

Turning the World Upside Down!

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Life of Paul series

Acts 17:1-15

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Church,

This week I had a repairman down to fix my garage door. I will try to tackle a lot of jobs myself but not replacing the springs on the garage door. Those things are dangerous. But after watching the guy and paying him \$300, I thought, "Ah, maybe I could have done that myself." Haha. Actually, I was happy to pay him. He was very likeable. This guy was a professional. He did a great job. But, man, this guy could fit the f-word so artistically into almost every sentence, sometimes twice, as if the sentence would be incomplete without it.

Before I called him to my house, I checked out his online reviews. They were all 5 stars. Then I saw his personal Facebook page. And as I read his posts, I thought, "Wow, this guy is really sensitive and caring but doesn't seem to have a lot of people to reinforce that in his life." That was my impression from spending maybe 2 minutes on his page. And that's what I had in my head and on my heart when he came over. When he was in my garage, I finally segued from garage door talk to his Facebook page and mentioned that I was impressed with his tender heart. That led to a long talk about him and his girlfriend who apparently doesn't know what she wants out of life. But they have a son whom he adores; however the boy's mom and him just can't find a way to do life together, at least not under the same roof.

From that chat, I came back to my sermon and our Bible reading today and am just amazed at Paul's ability to connect people to the gospel.

The Power of the Gospel

In many ways our world today is very different than Paul's. But our approach can be much the same. We meet people where they are at. Paul didn't invite people to church. He came to them in Thessalonica and Berea. He was the church on legs. He was the Holy Spirit enabled voice piece of God. He was the hands and feet of Jesus, showing concern for people... for all kinds of people. **As we read about Paul, we see the centrality of the gospel and the power of it.**

Paul was a Jew through and through. All of that Greek and Roman paganism in the cities mentioned in Acts 17 would have been completely foreign to a younger Paul. It probably made him uncomfortable at first. But through trial and error, I'm sure, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul found a connection point with people. He knew it was not his mission to change hearts and minds. That's the Holy Spirit's work. But it was his calling to point people to Jesus, to give them the gospel and to find a point of connection between these people and Jesus. As I think back to my garage visit last week, I tried to find a connection point with the repairman before he came, a place where I could meet on his turf, where I could encourage him and show the love of Christ.

That's something, with God's help, we can all do in our own way too.

To me, the biggest compliment that Paul and his fellow disciples receive is the accusation levelled against them by the mob in Thessalonica. The NIV reads, "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here." The ESV says: "These men have turned the world upside down..." They are using political language that speaks to causing a revolution. The verb *ana-statoō* is used here to speak about Paul and again in Acts 21:38 of an Egyptian terrorist who is said to have 'started a revolt'. Paul and Silas are being charged with causing a revolution in Thessalonica, with treason, a political crime punishable by death. Jesus, similarly, had been accused before the Roman governor Pilate of 'subverting' the nation by claiming himself to be "a king".

Church, by living by the word, living out the gospel, the followers of Jesus are presenting our world with a different way of life. It's a world that appears to be upside down from what is usual. But the reality is that the gospel puts life right side up. Trusting in Jesus for salvation involves repenting which is turning around. In this case we could say turning over. It's saying no to the world as we know it. Saying no to the pantheon of gods in our day—materialism, hedonism, sexual freedom, greed, humanism, atheism and more. Also saying no to all of the implications of serving these gods. It's saying no to self-serving power. Saying no to mistreatment of the poor, to abuse, to frivolous meaningless living. It's saying no to these gods in order to say yes to following Jesus' and living out his call to love God above all and our neighbour as ourselves!

Young people, when Jesus comes to reign in our hearts, all of our priorities and all of our worldly ambitions get flipped over. The gospel life—when we seriously live it—is counter to the world around us.

Martin Luther is usually credited with starting the Reformation by hammering the 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg. When asked to recant what he wrote, he said these words: "*I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.*" He was standing on good theology that has steered the church right for hundreds of years. You see, the Reformation wasn't a one-day event. It was decades in the making and has been continuing ever since. Each of us needs to take the truth of the Bible and apply it to our lives so that our lives are *anastatoo*, turned right side up in our upside down world.

Paul was doing that in the province of Philippi and wherever he went in the Roman Empire. He was saying, Caesar may be king of the Roman Empire but Jesus is King of my heart and my life and people noticed.

That's the power of the gospel today too, my friends. We live by the word of God in the Bible. We measure what we hear by the word of God, like the Christians in Berea. We follow the gospel's demands as shown by Jesus and Paul and men like Jason in Thessalonica and like Luther and others in 1500s in Europe. When our politically correct culture says, "You have to live by the adage "Everyone must

find their own truth” or “All paths lead to God”, we need to say, “No, in Christ alone we live and move and have our being. He is the way, the truth and the life!” When our woke culture tries to shame people into supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, we are hopefully way ahead of that wagon because we’re already standing with our coloured friends, living out the gospel that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, white nor black. We are all one in Christ. When everyone else is putting themselves first, we should be standing with Jesus and saying and showing, “Jesus is my King! I’m here to serve others as Christ has served me and given his life for me and you!”

