

Spiritual Growth Resources: From Discipleship to Apostleship

Acts of the Church

Early Church Faith for Today



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The Empowered Church Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Brief overview of Acts 17-19 | 3 |
| KNOW | 4 |
| GROW | 7 |
| GO | 10 |
| Scripture Memorization for this Week | 11 |
| Praise & Worship in Song | 12 |



Brief overview of Acts 17-19

We are in Acts 17-19. The amazing stories of Paul's Missionary Journeys throughout an ever-expanding territory. At rapid speeds, we see the gospel being proclaimed. We see the pattern of Paul arriving at a town or city. He goes first to the synagogue on Sabbath and preaches to both Jews and Greeks, many of whom become believers. These events get another group of people upset to the point of getting a crowd to force Paul out of town or arrested.

The forces of evil that work to shut down religious speech that contradicts the accepted traditions don't seem to realize these attempts only lead to the gospel being propagated even more. In these chapters, the forces of hell are unleashed even more. We have exorcists trying to manipulate God's power. At the same God's healing power accompanies Paul's preaching.

How do you respond to the stories we are reading? It's easy to be amazed at how people like Paul were able to accomplish what he accomplished. We are so far detached from the first century and the region. Seeing ourselves doing anything similar to Paul seems unrealistic. Yet, the same God who called Paul is the same God who calls us and has traced our mission field around the Sacramento area, and anywhere we go. Opposition to the message is to be expected, but through the opposition, God shows us a different way, a different place, while the mission stays the same.

K N O W | G R O W | G O

Into Asia Minor & Greece

K N O W

Read Acts 17-19

1. What was Paul's stay in Thessalonica like? Acts 17:1-9

1. Paul spent his Sabbaths in the synagogue "reasoning from the Scriptures."
2. He was able to persuade many Jews, Greeks, and "not a few of the leading women."
3. Paul had to hurry out of town to avoid the mob and authorities.
4. The spiritual "highs" were worth the challenges faced.
5. Other.

2. How does Paul describe his experience in Berea? Acts 17:10-15

1. He found the believers in Berea to be "more noble" than the ones in Thessalonica.
2. The believers were very eager to know more and examined the Scriptures.
3. Again, many believed, including very prominent women from the community.
4. Similar to Thessalonica, a group of agitators came to town to stop Paul from preaching.
5. Other.

3. What was Athens like, and what did Paul do there? Acts 17:16-34

1. Paul was disturbed by the number of idols in the city.
2. The environment didn't deter Paul from following his custom of preaching in the synagogue and the "marketplace" (community).
3. Local thought leaders engaged Paul and invited him to speak at the top court of Athens (the Aeropagus).
4. Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and even quoted Socrates.

5. Other.

4. How does our spiritual climate today compare to the one Paul found in Athens?

Acts 17

1. People still have their own set of idols.
2. There is still much interest in spiritual matters.
3. People are open to the "Unknown God."
4. People are religious but not spiritual.
5. Other.

5. What unique things happened for Paul in Corinth? Acts 18:1-17

1. He met a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers like him.
2. Paul seemed to give up on the Jews who opposed him and viciously retaliated against the gospel preaching.
3. Paul stayed with a God-fearing gentile named Titius Justus, who lived right next door to the synagogue.
4. God spoke to Paul in a vision encouraging him to keep preaching and not to be silent.
5. Up to now, Corinth was the place Paul spent more time in.
6. Paul didn't escape the mob this time.
7. Other.

6. What events took place in Ephesus in Paul's absence? Acts 18:18-28

1. Apollos, a Jewish man from Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus
2. Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla in charge
3. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos under their wings to mentor him.
4. Apollos was a great help to the church there in Ephesus.
5. Other.

