



SCRIPTURE SHARED
UNSTOPPABLE
THE BOOK OF ACTS

Week 7: Kingdom of God

Week 7, Day 1 – Paul at the Areopagus

Acts 17:16-34

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for [Silas and Timothy] in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols.¹⁷ So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this pretentious babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹ So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is 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, too, are his offspring.’

²⁹ “Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged 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 When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed, but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Understanding the Passage:

The first 15 verses of chapter 17 recount Paul being run out of several Greek cities because of his message about Jesus. Some believers that supported him helped him get to Athens, where he was immediately disappointed by the community's deep devotion to idols. He argued about them to fellow Jews in the synagogue as well as those he encountered in the markets.

Athens was the home philosophy, so it is no surprise that he ends up conversing with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Paul was a learned Jew and a Roman - setting him apart from many of the apostles and evangelists. His approach and ability to debate earned him an invitation to the Areopagus, which was a forum in which the rulers of Athens held trials, debate, and discussed important matters.

Paul begins his sermon by recounting his encounter with an altar to an unknown God. He emphasizes the need to personally know God rather than just worshiping an unknown deity. He describes God as the creator of everything and thus, a worthy object of worship. Paul continues by explaining God's relationship to humans and God's ongoing nearness. He makes the case for a living God rather than one like stone or that only exists in our imagination. He ends the sermon by calling them to account and telling them that they cannot hide behind their ignorance any longer. They must repent.

This sermon is so unlike Paul's other sermons in Acts. He clearly made the effort to appeal to the Greeks on grounds that would be familiar to them - he did not quote the Hebrew Bible, for they would have no reference for that. He did not mention the name "Jesus" or the title "Christ," but he did not settle for a half-hearted attempt to move the people toward becoming believers. He gently pointed out the fault in their reasoning. If we are God's offspring, and we are living, breathing creatures, surely God is too. That means God cannot be inanimate like silver, gold or stone.

Paul's approach reminds us that people don't start with a blank slate onto which you can impose your understanding of the gospel. Everyone has a worldview, experiences that have shaped them, their own understanding of spirituality. Paul had to kindly dismantle the Greek philosophers' ideas about gods before he could reconstruct a picture of the living God. By exposing their insufficiencies, he was able to proclaim the greatness (and sufficiency) of God.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What made the Epicureans and Stoic philosophers interested in debating with Paul?
2. How do you find common ground with people to whom you're talking about Jesus? What are some practical steps you can take?

Week 7, Day 2 – Paul in Corinth

Acts 18:1-8

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he found a Jew named Aquila from Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴ Every Sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. ⁶ When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent.

From now on I will go to the gentiles.”⁷ Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.⁸ Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household, and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.

Understanding the Passage:

The Corinthian church is one of the churches Paul planted and the one to whom he directed the most of his attention through his letters (based on references in 1 Cor 5:9 and 2 Cor 2:3-4, Paul wrote at least two more letters to the Corinthians than we have in our canon). In addition, Paul spends about a year and a half there on this journey. Why such a long time? Part of the answer may be that he has stability with Priscilla and Aquila. They were, like Paul, tentmakers and he was able to stay and work with them, perhaps as an employee or partner. Like Lydia’s hospitality in Philippi, Priscilla and Aquila’s partnership with Paul allows him to settle in for a period in Corinth.

We might also find reasoning for his long stay in his letter to the Corinthians: “I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.” (1 Cor. 2:3) After the struggles Paul encountered over the past few chapters, he may have arrived in Corinth exhausted, out of money, and feeling defeated. The 55-mile journey from Athens to Corinth was exhausting. He’d been run out of many cities, often by his fellow Jews who couldn’t tolerate the message that he was preaching about Jesus. In fact, in verse 6 he declares his frustration with the Jews and says he will go preach to the Gentiles. In the midst of all of this hardship, Paul may have been encouraged by finding partners for the work ahead.

