

Holy Week in Biblical Perspective
Resurrection Sabbath
“Three Responses to the Resurrection Proclamation”

Acts 17

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

April 21, 2019 • Morning Sermon

We will be looking at a no so familiar text for this Easter Sunday in Acts 17. This is God’s Word. God’s Word is the truth, inspired, inerrant and infallible. Acts 17:1–6 says [1] *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. [2] And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer (the cross) and to rise from the dead (the empty tomb), and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” [4] And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. [5] But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. [6] And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The pattern continues. Here we are less than 25 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. This passage takes place in Europe where the Gospel has arrived with a team through the Apostle Paul and it is met with resistance. There is an interesting statement that is made by an adversary of the Gospel, a pagan unbeliever who is utterly frustrated and obviously angry at the presence of the Gospel and the expected impact that he is anticipating of their preaching the Gospel. We just heard that this city of Thessalonica is a city that is now in an uproar (verse 5) and this pagan unbeliever says *“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”*

If you have been here this Passion Week you probably noticed a pattern. On Palm Sunday Jesus comes in with a regal enthronement ceremony that we saw through five points that affirms Jesus as King, the Messiah that were evidence through the palms, Psalms, hosannas, to the cloths, the riding in on the donkey to the fulfillment of prophecy and even the disciples setting Jesus on the donkey. From this passage in Matthew 21 it says the whole city was stirred up (verse 10). The objective was not to stir up the city for that was the blessed consequence. The objective was for the Savior to come in humility as King, not to bring judgment (for He would have been on a white horse), but to bear our judgment, as He came in mounted on this donkey, declaring He is not only King but Messiah for by the end of this week He will mount a cross to save us from our sins.

During the Maundy Thursday homily we saw how Jesus fulfilled the last Passover and established the first Lord’s Supper in anticipation when He would eat it anew in the Kingdom, the Lamb’s Supper when He returns for His people. On Good Friday we went through the words that Jesus gave upon the cross and here is a city that is stirred up and continues to be stirred up throughout all the week, particularly on that day where Jesus is scourged and taken to the cross

to save His people from their sins. We walked through His seven words spoken on that cross. They take Him down from the cross which is fulfillment of Scripture again, and placed Him in a new borrowed tomb, even as He had died for transgressors between two transgressors. Darkness descended upon us on that Good Friday. Then we left and there was the silence of a sealed tomb, but didn't He say on the third day 'I will rise'?

On the third day there will be a resurrection but that's not where the Disciples were at the moment. They had departed, they had abandoned Him. They walked away from Him and Peter had denied Him. They all denied Him. Some of you are thinking that it was just Peter but the rest had already left for they weren't even there when Peter was asked the questions in which he denied Him. It was likely if the rest had been there they would have denied Him too. Fear had replaced faith – disbelieving, discouraged, disoriented, departed – were His Disciples even as He had told them they would. They had fled.

The women that were with Him were with Him right up to the last of the cross and they saw to it that He was laid aside in the tomb. Then they came and they were not yet believing either that He would rise on the third day. If they had been believing why were they talking about how to get rid of the stone? They were coming to do their duty out their love for the Savior as for the resurrection, like the writer of the Gospels recorded it, like an idle tale, but then the tomb is empty of Jesus. That tomb gets to be a pretty full tomb for Peter and John will go into it. Angels will be in it and some of the women will go into it. Yet it is empty of Jesus because He is risen. He is alive and has won the victory. The One who was delivered up because of our transgressions is now raised because of our justification and our salvation. That begins to spread and now the city is stirred up again.

What message has stirred up the city? It is that Jesus of Nazareth, the One who died for our sins is risen. Then He will bear witness of Himself for the Scriptures give us 13 recorded affirmations of His appearance over a 40 day period. He teaches His disciples at various places and He affirms the Great Commission to go and tell the world of this glorious Good News of the Gospel as we make disciples of Christ to all the nations. Then from the Mount of Olives He ascends back to the throne and the One who was humbled to the point of death has been exalted in His resurrection, His ascension and is now at the right hand of the throne of God and pours forth the Spirit of God upon the people of God that He might dwell in our hearts by the presence of His Spirit, even from the throne. For He has now promised to come again after this Gospel is preached to all the nations.

What can we expect when this Gospel has been preached to all the nations? This is one of the reasons I'm in this Acts 17 text today. You can expect the Gospel to be preached which demands a response and if you decide not to respond that's a response. Jesus says "If you're not for Me then you're against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Everywhere the Gospel goes its object is not to shake the city or to stir up the city but it inevitably does that. Here in Acts 17 Thessalonica is in an uproar. One pagan observer says the whole city is shaken up. Stop and think a moment.