7. What does Paul's conversation Acts 19:1-7 tell us about baptism and the Holy Spirit?

1. According to Paul, it was important for believers to have received the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul equated the baptism that John (the Baptist) performed to signify repentance and belief in Jesus.
3. Baptism without the Holy Spirit was not enough. Thus Paul baptizes them again.
4. A sign of receiving the Holy Spirit back then was speaking in tongues and prophesying.
5. Other.

8. What supernatural events took place in Ephesus? Acts 19:8-20

1. people use handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's skin to heal people.
2. The seven sons of the high priests were exorcists and were trying to cast out demons in the name of "the Lord Jesus whom Paul proclaims."
3. These exorcists were put to shame when the evil spirit told them they were powerless and jumped on them. They ended up running out of the house naked and wounded.
4. Many people confessed to their practice of "magic arts" and burned all their books.
5. God won major spiritual battles.
6. Other.

9. How did the preaching of the gospel affect business and pagan worship in Ephesus? Acts 19:23-34

1. The "silver shrine" business was being affected because people were turning from that practice to Christianity.
2. When people's business, income, and livelihood are affected, people are willing to go after the source of the problem.
3. Locals figured they had to defend the goddess Artemis from Paul's misleading message.
4. There was a "great controversy" between Artemis and Jesus for fear of Artemis being "dethroned."
5. It brought confusion to those who claimed to be devoted to Artemis, not knowing why they were defending her.
6. Other.

10. What happens when a religious tradition becomes more critical to a community than turning to a more meaningful faith? Acts 19:35-41

1. Their identity becomes enmeshed with a tradition that gives them meaning.
2. It's hard to believe anything else, even if it makes more sense than what they have always believed.
3. Religious traditions should always be open to scrutiny and investigation.
4. They find a sense of belonging when you have a common belief and when someone changes that it threatens the belief they are not willing to let go of.
5. Other.

G R O W

Once again, we see the same pattern when Paul arrives at a town or city. He comes, goes to a synagogue on Sabbath, and gives a Bible study about how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. Some accept the message, and others don't. Then a militant group arises to kick Paul and his companions out of town, threatening his life, taking him before magistrates and other civic and religious leaders for questioning and some punishment.

So I ask myself, how do I deal with rejection? Just before arriving in Thessalonica, the pattern of preaching, teaching, followed by angry mobs, could discourage even the best evangelist. But why does Paul keep preaching? He says it in his letter to the Romans later on.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" Romans 8:18.

Paul's eyes were not only on heaven. He had a burden to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ because he believed with all of his heart that this message, which transformed his life, is the answer to everyone's questions, pain, and confusion. He didn't preach to have stars on his crown in heaven. He preached because he loved the people and wanted to see them in heaven. He wanted a better life for them. He wanted them to turn from their idols to the living God. That was his motivation to not stop amid so much turmoil caused.

Do you ever wonder why the preaching of the gospel causes so much turmoil in some circles? What's the harm in a person becoming a Christian. That person now treats his family better. This person has now been able to overcome addictions. This person now lives with a purpose in mind, a better future in sight, yet some people get upset when a person preaches this. It is mind-boggling, and for a disciple/apostle, it can be discouraging. Many people can come to repentance, be baptized, and live a fruitful life. Yet, sometimes, it is the detractors that somehow can take away our joy. It is that small group of people who only come to town to make our lives more difficult. Many times, this opposition comes from the very ones who claim to be doing it for God. None of this distracts Paul. After visiting many towns, synagogues, and homes, it is not until Corinth that God speaks to Paul again in a vision. Why didn't God give Paul a vision after his first opposition? It wasn't until many years later that Paul receives a vision from God that told him, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." Acts

18:9-10.

How do we deal with opposition when our friends and family become our most significant obstacle to a growing relationship with Christ. Our neighbors may betray us. When we want to share Good News, many receive it as "bad news." We mean no harm, yet the message is received with antagonism.

