

Turning the World Upside Down – Question 2
Acts 17:1-6
July 2, 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.”

For the past two Sundays, we have been talking about the impact Paul and Silas were having as they traveled through Greece and Asia Minor. Every community they stopped at saw indisputable change. Many people trusted in Jesus because of their message. Others did not, but one thing is for sure; nothing was the same ever again.

Paul and Silas’ impact was so great other cities and towns heard about them. That was the case with Thessalonica. When they arrived the people knew who they were. Some of the Thessalonians believed in Jesus. Others fought back.

It was the fighting back that most clearly revealed Paul and Silas’ impact. In fact, it was the words of their accusers that pointed to the change they were bringing: *These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.*

No matter what the Thessalonians thought of Paul and Silas, they were sure of one thing; Paul and Silas were turning the world upside down. Their impact was huge. Two men, just two men, were changing the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What a marvelous compliment; they were changing the world for Jesus.

What if we were making that kind of impact? What if people knew the world was going to be different because of us? What if people were turning to Jesus because of our presence and our message? What if people were saying, “Prince of Peace is turning the world upside down?”

We are looking at four questions in this series. Last week was question one. Are we a threat to turning our world upside down? Do we have what it takes to make a difference in our world? Is Jesus important enough to us that we will stop at nothing to see his name lifted up and praised?

We talked about three things that will make us a threat:

- 1) Treat nobodies as somebodies;
- 2) Challenge what people think the church is;

3) Devote all our energy to seeing people's lives changed.

The second question addresses this. Are the people of our community talking about our impact? Does our community see the change we are bringing? Is our community different because we exist?

The third question goes even deeper. Are we doing anything that will disturb our community? Are we shaking up those who have no use for Jesus or God's Word? Are we doing anything that causes people to be disturbed by our presence?

The fourth question goes to the bottom line. Is our presence pointing people to eternal matters? Are we leading people to see Jesus as their King?

Today we address question two. Are the people of our community talking about our impact?

The people to Thessalonica were talking about what Paul and Silas had done in the cities they had visited. The people were talking because Paul and Silas had been making an impact. In fact, Paul and Silas were the talk of the town. Thessalonica was a busy center for business of all kinds, but the thing making the most noise, the thing getting the most attention was the message of the Gospel. The Gospel was making an impact.

What does it mean to make an impact? Impact is defined as "to have an influence on," "to affect," "to alter." When we talk about Prince of Peace having an impact on the community, we are saying;

- 1) We are influencing our community for Jesus Christ;
- 2) We are affecting the people of our community by our lives for Jesus;
- 3) The community is being altered because we are here.

How did Paul and Silas, just two men, bring about such a great impact? They could have tried to bring change by inciting riots, which is quite popular with certain parts of today's society. They could have come into town and organized boycotts. They could have pushed for laws that were favorable for them. They might have tried to sway public opinion by spreading lies and rumors about the local officials. They could have picketed the pagan temples. They could have done any of these things – but they didn't.

What did Paul and Silas do that brought about this change? Some time later, Paul wrote a letter to the Thessalonian Christians and in that letter he described his approach to spreading the Gospel: *You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the Gospel of God to you. You are witnesses,*

and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe (1 Th 2:5-13 NIV).

Here you can see what made Paul's impact on Thessalonica. It wasn't rioting, fighting, or any of the other things I named. The strength of Paul's message and witness came from love. Paul changed Thessalonica because Paul loved the Thessalonians. Paul loved the city and its people.

If we want to make an impact on our community, we must love our community. We can measure our love for the community by asking a few simple question. Do the people around you mean anything to you? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to see people's lives change? Are you willing to sacrifice for the people of our community; your treasures, your talents, but most of all your time?

These aren't just idle questions. These questions demand some serious thought and prayer. The truth of the matter is, we will never have a real impact on our community until we are ready to answer "yes" to all three questions. Change has never come about without passion. Therefore, we must be passionate about revival in our community.

This means Prince of Peace needs a new church mindset. We have to change our mindset from "How can the community serve our church?" to "How can we serve our community?" That kind of mindset change can be difficult, but we have to change the way we think about our community in order to love our community.

So, let's look at three practical ways to cultivate love for our community.

First, ask the people you encounter questions like these. What would you like to see churches doing in our community? Where do you think the churches in the community are failing or missing the mark? What are the greatest needs in our community? Ask these questions at the ballpark, at Wal Mart, on Facebook.

Second, use these questions to show you the hearts of the people. Let their answers show you what's most important to them. Let their answers give you a glimpse of how you can really make a difference. Let their answers break your heart and let God plant seeds of love in your heart.

Third, develop the habit of walking prayer and driving prayer. This might be new for you. It works like this. Take the time you are traveling from one place to another and turn it into prayer time. (Do not close your eyes during walking and driving prayer.)

Pray with an open mind and an open heart. Ask God to show you how he sees the people around you. Ask God to help you truly love your community. Ask God to show

you specific ways to show your love for the community.

A primary requirement for changing the world is to take the church outside these walls. You have to get the church out of the building. This sanctuary is not the church. You are the church. Whether you are shopping, working, or just walking down the street, you are the church. When you fully understand that, then and only then, can you take the church to the people.

The best time for change is now. The best place for change to start is in each of our hearts. When you leave today, don't leave the church behind. Take the church with you wherever you go and, today, start turning the world upside down for Jesus.