A few lessons we can learn from Paul in this season:

- We are not immune to disappointment or heartache in our daily lives.
- Even great successes can be followed by hard times.
- Like Paul shared in his letter to the Corinthians, we must be honest and own our disappointment and struggles.
- God will provide people to come alongside us to encourage us and help us continue the journey (and sometimes God calls us to be those people for others).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What are some of the things that could have led to Paul feeling discouraged? What are some present-day discouragers?
2. Have you ever felt discouraged in your evangelism? What did that look like for you? If you have overcome that feeling of discouragement at any point, how did you do so?
3. How does Paul’s friendship with Aquila and Priscilla remind you of the importance of friendship during hard times?

Week 7, Day 3 – Apollos and Humility

Acts 18:24-28

²⁴ Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos from Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord, and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Understanding the Passage:

After some time in Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila accompany Paul to Ephesus. They became important partners in sharing the gospel. They stayed on in Ephesus after Paul left, administering the life of the church. When they heard the preacher Apollos preach about Jesus, they realized he was well-versed in scripture, but that his understanding of Jesus was incomplete. Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately” (18:26).

Put yourself in Priscilla and Aquila’s shoes. How easy (and appealing) might it have been to just go home and criticize him? We are all probably able to recall times when we’ve stood back in judgment rather than prayerfully considered how to approach someone with gentle correction.

Now put yourself in Apollos’ shoes. Even in the midst of his unbridled enthusiasm for Jesus, Apollos accepted guidance and discipleship with humility. He didn’t object to Priscilla and Aquila’s correction, nor did he try to give the impression that he knew everything. By the time he crosses over to Achaia, he’s become an equipped and powerful asset for the church.

What does it mean for us to be teachable like Apollos? Too often we are self-righteous or defensive when we are confronted with our shortcomings, especially about things we are reasonably knowledgeable about.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have you ever been in the position of Priscilla and Aquila and needed to offer correction to someone? What steps did you take to do that? How did it go? Should you have done anything differently?
2. How do you think Apollos felt when he was corrected? What are the benefits of Apollos’ humility? How does it increase his effectiveness in ministry?
3. Do you generally respond with as much humility as Apollos when someone corrects you? Why or why not? If not, what might you do to address your pride?

Week 7, Day 4 – Chaos in Ephesus

Acts 19:23-32

²³ About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. ²⁴ A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, “Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. ²⁶ You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.”

²⁸ When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹ The city was filled with the confusion, and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s travel companions. ³⁰ Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; ³¹ even some officials of the province of Asia who were friendly to him sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater. ³² Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

Understanding the Passage:

The Temple of Artemis sat on a hill above Ephesus. It was twice as big as the Parthenon and it cast a shadow - both literally and figuratively - over the city. It contained a statue of Artemis to which people prayed for good crops and fertility. But the influence of Artemis wasn't just contained to the temple and worship offerings. Other economic systems in Ephesus - like tourism and art - were related to Artemis as well. This is the root of Demetrius' concern. He relays his concerns that Paul has drawn away a considerable number of people from Artemis and they may no longer see people from "all Asia and the world" coming to worship her. No tourists equals no shoppers for silver shrines - that puts their livelihoods at risk.

This didn't happen overnight. Paul spent more than two years ministering and evangelizing in Ephesus. Over time, Demetrius and others saw their profits drop, which is what eventually led to the silversmiths being so angry they dragged the leaders of the Way - Paul's associates Gaius and Aristarchus - into the theatre to hold them into account. Demetrius posits that Artemis will be deprived of her majesty because of Christianity, but he's really concerned about where he gets his wealth (v. 25). He and the other silversmiths felt like they had to defend and protect their businesses, but what they were really defending and protecting was their exposed love of money.