Remember your calling. Don't forget your first love. The hunger you experienced when you first believed. Remember the words of Christ - I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

Paul's heart was provoked with anger when he saw so many idols in Athens. Yet, his outward demeanor didn't show it. Paul was able to control his anger and didn't allow this issue to derail his mission. He knew that they were people who worshipped idols and believed in strange gods. He couldn't let an outburst of anger get the best of him and lose any opportunity to reach the lost souls in Athens.

Furthermore, why get upset at people when this is all they've known. Paul directed his anger at the devil's influence to fool the masses. His sympathy was with the enslaved people by their philosophies and their worship of pagan gods and idols.

I think there's an excellent spiritual growth lesson here. False hope can provoke us to anger, yet we don't have to lash out. To Whom would Paul specifically direct his anger? There isn't one specific Athenian responsible for the idol that has gone on for generations. These are beliefs handed down for centuries and had become part of their culture. Paul preserved his energy by not getting angry. Instead, he used it to preach the gospel with more conviction and power. He used the very thing that got him angry and found a way to use it as an example of their lack of knowledge regarding the true God.

Would the Paul of three to four years before be so patient with idols and Athenians? Paul may seem a bit too tolerant of such idolatry. Now, Paul contains himself. Paul's response to being provoked was to pray for the Holy Spirit to take control of his heart and mind. as a result, he preaches one of the most powerful sermons recorded in the Scriptures.

Apply

1. How do you deal with opposition from the people you are trying to bring hope to?
2. How do you respond when you see something that "provokes your spirit"?

3. Would you have gone to the Areopagus and speak to the intellectuals of the time and speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
4. How have you allowed religious traditions and idols to have preeminence in our journey?

G O

How do you share this week the things we have learned so far. God has impressed you in some way. When we read something in the Bible that gets our attention, we think of how that applies to our lives. Sometimes we think first about how someone we know really needs to hear this. Well, we don't want to fall into the trap of always thinking of someone else when we hear a good amen moment when God drops a spiritual bomb on us. We wonder why we didn't understand that before. We wonder why we were so slow to respond earlier.

How many times have you said, "I wish someone would have told me that before." Now is our chance to make sure another generation doesn't go by without hearing what we didn't understand or didn't want to understand. Whether they receive it or not. With words and actions, we can say that someone may not want to listen but won't be able to "un-hear" it.

Paul's sermon at Areopagus

Paul saw the idols and took note of their belief system right away. He was able to pick up on their empty shrine to the "unknown god." Using the "unknown god" was an entry wedge to speak to them.

Paul acknowledges their religiosity. Their devotion to the other gods is evident.

"Let me speak to you about the unknown thing in your life that is missing."

At least the Athenians were honest enough to admit that they didn't know everything there is to know about God. They made room for the possibility of another god they may not be aware of.

Paul quotes one of their philosophers. Scholars say Paul was quoting **Socrates**, which tells us that we need to be up-to-speed on what others are reading. We need to know what's going on in society. We read and investigate to understand what others believe so we can understand how other people are thinking.

Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila

This couple played a crucial role in helping Apollos gain a more accurate picture of the gospel. Paul had entrusted them to stay in Ephesus while he continued his travels. Apollos was already a powerful preacher, but even a powerful preacher needs feedback, encouragement, and training. Don't be afraid to be taught another way of doing

