

Turning the World Upside Down  
Acts 17:1-6  
June 18, 2017

*Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." 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. 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. 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 text tells us that Paul and Silas are in Thessalonica. They have been there about three weeks. They were telling the people of the city about Jesus. Some of the people believed and became Christians, followers of Jesus.

However, not everyone was please with their message. Some of the leading Jews either became of jealous of Paul and Silas, or felt threatened by them. Those Jews set out to find Paul and Silas and teach them a lesson. When they couldn't find Paul and Silas, they found Jason and looked to take out their anger on him. Paul and Silas were staying with Jason.

The Jews dragged Jason to the local courthouse and made their complaint public. The words they used say more than they ever intended. Listen once again to their charge: *These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.* (Acts 17:6 ESV).

What a thing to be said about two followers of Jesus. Paul and Silas had earned quite a reputation for themselves. More than that, their reputation had preceded their arrival at Thessalonica. Also, their reputation had an effect on the leading Jews there. Those Jews were at least very concerned and at most frightened. They knew in advance that these two men had turned the world upside down wherever they went.

Just the appearance of Paul and Silas shook up that leading Jews because they knew what their appearance meant; Thessalonica was about to be turned upside down. What an incredible thing to be said about just two followers of Jesus.

Paul and Silas had turned their world upside down. They had earned a reputation of bringing change wherever they went. The world around them was no longer the same as it had always been. I'd say they were doing some things right.

When I read this account, I asked myself four questions. I want you to consider these same questions.

Question 1: Are we a threat when it comes to turning the world upside down? Do we have what it takes to make a difference in this world? Is Jesus important enough to us that we will stop and nothing to see him lifted up and his name praised?

Question 2: Are the people of Farmington Hills talking about the impact we are having on the community? Does our community see any change we are bringing? Is Farmington Hills different because we exist?

Question 3: Are we doing anything that will disturb our community? Are we shaking up those around us who have no use for Jesus or God's Word? Are we doing anything that causes people to be disturbed by our presence?

Question 4: Is our presence leading people to see the truth of God's Word? Are our words and actions doing anything to help people acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

I'm sure things in Farmington Hills are different because we are here. The problem is I don't think we have yet reached the level of "world shaking." I don't think we are even at a "town shaking" level.

So how can we become people who are turning the world upside down? I don't have the answer to that question, but I believe we can find that answer in God's Word. Since Paul and Silas were the ones accused of turning the world upside down, let's see what Scripture tells us about their actions. Let's follow their trail to Thessalonica. A look at their trip may tell us how they came by their amazing reputation.

The beginning is always a good place to start: *Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers*

(Ac 15:40-16:5 NIV).

This is the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. They picked up Timothy along the way. Timothy was young, possibly a late teenager. The trio visited churches which Paul had previously planted. They encouraged and strengthened the believers in those churches.

So, here's one way to turn the world upside down: get everyone involved. Paul and Silas took a young person with them. They got the people in the churches excited and encouraged. In other words, Paul and Silas made sure everyone had a part to play in turning the world upside down.

If it's our intention to turn the world of Farmington Hills upside down, everyone needs to be involved. There is not one person in this sanctuary that God will not use to shake up our community. If you're eighty-five, you need to be active in lifting up Jesus wherever you are. If you're ten, you also need to be involved.

There are no limitations on being an active Christian for Jesus. Age is no limit. Income is no limit. Education is no limit. Whoever you are, whatever you are, you need to go out into the world and be the person God made you to be. You need to get involved in what Jesus is doing around you. To turn the world upside down, you need to be involved.

What else can we learn from Paul and Silas: *Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them* (Ac 16:6-10 NIV).

Paul seemed to be a little confused as to where to go next. There was no shortage of cities and towns he could visit with the message of Christ. Places like Ephesus and Colossae and many others along the coastline were ripe for the Gospel message, but God wanted Paul somewhere else.

In this we can find another way to turn the world upside down. This is a foolproof method, but it can be very hard to do: follow God even when it doesn't make sense to our way of thinking. Paul and Silas would eventually get to Ephesus and the other cities, but now wasn't God's timing.

There are times when we are sure we know exactly what to do next. There are times when we think we have it all figured out. Then we find out that God is pointing us in an entirely new direction. We look at God's plan and we shake our heads. Why in the world would God want us to do that?

However, to turn the world upside down we must follow God's plan. Because, even when it doesn't make sense, God's plan is always better than our plan. To be a world changing follower of Jesus, you must throw away your roadmap for your life and start following God's plan.

Paul and Silas eventually ended up in jail in Philippi: *After [Paul and Silas] had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks* (Ac 16:23-24 NIV).

Not exactly the reward you would expect for two men who had turned the world upside down for Jesus. If that happened to you, it might make you wonder if you had truly been following God. After all, God wouldn't want you to end up some place where you weren't

comfortable, would he?

While Paul and Silas sat in jail praying and singing hymns, an earthquake shook the jail. The cell doors swung open. The prisoner's shackles fell off. The jailer, knowing he was as good as dead, tried to kill himself, but Paul and Silas stopped him. Then a most amazing thing happened: *[The jailer] then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household"* (Ac 16:30-31 NIV).

One of the things Paul and Silas did to turn things upside down will also work for us: they looked for the opportunity in every situation. We have to be open to the present if we are going to be effective. Paul and Silas were in jail, but they understood that they could be just as effective in jail as out in the open. Opportunities are all around and we see them when we are looking for them.

Almost anything can be an opportunity to witness. Every day I post a short sermon clip and a prayer on our church's facebook page. One day I saw a "like" on the prayer but I didn't recognize the name of the person. The page said I had a mutual friend with this man. That mutual friend turned out to be one of our members. That member must have done something to get his friend to look at our page and read that prayer. That's how simple it can be to turn the world upside down.

At work, at school, in the grocery store, these places may not seem like the ideal place to begin turning the world upside down, but God knows where you are. He will put opportunities in your path. Your job is to be alert.

One more thing to help us turn the world upside down: *But when [the Jews] did not find [Paul and Silas], they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus"* (Ac 17:6-7 NIV).

The people who were angry at Paul and Silas knew what they were up to. Paul and Silas were preaching something totally opposite to the popular religions of the day. Paul and Silas weren't using any elaborate ceremonies or rituals. They weren't following the latest program for church growth. Their message was so simple even their enemies understood it. They were simply proclaiming "Jesus is king."

Our lesson on world flipping here is: keep it simple. Your proclamation of the Gospel must be simple and constant. God loves you. Jesus died to pay for your sins. Faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior is all that is needed for salvation.

We need to speak that message. We need to live that message. We can turn the world upside down with that one simple message: JESUS!