. We're to put on the belt of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; the helmet of salvation; the shield of faith; our feet are to be shod with the

preparation of the Gospel of peace; and then, yes, there is the sword of the Spirit. What's interesting about the sword of the Spirit is that it is the only one of the items listed that is then clarified of what it is, and the reason is this: that in the armor of God, the only item that is offensive, the only item that allows you to gain territory, the only item that allows you to make progress is the sword of the Spirit, and it says the sword of the Spirit – listen to this – which is the word of God. When they gathered, they did not reason with their intellect, though they were intelligent people, they reasoned from the Scriptures, and what you and I need to understand is that if there is ever going to be progress made in this dark world, it must have as its priority the word of God in our lives.

Now, one of the things I want to share with you, I've shared this in times past so for some of you it is a repeat, but hear me out, one of the reasons that I will never win, much less run for a political office is this: my slogan would be, "If your name's not God, I don't care what you think." Because they turned the world upside down because they did it the way God said to do it. They used his playbook. They went according to his plan.

Notice the influence that this had. It said not only did they open the Scriptures, they reasoned with them. They alleged these things. Now, I know some of you are familiar with the fact that we have three teenage boys in our house and so when it comes to watching television, there is really only two choices: sports or sports. That's all we watch. But every now and then, we go off and we will, shall we say, open ourselves up to some more entertainment other than football, basketball, baseball or even curling during the Olympics. You never know. So one of the shows that my boys have naturally gravitated to, you may be familiar with the show, very typical teenage boy show, it's called "Forged in Fire." All y'all familiar with "Forged in Fire"? That's right, it's four blacksmiths in a reality show making knives and weaponry. I mean, what more could three teenage boys want to watch than that?

So that being said, recently we watched an episode of "Forged in Fire," and if you're not familiar with it, it is a reality show. They start with four blacksmiths and they do a contest about making a blade, then one gets eliminated; then they make a handle, another one gets eliminated. When you get to the final two, they are commissioned back to their home for five days and they are asked to replicate or duplicate a piece of weaponry or art from some historical period. Well, the one that we most recently watched, they were asked to make or to fashion a two-edged sword, much like what Hebrews 4 says. It says the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.

So in the process of this reality show, they're going in, they're making, they're fashioning, they're forming, but when you get to the end of the show, this is where the winner is determined: not by how attractive the sword is, not by the ornateness of the sword or even the craftsmanship, but how well does it withstand the ability to be put into action just as if it was being used for its original purpose. As we saw this sword demonstrated on this previous episode, one of the things they did is they took one edge of the blade and they cut on this side, then they took the other edge and cut on the other side, then they thrust it in the middle with the point. You know, I don't find it ironic at all that it says that they reasoned and they alleged or they proved, in other words, when the word of God is

utilized as the priority of our lives, it is a two-edged sword. It reasons on one side and it proves on the other.

Do you know what's interesting about this passage is nobody argued with them. Now there were a lot of folks that didn't believe and there were a lot of folks that weren't interested, but there wasn't a whole lot of argumentation. And I think one of the traps we fall into in our contemporary culture of Christianity is somehow we think we need something more than the Bible to get the job done. We've got it right here. They used it and guess what? They turned the world upside down.

It was their priority, but what I also want you to see is the power behind it. Look in verse 3, they "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Now what I'm about to share with you, just hold on with me for just a moment. Work with me here. I want you to understand, I know I have a physical Bible in my hands, many of you have them on your phones and tablets and such and that is fine, but I want to work with mine just for the sake of illustration. It is wrapped with a leather cover. It is composed of paper and ink. You do understand that left alone by their independent properties, there is no power in these pages. It's just paper, ink and leather. That's it. The power to turn the world upside down is they utilized these words on this paper to allege and to show that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. You realize that if the tomb was not empty, we wouldn't even pick this up, much less buy a copy of it. The power in the words, the power behind the words, the power through the words is Jesus Christ alone.

Now notice how they identify him in verse 3, it says they show "that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." You know, that word "Christ" means "anointed one," the one who will solve our issues, address our problems. Earlier in the book of Acts 5, remember Gamaliel, this very well-known individual and a philosopher and a theologian. There was this uprising about Jesus and he gave this incredible wisdom, he said, "Guys, if this is of God, you're never going to be able to stop it. If this is of man, don't worry, it'll fade away." How many personalities have risen and fallen, how many kingdoms have risen and fallen and yet they prove, they allege that Jesus is the Christ.