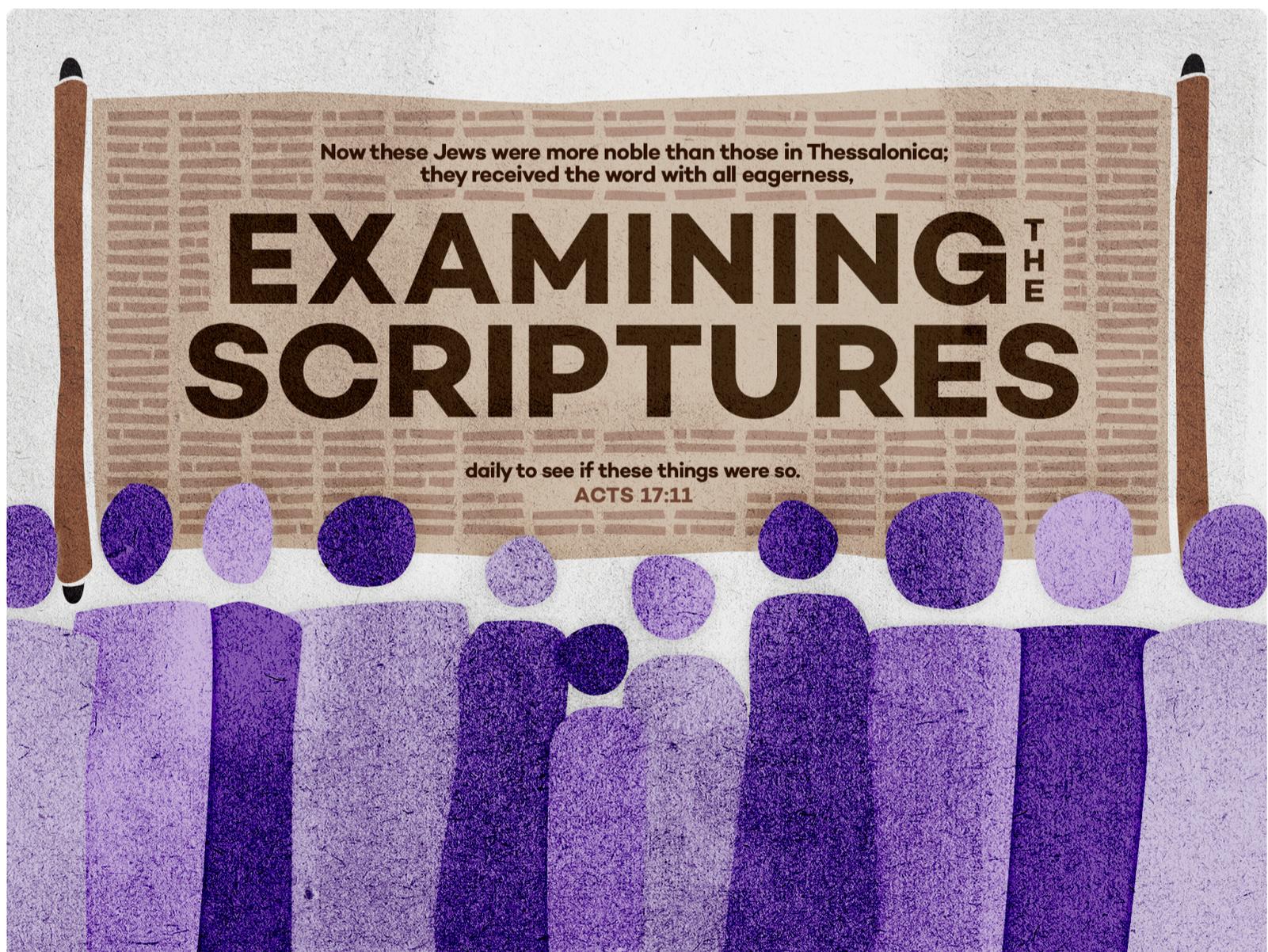
something. There isn't just one way. Try the method you feel comfortable in. At the same time, allow for feedback and counsel.

