

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Acts 17:6, "These men (Paul & Silas) who have turned the world upside down have come here also." (Jealous Jewish leaders speaking before the city authorities of Thessalonica)

INTRODUCTION: Someone has suggested that there are three basic classes of people in the world:

1. Those who MAKE things happen.
2. Those who WATCH things happen.
3. Those who HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IS HAPPENING.

Paul and Silas and the early Christian apostles, disciples, and missionaries belonged to the first group--those who MAKE things happen.

These devoted and dynamic Christians in the early church really made things happen in those days of the Roman Empire.

I. In many fundamental ways the world needs turning upside down, because it is now wrong side up.

A. In commercial circles we find this to be true. Goods are bought and traded and transported and made available not because people really need them, but because the manufacturers and traders and wholesale and retail corporations want ever growing profits.

B. Character is not the most valued commodity today. Ethics has to be taught in school courses, to keep the greedy businessmen, just barely within the law. Morality is not observed or learned in the

church or home like it used to be. Political candidates are permitted to be unfaithful to their wives, yet they are trusted to be faithful to their oaths to protect and defend this country and to administer its laws with utmost faithfulness. Many of us fear that lawyers, doctors, politicians, and preachers who has been unfaithful in marriage will be unfaithful in other areas of trust.

C. In many ways the religious world is also upside down.

1. The world's religion is, "Do, and thou shalt live." This is to say that there are certain things we must DO to be saved.

Yes, the world needs to be upset, and the gospel of Jesus Christ does just this. The gospel upsets the world's lethargic complacency, its social and economic status quo, its twisted conscience, its scientifically prejudiced mind, its moral indifference, and its smug self-satisfaction.

This is just what the prophets of the O.T. also did, as they **were known as "the troublers of Israel.,"** from Elijah to Nathan to Amos, to Jeremiah, to John the Baptist.

Too often the leaders of the church try not to upset anyone if they can help it. It is too hard to raise budgets from people who have been upset and made uncomfortable!

The temptation then is to soothe and never to upset anyone, especially the governmental authorities!

2. Christ's religion is, "Believe, and thou shalt live." His way is to believe the gospel, have faith in him, trust him alone as your Savior. There is absolutely nothing you can do to earn your salvation. Good works, religious ceremonies, model morality, none of these can bring forgiveness of sins in the sight of God. It is only by His grace and mercy that we can be saved; and all you have to do is to believe in him, or trust him, and accept him by faith as your Savior. Then, after you become a Christian, and Jesus is your personal Savior, you will find that your personality is changed, your style of life can no longer be the same, and the sinful things you once loved you now hate, and the things of God you once despised are now the highest priorities in your new life.

II. The Gospel Always Creates a Disturbance.

A. It did in the Apostolic Age and in every age of history since then.

B. It creates a disturbance in men's hearts.

1. Conviction of sin

2. Demand for a decision

C. It creates a disturbance in men's social relations.

1. In his vocation

2. In his pleasures or recreation

3. In his home and family life

D. The object of the gospel is not the subversion of the world, but the conversion of the world;

--not violent world revolution, but the spiritual solution to universal problems;

--not destruction and tearing down, but salvation and building up.

E. But this prospect is disturbing to those who have their own selfish interests to protect, and who do not trust Jesus Christ or his people.

1. This basic disturbance reveals a deep seated hostility in the human heart against the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel.

We suddenly find our identity, our security, our purpose, and our meaning not in the fact that we are Canadians, or Americans, not in the fact that we come from Georgia or N.Y., not in the fact that we are conservative Southern Baptists, but in the fact that we are a new creature and a new race. Our identity is now Christian; we belong to Christ.

E. There is no other way to turn the world right side up, except to turn it upside down by the power of the Gospel of Christ, and by absolute faithfulness to the message of this gospel, vs. 2,3.

In 1830 a man named George Wilson was tried by a U.S. court in Philadelphia for robbery and murder and was sentenced to be hanged. Andrew Jackson, President of the U.S., pardoned him, but Wilson refused the pardon and insisted that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. The Attorney General of the U.S. said the law was silent on the point. The President called on the Supreme Court to decide the matter. Chief Justice John Marshall, ablest of lawyers and judges, gave the following decision:

"A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang."

And he was hanged.

So the atonement of Christ, in making provision for the salvation of the whole world, is beneficial only to those who ACCEPT him as their own personal Savior.

Tragic it is that this seems to be the stumbling point of many who want to save themselves by their own good works.

Don't refuse God's gracious pardon.

Accept it, and trust his Son as your Savior, and make him the Lord of your heart & life today.

2. This is the unintentional but clear testimony of the enemies of the gospel. And when people reject the authority of the gospel, they set up something else as their authority, and this is usually contrary to the gospel, and soon the world is turned wrong side up.

III. How Christians turn the world upside down, and thus right side up.

A. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2. The early Christians were more conscious of spiritual power than they were of political or numerical power; they were more concerned with God's solutions than they were of human problems.

B. Their method was to follow the will of their Heavenly Father and to concentrate on winning new recruits for their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

C. We can turn our world upside down, or right side up, whichever way you want to say it, by following the example of those noble and dedicated early Christians, and by realizing that our greatest foes are usually the enemies of our own groups.

D. By becoming really serious about getting the gospel out to the whole world, as the early church did.

1. We must let the gospel change us before we can change the world.

Leslie Newbigin says the conversion of Cornelius the Centurion in Acts 10 is significant because it is also the conversion of Peter and the Jerusalem church. He goes on to say: "Missions changes not only the world but also the church."

I believe that is very true.

A missionary church will be a soul-winning church, and a soul-winning church will be a growing church. Genuine conversion and missionary evangelism raises a church above the restrictions that culture, nationalities, customs, and prejudices place on us.

Churches and Christians must be turned upside down before God can use them to turn the world upside down. But God is ready to do this whenever we are ready to let him. Will you let Him have His way in your life today?

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