Now Jesus himself in Matthew 24, he is on what we know as the Mount of Olives. He's got the disciples, they've gathered up there with him. This is just a couple of days before his crucifixion. He takes Peter, James and John, the big three, they go up to have this kind of solitude Bible study together and they ask him some important questions such as, "When are you coming back? What's it going to look like? What's the sign going to be?" Those are pretty important questions, are they not? Do you know what Jesus' first response to them was? "Do not be deceived for many will come in my name." They used the words of God to prove, to allege, and to reason that Jesus Christ alone has the ability and the power to be what we so desire to have.

Notice that it says that "must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." Let me speak to you about the influence of the person of Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:10, it says that we should fellowship with his sufferings in the power of his resurrection. Now when

I hear the word "power" it is my natural inclination to put the word "horse" in front of it, horsepower, alright? We're talking about taking something and magnifying its ability, its energy, whatever it may be to either go faster or do it harder or whatever it is, but when we look at the concept when it said the risen Jesus, the power of the resurrection, that is where we get our modern concept and even our modern verbiage for what we know as dynamite. Now last time I checked, dynamite really only has two functions: it either blows stuff up or it clears away. I mean, that's it, right? That's what dynamite does.

So think about this for just a moment: what is the power of the resurrection? It means it can take obstructions in a person's life, it can take addictions, it can take prejudices, it can take problems and Jesus Christ's resurrection can blow it out of the way. It also can create a path. How many of you have ever thought, "Boy, I just wish there was a direction to go. I just wish I knew which way to walk. I just wish..." Guess what? Dynamite has the ability to provide direction and a path of least resistance that was otherwise stopping you.

So when it says here that they opened up the Scripture, they alleged, they proved, their priority was the word of God but they realized the power was not in their oral presentation, the power was not in their facilities, the power was in the fact that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, he could remove obstructions and he creates a pathway, so much so that notice what happens: many people began to believe. Then I want you to notice what happens in verse 5. You see, there's my favorite word in all of the Bible, "but." Now everything's going great, right? I mean, they've walked into town, it's been about three weeks, people are believing, life is good, and then, "but." What you see in verse 5 is this: there's a group of people who don't like what's taking place and they begin to oppose them. So let me share with you today what I want to call the probability. The probability that if you and I prioritize the word of God and allow the power of Jesus Christ to operate through our lives, the probability that you and I will experience what verse 5 says. It says, "the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason."

Now globally speaking, what we know as persecution, the shall we say, physical and emotional, even mental detriment of believers in Jesus Christ, is commonplace globally, but has not necessarily been readily available or promoted within our current context in recent years. In fact, I will say and I'm just going to go ahead and say this and some of you can get upset and I really don't care, we've gotten soft, folks. The church has gotten soft. You know, I had an old football coach who used to say blood makes the grass grow. That being said, it was said that the blood of the martyrs is the foundation of the church.

You know, when we speak about the probability, I want to identify who it was that did it. Lewd folks. Baser folks. The culture, the community around these believers did not like the fact that people were believing and the culture was losing their grip and their power over the people. And the reason I want to use the word "probability" is this and maybe I'm just the only one in the room but I have this really weird thing I like to do. I mentioned in our home that we watched sports or sports and the occasional "Forged by Fire," but we watch sports and sports. One of the things I like to do, and there are several

apps that allow you this opportunity, is whether it's the game I'm watching or another game I'm paying attention to, and by the way, I'm a typical sports junkie, I have like 18 games going on at one time, is I love the probability meters on these games. If you're not familiar with them, they will share with you what is the probability that a certain team will win and another team will lose, and it's interesting to watch because you can have a team that has an 85% probability of winning and one turnover, one interception run back and all of a sudden it goes from 85 to 48. In other words, things change literally with one play or just a few seconds of the clock, and I love watching those probability meters. Let me translate that probability meter to our world today. What is the probability that you and I here in our context will experience what verse 5 just said? It's increasing every single day. Every day.

