

Preaching That Turned the World Upside Down

By: Earl E. Robertson

From victorious preaching efforts in Philippi and Macedonia, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica via Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 16 and 17). Here in the synagogue, as in other places of opportunity, Paul reasoned with the Jews three Sabbath days out of the scriptures. Out of these efforts the church in Thessalonica came into being; however, some of the Jews *“believed not”* but acted through envy and using lewd and base men created a riot. The preaching of Paul and Silas was so powerful and impacting that the Jews said they were violators of Caesar’s laws and that in other places had *“turned the world upside down”* (Acts 17:1-9).



Is the present day Christian surprised that religious folk would react to this quality of preaching by Paul and Silas as they did? Did the world need turning *“upside down”*? Was the message preached by these men of God sufficiently capable of doing what the charge says? Was God giving impetus through the pure messages of these men upon the hearts of the hearers? Was error impervious to the power of truth about Jesus proclaimed by Paul and Silas? Could weak, non-distinctive, platitudinous sermons often heard today turn that world upside down? Can such preaching change our world for the better today?

Yes, the world that God so loved (John 3:16) is ever in sin and needs to be changed – saved (1 John 5:19). God-fearing saints know the power of scripture when faithfully preached to benefit both the lost and the saved. It was not Paul and Silas that turned the world upside down, but the truth of their message! God’s power is *“unto salvation.”* Power and salvation are reciprocally related here – no power, no salvation. The preposition *“unto”* denotes the purpose, the aim, the consequent result in preaching this God-power gospel: it is unto salvation (Romans 1:16-17). This scripture-power turns people from darkness and sin to light and salvation; it changes the world from wickedness to righteousness (see Acts 26:16-18).

Apostolic preaching constantly reflected the concept that their message must connote a true relationship with scripture. This says their preaching had to be *“as the oracles of God”* (1 Peter 4:11). Noble people searched the scriptures when they heard the apostles preach (Acts 17:10-12). Such action of pure motives denotes logically the essential attribute of the absoluteness of scripture; all assumed standards for life’s belief and conduct must be measured by God’s inspired word! Some having heard Jesus, but confused as to who he was, said, *“Hath not the scripture said”* (John 7:42). That which is *“noted in the scripture”* (Daniel 10:21) was especially true, and not to be controverted.

So, Paul and Silas *“reasoned with them out of the scriptures”* (Acts 17:2). Of what benefit would it have been to the worshipers in that synagogue if Paul had challenged them with mere human philosophy? The doctrines and commandments of men have never been good for anyone religiously (Matthew 15:9). Though the Jews were religious they were lost (Romans 10:1-3), and Paul and Silas had the message of truth that could change their condition. Christ was their subject, *“This Jesus*

whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:3). They were explaining and showing them God's plans for Christ in saving the world. Christ can't be preached without using scripture, and using it faithfully. The Ethiopian was reading scripture (Isaiah 53) when Philip the evangelist met him (Acts 8:27-34), and the preacher using *"the same scripture, preached unto him Jesus"* (Acts 8:35) that led to his conversion to Christ (Acts 8:36-39). This is the preaching that saves – turns the world upside down!

Preaching without scripture will not save anyone; it is not the preaching that God bids (Jonah 3:2). Though God ordained preaching to save (1 Corinthians 1:21) because the world is lost in sin (Romans 3:23; John 3:16), the marvelous ends cannot be achieved unless the right and full message is declared. Scripture is the sure basis on which we can impact the world for change (2 Timothy 3:15), and we know the scripture cannot be invalidated (John 10:35). Preachers must use *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 4:15) for the benefit of others. It is a poor and vain thought if one thinks he can preach the saving Christ to a lost world and not use scripture. Even Paul preached Jesus *"according to the scriptures"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Paul said Christ died and rose from the dead *"according to the scripture"*! This is where the power is, brethren. There is power in the scriptures (Hebrews 4:12). When the sinful audience at Pentecost heard Peter's preaching it gave ground for their change, and they enquired for a remedy (Acts 2). The inspired scripture has to be known for salvation (2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 10:14), and it has been used faithfully to the salvation of all that are in Christ Jesus (Acts 9:6, 10-20). As Paul faithfully preached Jesus to these synagogue Jews he showed that Christ had to suffer for sin (Isaiah 53; Luke 24:13-51), and that God raised him from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). They so affirmed with confidence because they knew the scriptures do not speak in vain (emptily), not meaning what they say (James 4:5)! They also affirmed apostolic teaching cannot be successfully contradicted (1 Corinthians 15:12).

Preaching that turns the world upside down is preaching that is true to the world of God by men who perceive they are representing God to the people!

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