Apply

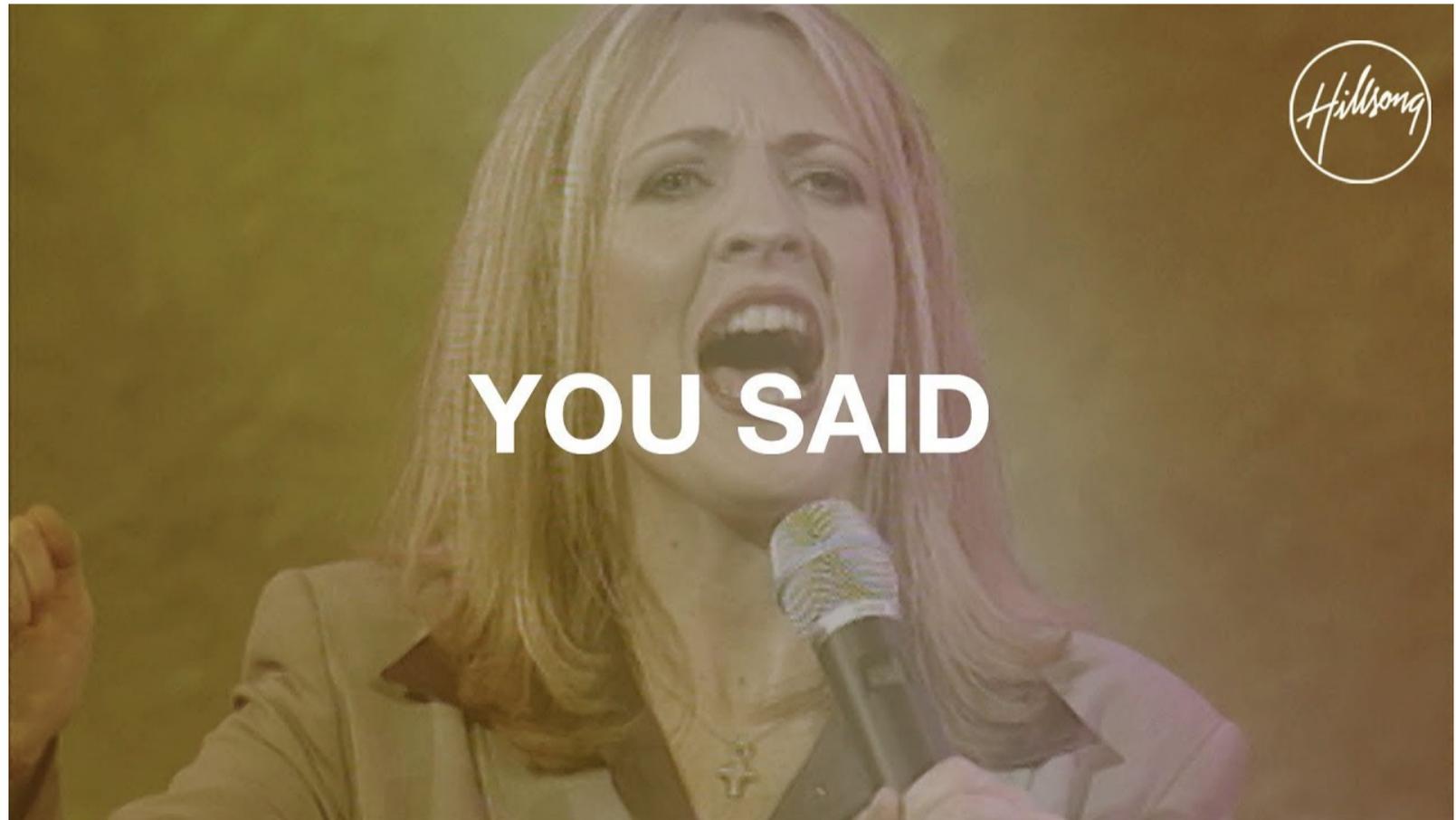
1. What and where is "Athens" to you?
2. What provokes your jealousy for God's kingdom?
3. How do you mentor, guide, counsel preachers in sharpening their skills?
4. What are some excellent books you can read to know what the current day philosophers are saying?
5. Would you like to be part of a class to learn how to share your faith? (Contact Pastor Pedro at ptrinidad@carmsda.org)