Now we live in a world where about 80% of anybody you run into will claim they believe in God and that's fine, that's great and that's wonderful, but let me give you the latest what we know as data on what we call evangelical Christianity. You say, "Well, that's a name I hear a lot. It has a lot of negative connotations. Some people think it's positive." Let me share with you what an evangelical Christian is in spite of what people may say they are. Here's what they are. An evangelical Christian believes that the Bible is true from cover to cover. It's inerrant. It's infallible. 2. An evangelical Christian believes that Jesus Christ was born miraculously of a virgin. An evangelical Christian believes that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, he died a physical death, and fifth, that three days later he rose physically from the grave. In addition to that, an evangelical Christian believes that Satan is real, he's not just a figment of our imagination, and that one day as we just sang, Jesus Christ is going to return.

Now I know what some of you are thinking, "Isn't that the curriculum we use in third grade Sunday school?" Yeah, pretty much. I mean, that's just the basics, is it not? Did you know that according to the latest data, less than 10% of Americans are evangelical. Less than 10%. I know what you're thinking, "There's no way. Everybody I know..." You do understand you're a part of that 10% most likely and one of the things that I think we forget is the probability that as there are fewer and fewer believers in our context, there's a probability of persecution growing exponentially. They did it to them, they'll do it to us.

It says who did they gather? These lewd folks, these crude folks, and notice the influence, they caused an uproar in the city. You know, one of the first major waves of mass Christian persecution came at the hands of a man by the name of Nero. In fact, he actually initiated, there were 10 major waves in the first 300 years of Christianity of state-sponsored official persecution of believers in Jesus Christ. But here's what Nero said. You may not find this frightening but I do. Nero, who was then the leader in Rome, he said that everything that was wrong was the Christians' fault. Everything. It didn't even matter if the Christians were there or not, just the fact that they exist made them the problem. And yet you see through Nero's reign, through Domitian's reign, through all of these individuals who consistently ramped up, shall we say, the level of persecution, what did the church of Jesus Christ do? It grew and it grew and it grew because they turned the world upside down not based on how well of a physical life they were able to live, they

turned the world upside down because their priority was the word of God and the power of Jesus Christ working through it.

So what's the possibility? Notice verse 6, "when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Let me give you a possibility today: what you see happening in the life of Jason, what you see happening in Acts 17 can happen in your life as well.

Now think about that, his name is Jason. That's a great name, don't get me wrong. It's not in the list of the apostles. It's not in the list of any of the elders. It's not in the list of the bishops. It's not in the list of the deacons. You don't find his name associated with any "title or authority" in the New Testament. That's right, to use sports terms, he wasn't a coach, he wasn't a manager, he wasn't an owner, he was just an everyday player on the roster. You see, Ephesians 4:11 and 12 says this, "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers," verse 12, "For the equipping of the saints." You see, when you talk about turning the world upside down, we've got to identify who are these people that turned the world upside down. Was Paul a part of it? Sure. Was Barnabas? Yes. Was Silas? Of course. But it was the Jasons of the world that made the greatest difference because the Jasons of the world went out into the highways, into the byways, into the businesses, into the homes. Paul couldn't be everywhere, Silas couldn't be everywhere, but the people of God could be everywhere and what you see is those that were responsible for turning the world upside down were the Jasons of the world.

And what was their influence? It says they have turned the world upside down. Can you imagine if that was written on your tombstone? Now for those of you that don't know, my wife and I, we've already chosen what we want our tombstones, our kids don't like it so we've got to buy them in advance, but here's what we want. Now typically statistically men typically die first. It's just part of the way it rolls, and so here's on my tombstone it's going to say, "He tried," and hers is going to say, "She tried too." If we die together, it's going to say, "They tried." By the way, think about that throughout the day. It's got a lot of heavy connotations to it. You don't have to use a whole lot of words to say a whole lot, but can you imagine having somebody write on your tombstone, "This person turned the world upside down."