From these departed, disbelieving, discouraged disciples, less than 25 years after His ascension there is not a celebrity endorsed, paid for upon the itinerate ministry of the Apostle Paul, but a frustrated response to the work of the Gospel. Paul has joined a group called the Apostles. These are not people with multiple resources for they can go rent the coliseum and do a week of crusades, but they are filled with the Spirit of God and they know something. They know that this Jesus died for their sins and now it makes sense because now they see the resurrection. On Friday they didn't see it that clearly but on Sunday they began to see it and they know He is risen. And they will not stop preaching that.

That's why Paul goes into the city and says "Jesus must suffer for sins" for you and I cannot be right with God unless God Himself sends His Son who goes to the cross where He freely gives it for no man takes His life. He has Himself plaquered on that cross between heaven and this earth because He alone can rescue us from our sins to bring us into glory. On that cross the love of God meets the justice of God and sinners are saved by the grace of God to the glory of God and there is no other way but He made that way when there was no way. Then God put the exclamation and the affirmation with His resurrection. The resurrection says this atonement has satisfied My justice and we can be right with God.

You might be wondering if there is another way but Jesus already asked that question in the garden. Matthew 26:39 says [39] *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* Here when Jesus is saying 'let this cup pass from Me' He is referring to another way other than the cross to save His people. Jesus' answer from the Father is that there is no other way. Sincerity or man-made religion won't get you to heaven for it is only Christ and the resurrection affirms that He is the Christ and that this Christ is the way, the truth and the life. And that what He has done is sufficient. You can be right with God.

In this past year as I have been studying these accounts I have been drawn back to Pontius Pilate. It's interesting that the very people who tell us the resurrection is a myth that it didn't happen also can't tell us why cowards become courageous warriors and eventually die for the faith. You might think you have met those who have believed the lie and died for it but my question to you would be all eleven at one time give themselves to it? An account that affirms itself by first affirming itself through people who couldn't even give an account and bear witness in a court, women? I have spent Easter Sunday after Easter Sunday affirming the historicity of the resurrection for it's not hard but you really have to work hard to dismiss it as a historical fact.

Peter who 50 days after he denied Jesus goes out in front of the same people he denied Him to and says "This Jesus whom you crucified God raised from the dead" so if you want to stop Christianity just roll out the body. One might say the tomb was empty because Jesus didn't really die but He resuscitated and He moved the stone. You have been beaten within an inch of your life, hung on a cross, utterly decimated and you're going to move a three ton stone? To believe something like that you have to have some kind of faith and I don't have that kind of faith. I'll just take the fact that He was raised from the dead. It stands patently true.

If you really want to work on your cardiovascular system just read the opinion page of the New York Times from time to time. I read it this week and I have to thank my son for sending it to me. There was this amazing article of you don't have to believe this myth of a resurrection and one of his statements was you know that the resurrection didn't happen because the four accounts (referring to the four Gospels) don't totally agree in every detail. Do you mean there were real people who looked at the same event where all of the essentials were the same but they had a different perspective? That sounds more like reality than falsification. He is basically saying unless they are identical they can't be true.

In fact, if you picked up the four accounts of the Gospel and they were identical what would you say? I know what you would say if you worked for the New York Times, knowing that four different writers wrote the same thing, you would say 'collusion.' They must have gotten together and copied each other. No, this is the same event and the essentials are identical but they are looking at it with different perspectives as they are describing it from the different dynamics that the Holy Spirit has laid upon their hearts so that we get a composite picture and not just a regurgitated picture. All of it stands patently obvious.

I love to see that everywhere they go with this Gospel, from Jerusalem which is so stirred up on the day of Pentecost where 3,000 come to Christ and that's just counting the men and not long after that 5,000 come to Christ which is just counting the men and as this city is so stirred up the evil empire strikes back as they bring death to some of the leaders like Stephen. Persecution comes to some of the believers effecting their livelihood so they get scattered and they go to Samaria where that city gets stirred up. Then they go to Antioch and they get stirred up. Paul and Barnabas get sent out and go to Lystra and Derbe and they get stirred up. Then they go to Galatia and Ephesus where this city gets in such an uproar that they try to kill the Christians in the amphitheater.

Then they go to Europe and to the city of Thessalonica where this city gets in an uproar. This is where we get the statement 'these people are turning the world upside down.' Who are these people? They are common everyday people that had been transformed by the power of the Gospel just like you. These are common people who know the risen Savior and now they go with this message. The emphasis of them going city to city is not them giving a personal testimony of their experience with Jesus. What authenticates Christianity is it is a message from the Word of God and the Word of God is the truth.