Scripture Memorization for this Week

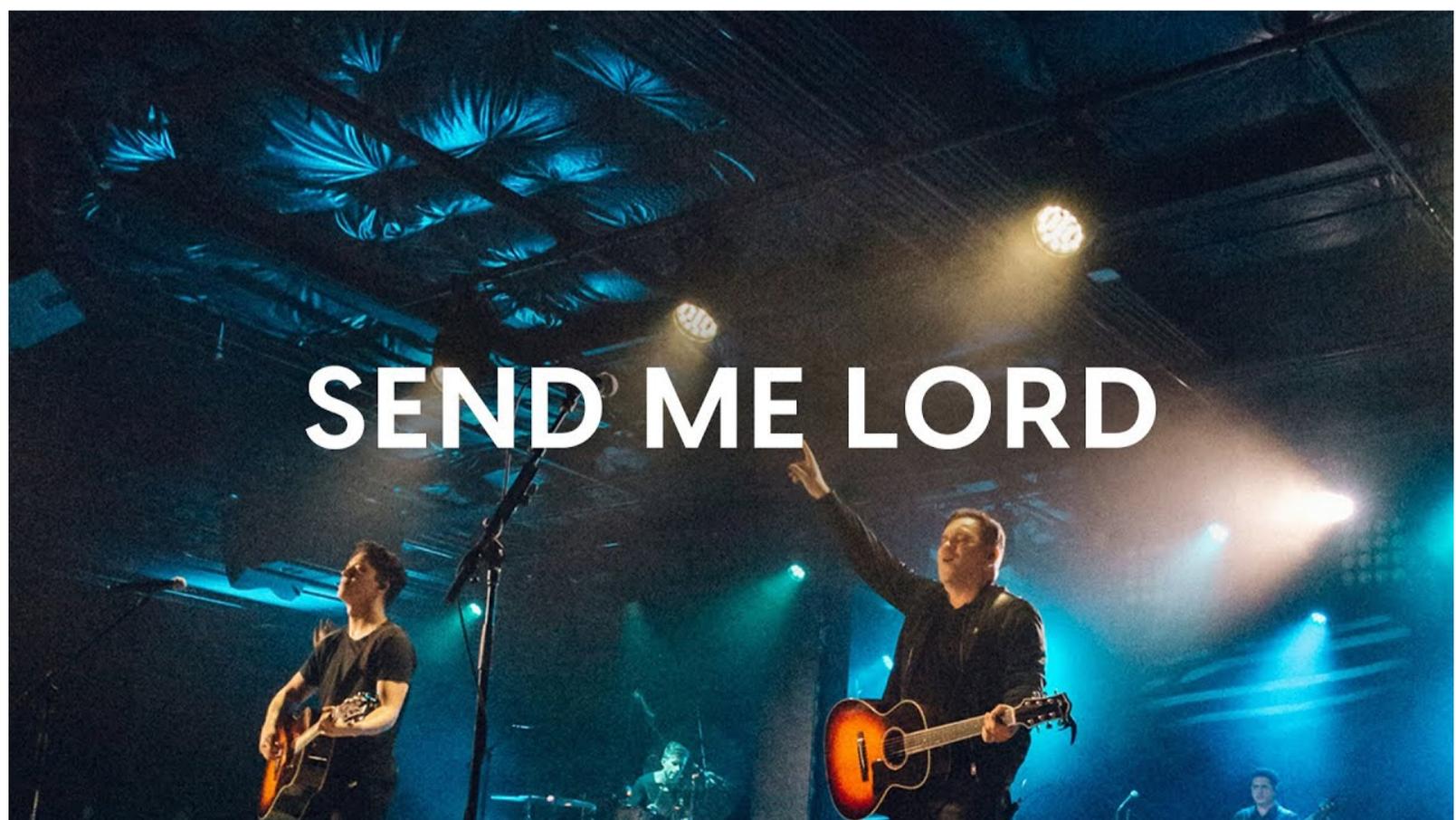
Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. – Acts 17:11



P r a i s e & W o r s h i p i n S o n g



Send Me Lord by Matt Redman



Go by Darlene Zschech