You see, Jason is dead. He hasn't been around for 2,000 years, and we don't know where his physical grave is but this is the one statement that we have about him, "He turned the world upside down." You know that the possibility is that that could be said about you. You know the possibility is this could be a part of your life. In fact, allow me to close today with the precedence here because I know it's so easy to read this story and to look back in 2,000 years of history and say, "Yeah, that's a great story," but let me give you some precedence, let me give you the identity of some folks who have turned the world upside down just in the last 500 years. Oh sure, there's been Martin Luther. There's been guys like D. L. Moody. There's been R. A. Torrey and Charles Spurgeon. There's been some pretty heavy-hitters for the sake of the Gospel but I dare say that we might be able

to list maybe a couple of dozen, a couple of dozen individuals and yet in the last 500 years, we can say that in waves of awakening and revival, this world has been turned upside down several times in a lot of different places but it was turned upside down not because of the Spurgeons and because of the Torreys, thought they were important, it was those who lived by the priority of the word of God in the power of Jesus Christ in the highways and the byways of life that changed everything.

Allow me to identify one such person today that you may or may not have heard of, his name is Joseph Lamphere. He was a businessman and in 1857 he was so bothered by the world around him, he was so bothered by the culture and its contrariness to Scripture that he moved to New York City because he believed that that was the hotbed of all the problems. As a businessman, he moves to New York City and this was his strategy: he put a piece of paper on what we would call a telephone pole and all it said was at a certain time, at a certain place, come and pray with me. He gathered at that place and on that first day there were three others that gathered with him and they decided the next day to gather, and the next day to gather, and the next day to gather. Let me give you the influence of Joseph Lamphere: 18 months later, over 1 million people had come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior because of what he started that day. One million. Now I know you're thinking, "One million, that's a lot of people," but let me translate that into our culture today. If you were to equate the populations of then and now, that would be 30 million people or the population of Texas. Do you think our world would look a little different if 30 million people came to know Jesus in 18 months? Do you think it would change our communities? Do you think it would change our culture? Do you think it would change everything? Yes, it turned the world upside down.

I think one of the problems that we have is we say, "Well, that's for the Luthers and that's for the Spurgeons." No, it's for the Jasons and the Josephs, the persons who are on the roster who are sitting in pew 5, seat 15, who say, "Do you know what? I don't like what I'm seeing and I want to live these words that are written. I want Jesus Christ to empower my life. There may be some opposition but I want to see the world turned upside down. I want to see my home, I want to see my business, I want to see my school, I want to see my whole culture for the sake of Jesus Christ." Do you realize that the only thing stopping us from seeing Acts 17 in our lives is us? We're the only problem.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person here today who for whatever reason and however you found yourself in this place, we're grateful and we're thankful but maybe you realized that you're the one that's been turned inside out, you're the one that's gone the way of the world, you're the one who's bought the bait of what's being fished with in our world today. Maybe today for the very first time when you hear the sufferings of Christ, the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and the power therein, maybe today for the very first time you realized your need for Jesus Christ in your life. I've got great news for you. The Bible doesn't say you have to sign up for a bunch of classes, check off a bunch of boxes, the Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If that's you today, can I encourage you just to call out to the Lord. Technically we would call it prayer. You don't have to do so out loud, in fact, you don't have to use the same words that I would use, the Lord hears your heart, and maybe your conversation, maybe your crying out would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to confess, I just want to admit what you already know about me, I'm the problem but I believe that Jesus is the answer. I'm the one who's messed up. I'm the one who's sinned. I'm the one who's rebelled. But I believe that you loved me so much that Jesus Christ was born on my behalf. I believe you loved me so much that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on my behalf. I believe you loved me so much that Jesus Christ was willing to take the price of my sins on the cross and three days later he rose from the dead. And God, I believe that his love for me is such that because of his resurrection I can be forgiven and I can be saved. So God, today I come and I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to save me. I'm asking you to forgive me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

If today is the day you had the conversation with the Lord, we'd love to celebrate with you. We'd love to know how the Lord's moving in your life and we as a family of faith would just love to have a conversation with you this day. But maybe you had that conversation years ago, maybe it was decades ago, and maybe today you realize rather than Jesus turning the world upside down through your life, the world's turned you inside out. Maybe today is not the day about coming and having a conversation with one of us, maybe today is about leaving this place in a few moments and seeing your business, your home, your school, or wherever you go, turned upside down with not only your belief in but your living the words of God.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, thank you. Thank you for your hand of mercy. O God, do we deserve judgment. Yes, but you're willing to give us forgiveness, you're willing to give us what we would call a second chance or a third chance or an infinite chance. Thank you for your arm of mercy, your hand of grace. Lord, I pray today we would simply take advantage of it. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.