From the Scriptures Paul reasoned with them and explained to them Jesus, instead of the illogical commitment of pagan religions he gave the consistent testimony of the Gospel. Paul tells them that He suffered for our sins and that He was raised. The crucifixion is where God made man right with Him and then God declared that He would be right within us. The resurrection is God's exclamation. This is the Son of God. This is true salvation and this Jesus will ever live to pray for you. And He will come again to bring you to Himself. He ever lives and so because He lives you now can have life evermore. This is the message they bring and it turns city after city upside down.

This message demands a response. In the Old Testament it says about the Messiah that He shall shake the nations for the treasure of God (Haggai 2:7). That is His people in every nation from all over the world. He turns it upside down to bring men and women and shake them out to Himself. The nations will get in an uproar and strike back with persecution but His people keep taking the message – Jesus is the Christ. He died for your sins and rose again and that's the message that demands a response from every one of us.

That is what I love about my time learning about Pontius Pilate. Interestingly, people thought Pilate was a myth too but in 1963 they found a stone by Caesarea by the Sea with his name on it where he lived. So, so much again for the critics. If you wait long enough archeology, geology and science will catch up with the Bible. Pilate asked Jesus 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) I am going to ask you what Pilate asked the crowd in Matthew 27:22a, [22a] *Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"* What will you do with Jesus?

In Acts 17 we see three response to this question. Let's continue in this text. Acts 17:16–21 says [16] *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because **he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.** [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what*

these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

We don't build our faith on reason, we build our faith on the Word of God but the Word of God is never unreasonable. You can reason from it as Paul is doing here in the synagogue with the Jews, devout people and those in the city. Why did Paul preach Jesus? Is Jesus sufficient to save us from our sins? Yes.

There is a movie that came out in 1993 called Rudy that seems to play on some station almost everywhere. People were all moved by as you all know he got into the last game at the last minute and he's the last guy to get carried off the field at Notre Dame, which may say something about Notre Dame football but I won't go there. He was 5 foot 3 inches, 114 pounds but we love him because he was tough for he took everything thrown at him. He had the team spirit and rightly so he got into play for 30 seconds and we honored all of that with him but I will promise you Rudy will never start at left tackle for Notre Dame because he would get killed. He is too small and not strong enough. We can admire all of the other but he is not able.

The One that went to the cross was the Son of God who took our place with our humanity and He is able to deliver us. Then He suffers and He drinks to the last drop. All of the judgment due to us – all sins of omission, commission, sins of thought, word and deed, rebellion against God – He became our sin on that cross. He took all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity and when there was no way for any one of us to be saved He made a way and that way is Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man can come to the Father but through Him (John 14:6). Twelve legions of angels were ready to come and at the cross you see what man is because men and women for one time in history have God where they can put their hands on Him and they crucified Him. That's the heart we're born with – a Christ crucifying heart.

Christ goes to the cross and even though we need Him we didn't want Him but God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). He who did not need us wanted us and drank that cup of judgment to the last drop. Then He says 'tetelestai' which means 'it is finished.' It is paid in full. He didn't say 'I am finished.' He said 'it is finished' but He wasn't finished. He would come out of that grave, ascend to heaven, send His Spirit and send His people with the Gospel to bring you from death unto life. He brought you to read this today and you can leave the dominion of sin and its death and come to Christ for life now and forevermore. Our payment has been made.

Then we see for one time in history where hell is on the earth. With His cry from Mark 15:34 it says [34] *And at the ninth hour, Jesus shouted in a loud voice, "Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"* The reason why is it's not just Me but Jesus has become on that cross me (us) for He has become our sin. He willingly has become our sin offering. He suffers that we can have eternal life in Him.

Paul also gets into debate with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Epicurean's believe that we're a walking accident and the only thing that makes life is to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die. When you die you're worm food. You weren't born with a purpose, you don't live with a purpose so you have to make your own purpose and the best purpose is to gratify every single appetite you have to its absolute fullest and then some. There is no such things as truth. Even my children would use the language of the Epicurean growing up and it would just grate on my as a parent, like someone running their nails down a blackboard. I would say something to them and then they would look at me and say 'Whatever!' That is Epicurean for whatever you want to do or whatever you want to believe is what it would be.

Then there is the Stoics. They believe there is a power that is impersonal and you somehow got on this earth by that power. There is no personal relationship with that power for he just imposes fates upon you so just bear it. Somehow grit your teeth through life was their philosophy. Paul is in the capital of arrogance, right in the middle of Athens. So Paul is debating these people and other philosophers as well but something he is saying about this Jesus, being right with God, this cross and this resurrection gets to them. He doesn't doctor up the message but just brings the message raw and true to them. He doesn't get assimilated into the culture for he is counter culture. They want to know more about it so let's go on in the text.

