

Turn the World Upside Down

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

The American Revolution ended with the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. British General Cornwallis surrendered. As the British troops marched out of Yorktown to give up their arms, their band played a popular tune of that day: “The World Turned Upside Down.” The song fit the occasion. The British army had been defeated by American soldiers—not the completely untrained commoners we sometimes imagine, most colonial soldiers had been trained in state militias; but still, they were nothing compared to the best army in the world. How could this have happened? The most powerful nation on earth surrendered. The world had been turned upside down.

It may seem like our world has been turned upside down. Two months ago we were still worshipping, still meeting, though with a sense of foreboding. Three months ago this “coronavirus” was an illness we were starting to hear about in China. Everything has changed. Now businesses are slowly opening up; yet as everyone says, we aren’t going back to how things were before. There will be a new normal; and we’re trying to figure out what that means. How long will we worry about social distancing? Will we shake hands ever again? And of course, we are concerned for all the people still getting sick. The world seems to be upside down.

In our lesson from Acts, Paul and Silas came to the Greek city of Thessalonica, where their presence caused a riot. The mob had an interesting charge: **“These men have turned the world upside down.”** How? By preaching about Jesus Christ. The message of Jesus changes everything. So today, we’ll look at this account of early Christians making such a difference by their preaching; and then we can go out and Turn the World Upside Down.

Paul and Silas and other believers had gone to the city of Philippi north of Greece. That’s where they drove a demon out of a fortune-telling girl; they got thrown in prison; then they told the jailer about Jesus, and baptized the man and his family.

Paul and Silas had to leave Philippi, so they traveled south to Thessalonica. But they didn’t run away in fear. They were missionaries, bringing the good news of Jesus to all the people they could. After all, Jesus died not only for Philippi but for Thessalonica—and all the world.

They had a customary way of starting to teach in a new city. **“As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead.”** Paul started in the Jewish synagogue, basically their church, and as a traveling teacher was allowed to speak about the Bible.

Notice where Paul’s message was based. Paul didn’t talk about the latest philosophy. He didn’t tell people to dig down deep inside yourself to try to find the truth, or just follow your feelings. Paul didn’t make up some ideas that might seem appealing. Instead, Paul stuck to the Bible. He used God’s inspired Word, because he knew that the Bible was the power of God that could actually save souls.

Acts says that Paul **“reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”** The message of the Bible is not some magic formula, like saying “Abracadabra.” God does not use incomprehensible math formulas. The Bible is written in human languages. Some people may not accept it, but that doesn’t change the fact that this is a book that we can understand. And it’s a story that we can tell.

Paul used the Scriptures, at that point the Old Testament, to show that the promised Savior would have to die, because our sins are so great they require a perfect sacrifice. But the Old Testament also clearly taught that the Savior would rise from the dead, bodily come alive. And there is only one person that fits that bill.

Paul said, **“This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.”** Jesus is the substitute who took our place, standing before God guilty for the sins of all people. Jesus took all of our punishment, our sin, our guilt, our death. By shedding his blood and then rising from death, Jesus turned the world upside down. Instead of being punished, we are now in a state of peace with the holy God.

The Good News about Jesus changes people. It is effective, because it is God’s Word. The news that you can’t save yourself, that you are headed for hell, but Jesus changed your fate—that news leads to two reactions: either you trust Jesus with your heart, or you harden your heart and trust yourself. We see both reactions in Thessalonica.

“Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.” Jews and non-Jews; men and women; prominent people and commoners—their lives were changed by the words Paul spoke. The Holy Spirit filled them with faith through the news of what Jesus had done. They didn’t have to wonder any more how they could make up for the bad things they’d done. They didn’t need to feel guilty. They were forgiven. Their world was turned upside down by the wonderful news of Jesus.

But some did not believe. They fought against the message that they needed to be saved; they thought they were pretty good people on their own. They rejected the forgiveness that Jesus had won. And as often is the case, they were angry about this. People don’t like being told there is something wrong with them, even when there clearly is. They don’t want to have their neat little world turned upside down.

In Thessalonica, they started a riot. They wanted Paul and Silas beaten up. Not finding the two missionaries, they dragged some other Christians before the city officials, hoping to get rid of them.

So Paul and Silas left. They traveled west to the small town of Berea; and once again, they preached about Jesus.

What an example for us. We are not commissioned missionaries to cities in Greece. But we Christians are witnesses for Jesus. As Peter said in our Second Lesson, **“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood...so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness.”** Wherever we live, we are the ones God uses to spread the love of Jesus. God uses Christians all around the world to share his Good News.

But how do we do that when we’re not supposed to be out and about? How great that we have all the technology that we can use. Talking—that’s what Paul did, and that’s what we do today. And what opportunities we have to share God’s Good News. There is a world that is

caught in fear and loneliness. There are people struggling to understand how they will survive. Things have been turned upside down for everybody. People have little idea what the future holds.

How can we help them? By sharing God's Word with them. We can do like Paul, telling the story of Jesus—his birth at Christmas, his miracles, his loving preaching, his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven. We can explain that Jesus did all these things for us. We can open up the Bible to others so they can see their Savior.

Some will accept that message; some will reject it. Some will be like the Bereans, at the end of our lesson, who wanted to study the Scriptures in much more detail. And once again, **“many of them believed”** through the power of God's Word.

Would you like to understand Scripture better? Would you like a class like Paul gave—summarizing Scripture, Old and New Testaments? If you're not a member of our church, I'd like to invite you to a class that goes through the Bible's main teachings. There is no obligation—there is no fee, and you don't have to join our church. We would just like to share with you what is in that big book. Already now I can take you through an individual class, either meeting in person or we could meet on-line; or you can sign up for a group class, once we're allowed to meet. Call or email our office and we can arrange a class that fits your schedule.

And members of our church, I'm looking forward to starting Bible classes with you once again, too.

For this is how we grow in our faith. As Peter said, **“Crave the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”**

Your world was changed by the Word of God. Now God uses you to change the lives of others. Turn the world upside down, by sharing the Good News of Jesus. Amen.