

Are You Ready To Turn The World Upside Down?

Acts 17:6, 14-34

“These men who have upset the world have come here also...” (Acts 17:6b). Such was the accusation of an angry mob against Paul and Silas as they came to Thessalonica. The good news had persuaded a few too many for those who held the power. Christians were getting the attention of society. A gospel movement was forming. It all came to a head in the middle of a city. And *the world turned upside down*.

I read this passage, and I'm burdened. Too few churches...too few believers...are ready to *turn the world upside down*, today. In Acts 17, Paul is said to have so upset the world...that he and Silas had *turned the world upside down* as he *proclaimed the good news* that the one and only true and living God is knowable.

I. PAUL'S PRACTICE: (His custom) (vs. 2, 10, 16-17)

According to Paul's custom...(vs. 2, 10, 17) He would go into the *synagogues* and trying to reason with the Jews according to the Scriptures...*explaining and giving evidence that Jesus was the Christ...the crucified and resurrected Messiah*.

Reasoned (vs. 2)...we get the word *dialogue* from it. It describes a *discussion...not a formal sermon*...from which Paul repeatedly fielded questions from his hearers.

Paul had *three qualities* that compelled him to proclaim the gospel...*courage, boldness, and passion*. The prospect of *resistance* or *trials* or *persecution* didn't deter him from carrying out his calling. The thought of people rejecting him didn't hinder him.

Provoked (vs. 16)...Gk. *paroxuno*, literally means *to incite...to become angry...or to be irritate*. It's a picture of sticking one's lip out when being provoked and becoming mad. In medical terminology it means a *seizure* or *epileptic fit*. It describes Paul as being mad and having a fit. The tense is *imperfect*, meaning that Paul didn't have a sudden burst of anger, but a constant and continuous *irritation* or *displeasure*.

Unfortunately today, we have become comfortable with political correctness. Very little stirs us or gets us upset...irritates us. And even when it does, what are we willing to do about it?

II. PAUL'S PERSUASION: (vs. 3, 11-12, 18-31)

The Bereans *received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so* (vs. 11).

Examining (vs. 11)...a word used to describe a *judicial investigation*. They carefully sifted through the evidence and concluded that the gospel Paul proclaimed was the truth that fulfilled Old Testament promises.

During Paul's visit to Athens, he met *some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers* (vs. 18) and dialogued with them about Jesus. This led them to bring him before the court of Areopagus...an institution revered from the city's earliest times...a court that met upon the hill called Areopagus (Mars Hill). Its purpose was to decide religious matters. Members of the court were curious about Paul's proclamation regarding their worship to a god they didn't know...*an altar with the inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD* (vs. 23).

Epicurean...They were *hedonist, atheists*, or at best *deist*. Their philosophy can be summed up in the phrase...“*If it feels good, do it*.” They said *the chief end of man* was *pleasure* and *happiness*. This *pleasure* they believed, was *attained by avoiding excesses*...and the *fear of death* was *overcome* by *seeking tranquility*. This *pleasure* was also obtained by *seeking to be free from pain*, and by *loving mankind*. They believed that *if gods existed* they didn't *become involved in human events*.

Stoics...They held to a philosophy that taught that *self-mastery* was the greatest *virtue* and that it was based on *knowledge*. It taught that the wise lived in harmony with a *divine reason*...or *fate*...or *providence* that *governs nature* and *directs history*...that they had a *great purpose* in life. They believed that this great purpose was indifferent to the fluctuations of *fortune* and *pleasure* and *pain*. They sought to *reach a place where one feels nothing*.

Paul's proclamation to the court (vs. 22-31) provides a model for communicating the gospel to a group that has *no Bible background* or *understanding...intellectual pagans*. He drew from his surroundings by mentioning the *Athenian love for religion*, demonstrated by their many *idols*. He then made his plea for Christianity by declaring that God does not dwell in man-made temples (vs. 24).

The thrust of his message was clear...the *Creator God*, who has *revealed Himself in Creation*, has now commanded *all to repent*, for *everyone must give an account to Jesus Christ* whom God *raised from the dead* (vs. 29-31).

III. THE PEOPLE'S PROTEST: (vs. 5-9, 13, 32)

Notice the comparison between **verse 5** and **verse 11**. The Jews in **Thessalonica** never looked at the Scriptures to see if what **Paul** was teaching was correct. They were jealous and felt threatened... their positions and power were being threatened. Their traditions were being challenged.

IV. THE PEOPLE PERSUADED: (vs. 4, 12, 32-34)

Paul's presentation of the gospel was so compelling that some of the **Thessalonian Jews** were *persuaded*...even though the majority rejected it. Most of the converts in **Thessalonica** were **Gentiles steeped in idolatry** (**I Thessalonians 1:9**)...people from *various nationalities* and *social positions*. An even greater harvest was reaped in **Berea**, where many of the Jews believed. In **Athens**, it says that *some men joined him and believed*...while others said that they would wait and hear Paul again concerning this. The majority in **Athens** just *sneered when they heard of the resurrection of the dead*.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- Don't underestimate the power of the Gospel. It's the **power of the Gospel** that persuades man...not the **eloquence of our presentation**.
- We tend to stay **where we are comfortable**...to stay with what we consider normal. The problem is...we can't stay where we are...and go with God.
- We must be willing to be **bold**...to be **vulnerable**. We must be willing to have people resist us or even turn against us. We have to be willing to be Christ-centered...counter-cultural.