Acts 17:22–34 says [22] *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for "In him we live and move and have our being' as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring.'*

[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

*[32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."** [33] So Paul went out from their midst. [34] But **some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.***

Paul, again stirs up a city, not by his methods, he just preached the Gospel. Christ died for your sins. He is risen and the risen Savior will one day bring judgment but when He came He bore your judgment. He is risen, come to Him today, before that Day of Judgment and he calls them to a response. There are three responses in this text. Some mocked, marginalized and ignored. In other words they rejected the message. Some with curiosity wanted to hear more but they procrastinated. Thirdly, some believed and followed Him. There is so much here in this text.

Everybody you meet is religious. America just had a survey that showed the biggest number of people here are the non-religious. Yet there is no one more religious than the non-religious. I'll be glad to substantiate that if I had time but I don't. Either you worship God or a man-made religion for everyone has a man-made religion they have bought into.

The second thing we see here is that everybody worships. It may be a football team, a house, possessions, money, prestige, power etc. because everybody has something they are ordering their life around that they're convinced makes their life worthwhile and that is life for them. So what about an atheist? Now that's a leap of faith to find His darkness. For three years in college I did my best to be an atheist for I thought it would be so convenient to be an atheist but I just couldn't do it. I tried to get to there is nothing and nothing made something, then

something ordered itself as it replicated itself and now you can go anywhere in the universe and $2 + 2$ is always going to equal 4. If you give space and matter enough time this will happen. I don't have enough faith for spontaneous generation or to outlaw the second law of thermodynamics. If you walk through a field and there is a turtle on the fence post someone has been here before me. I didn't get saved then but I just knew I couldn't be an atheist.

Thirdly, everybody believes. Everyone believes in something. Fourthly, it isn't working and it never does. That's why they kept getting together to hear something new. You don't come to church to hear something new, you come to hear the old, old story. I just want to hear it again freshly. They need something new because it's not working and whatever you believe in apart from Jesus will not work and I tell you that because I love you so much. It will not work in this life and it will not work at the Judgment Seat and it will not work into eternity. But there is Someone who loved you enough to do the work for you that does work and will bring you from death unto life. He loves you relentlessly and will be with you forever. He is risen and coming again. That is all of the message I have for you.

What's your response? We saw three responses from the text but the reality is there is not three responses. There are only two. To procrastinate is to say 'no'. Today is the day of salvation. We are not where the Disciples were on that Friday where they thought that everything is lost. They couldn't have been farther from the truth but that's what they thought – all was lost.

It reminds me of a story my friend R.C. Sproul shared with me in seminary about that enormous battle in Europe in 1815. It was June 18, 1815 and the place was Waterloo. It was the Duke of Wellington who led the English armies and it was their last chance or they would be under the dominion and tyranny of Napoleon. The battle was fought and everyone in England was waiting to find out the outcome. They had outposts and couriers everywhere but the main one was in the Winchester Cathedral where one could look over the English Channel. On that day up comes a ship from the battle to give the signal to the one at the outpost at the Winchester Cathedral.

As he begins to read the signal the fog rolls in from the English Channel upon the ship and it's obscure. The person at the outpost said 'I think I have the whole message' so he publicized it throughout all of England. He saw two words which was 'Wellington defeated.' As the message went throughout England despair began to permeate but then some time hours later the fog lifted and the signals were given again. This time they weren't obscured. The outpost at the Winchester Cathedral saw the whole message which said 'Wellington defeated Napoleon.'

On Friday it looked like defeat but the reality was that Jesus defeated sin, death, hell, and the grave so with Pilate I ask you, what will you do with Jesus? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer for the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. If you would like to talk with someone about a relationship with Christ or about your walk with Christ please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to talk and pray with you about this. I want to invite you to Jesus. Don't leave to go and get better. If you could get better He wouldn't have gone to the cross. He went to the cross to take you right where you are and I have good news for you, He won't leave you where you are. He will grow you by His grace for His glory. He will be with you, in His Word. His people will be with you. He will never leave you. Today you can have a new heart, a new record, a new family and a new home if you come to Christ.

We will give Him the praise. Dear believers, our nations needs to be shaken but that's not our objective. Our objective is to tell everyone about Jesus – His atoning death and His resurrection. Then ask Him, 'God, shake our city and the nation for Your glory.' Jesus I pray this in the matchless Name of our risen Savior, Christ, Amen.