They had gotten caught up in individual (greed) and systemic (idol worship) sin. They believed lies - primarily that if they prayed enough, they'd see rewards in their crops and pregnancies. When Paul comes along preaching a gospel of grace and God's provision, rather than a focus on paying Artemis for results, it turns the whole paradigm on its head. The silversmiths lose their power and ability to earn money from the likenesses of Artemis.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have you ever gotten caught up in a situation like the one described in verse 32 in which you find yourself torqued up but don't even know the reason why? How did others sway you?
2. What idols (money, power, influence, control) compete with God for your devotion?

Week 7, Day 5 - Paul's Words to the Ephesian Elders

Acts 20:7-38

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting. ⁹ A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and bending over him took him in his arms and said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." ¹¹ Then Paul went upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he continued to converse with them until dawn; then he left. ¹² Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted.

¹³ We went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board there, for he had made this arrangement, intending to go by land himself. ¹⁴ When he met us in Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵ We sailed from there, and on the following day we arrived opposite Chios. The next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we came to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; he was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

17 From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. 18 When they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. 20 I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. 22 And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. 24 But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

25 "And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. 26 Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. 35 In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. 37 There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.

Understanding the Passage:

This is Paul's personal farewell to the Ephesian elders and his partners in ministry in Ephesus. Readers are offered an intimate glimpse into Paul's relationship with them. He knows he heading to Jerusalem the following morning and he wants to leave them with his words of wisdom and reflection. He speaks for so long that he bores one of the younger followers, Eutychus, who fell out of the window in which he was sitting and landed three floors below. Every preacher's worst nightmare! Those who were gathered found Eutychus dead, but Paul went down and declared that Eutychus was still alive. Paul's miracle affirmed his great power, but didn't distract him from immediately resuming his speech.

His parting words are partly a recounting of his evangelism, partly a defense of his actions, partly a warning for what is to come and a reminder to be strengthened in the face of it, and concludes with a benediction. He tells them twice that he did not hold back from sharing the full gospel with them (v. 27 and 31). This probably meant corrections and convictions when they had gone astray. Much like a parent who tries to give their child every warning about a potential danger (so the child doesn't hurt himself and so the child doesn't come back and ask, "why didn't you tell me...?"), Paul also attempted to teach all of the hard lessons to the Ephesians. There are times when sharing the gospel isn't going to sit well with someone or they will be offended. The feelings of those he may have offended mattered less to Paul than the idea that they would not have the full knowledge of their need for forgiveness and the way that they could realize that forgiveness through Jesus. We should be mindful as well of not diluting the message of Jesus, but having hard conversations and offering correction, when needed, in an effort to bring people into a closer relationship with God.

Paul demonstrates his willingness to follow the Spirit wherever he's led by going to Jerusalem. He has no idea why he's being called back there or what is waiting for him, but he knows that there are persecutions and imprisonment waiting for him.

The closing verses in this passage (36-38) demonstrate Paul's closeness to the Ephesian elders. Their relationship is not just a partnership of convenience or shared goals, but one that is truly built on the kinship of Christ's followers.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What would be your final words about your ministry as a believer if you were leaving those with whom you'd shared part of your life?
2. Read verse 24. How would you put this in your own words to describe your life?
3. Are you in relationship with any other Christ followers like the kind of relationship described in verses 36-38? If so, reflect on that relationship and spend time offering God gratitude for those people.

Week 7 Video Discussion Questions:

1. What did the first-century church leaders (and Jesus in Acts 1) mean when they talked about the Kingdom of God?
2. What does the Kingdom of God mean to you?
3. What do you imagine the Kingdom of God will be like when it is fully realized? What specifically will be different from the way it is now?
4. Do you see any signs of the Kingdom of God in our community?
5. How does the church today serve as a sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom?
6. David and Tom talked about the upside-down metrics of the kingdom. What are the things you do that have no "street cred" in real life, but are thin places where you meet God and see the inbreaking of the kingdom?
7. Have you ever, like David said he used to believe, thought that the kingdom depended on you? How did that affect your actions? How did that affect your relationship with and dependence on God?

Prayer requests and other notes.