The word of God, the gospel, can incite opposition but **with** the Holy Spirit’s help, our faithfulness to live and proclaim the gospel will also attract some people to Christ. That’s the power of the gospel. We can’t change hearts but the Holy Spirit working through the word that we live and share can change the hardest and most rebellious of hearts. He has done it throughout history. Just look at Paul himself. A hater of Jesus is softened by the Holy Spirit and becomes a great missionary for the power of the gospel and is used as the church on legs to share the life changing gospel with people all over the Roman Empire of his day.

Expect Gospel Opposition

The gospel is powerful. And that’s why it also faces opposition. Paul, Silas, Timothy and “Jason and the others” in Thessalonica and in Berea planted seeds and saw fruit. But they also were strongly opposed because lies hate the truth. If we truly live and teach the gospel, we can expect opposition.

In fact, it’s probably safe to say as author NT Wright does, “the charge is, ‘all of them are all acting against Caesar’s decrees’—they don’t say which ones, but the meaning seems to be in the final phrase—‘saying that there is another king, namely Jesus’.”

If you know anything about ancient tyrants, particularly the Roman ones, you know that they don’t take kindly to rivals. You see, if Jesus is Lord or King, then Caesar isn’t!

When the false charges come out that Christians are promoting Jesus as king in place of Caesar, the Christians in Thessalonica quickly feel the wrath coming and whisk Paul away. Jason and his group willingly take the fall—get thrown in jail and then released on bail. I found it interesting to learn that Luke’s reporting on the conditions of their bail, in the original Greek seems to be that they are free to go as long as they keep Paul and Silas from returning. One writer said, “It was probably this legal ban which Paul saw as Satan preventing him from returning to Thessalonica.”

The gospel lived by Paul and Jason in 50 AD, as well as Luther and Calvin in the 15 and 1600s faced opposition. And it still does today.

We can think of the hundreds of millions of believer today. Yes, conservatively, the organization Open Doors estimates that well over 200 million Christians face intimidation, prison and even death in our day. That's staggering, isn't it? Yes indeed. 200 millions Christians today!

It is happening more subversively even in Canada today. The Bill C-8, which passed in Parliament this past week, could be used—if it doesn't get fixed by the Senate—to prevent parents and churches from speaking about certain sexual things to their children and congregations. Christians and others who decide to live contrary to the wishes of our supposedly enlightened, woke leaders will increasingly—I suspect—face this discrimination and opposition in our country.

The way, the truth and the life offered in Christ is welcomed by some but it is always hated by others who only know the world in it's upside down orientation. All we can do is continue to serve Christ, live by his word and share and show his love. Then let the Spirit do his work in and through us to help people long for a world oriented to Christ. Regardless of opposition, we can remain confident that the Lord Jesus is with us and will keep us in his loving care.

The Gospel Changes Lives

You see, dear people, the gospels always has and always will have power and always has and always will attract opposition. But it also always has and always will truly change lives so that God's people model life as God intends. Paul and the others knew this personally. They saw it in others. Paul had seen Lydia, a demon-possessed slave girl, and the jailer in Philippi believe in Jesus and be transformed—as recorded in Acts 16. Now in chapter 17, people like Jason and others in Thessalonica and Berea are coming to faith in Jesus. They quickly and selflessly move to protect others and willingly take the abuse of those who oppose Jesus. They are fearless and determined to live for Jesus. The Bereans are, likewise, eager to cast aside their Greek gods and take on the scorn of their neighbours because they believe the gospel. They came to believe that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the one and only way, truth and life from God! They quickly discovered that Jesus is present with his people by his Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave them peace and unshakeable joy, along with incredible courage to live and share Christ's love.

This past week our city mourned the passing away of Joey Moss. Joey was my age—57 years old. He was born with Down's Syndrome and became a model citizen in our city. He was befriended by Wayne Gretzky and brought into the Oilers' dressing room where he became a huge source of encouragement for the team. Then our now EE club brought him in as well. Mostly through my sister in law Katie who also has Downs, I have come to know selfless love that gives without expecting anything in return. I think her and Joey teach us so much.

That's the kind of fruit the gospel should bear in the lives of Christians. Because we've been loved by the sacrificial love of Christ, he gives us a contagious love for others that should not melt in the face of opponents but grow

stronger and brighter. The transforming work of the Holy Spirit in us empowers us to meet people on their turf but we must respond.

I was impressed by a group of young men in our congregation who last Sunday decided to bring love to the homeless camp downtown. One felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit. He humbly told me, "I don't want to boast about anything other than Jesus, but I wanted to tell you this: I had an idea to help those in need. I ordered 16 pizzas and Pepsi's and got a couple packs of crazy bread and I had 5 toques and some hand warmers and wool socks and work boots and a pile of gloves. I invited three other guys from church and we went to the tent city and passed all this (food and) gear out to the homeless this past Sunday. It went very well."

That's an example of the gospel changing our lives so that we can courageously and generously go and love others in Jesus' name, without judging them. That's how we live right side up in a world that is upside down.

We also have opportunities to support World Renew's World Hunger campaign today. That's an international ministry to those hurting world-wide. Locally we can support the work of the Mosaic Centre as they try to help put the world right side up with the love of Christ.

This week I listened to a pastor from another church going through the Renewal Lab process in her city. She talked about how they opened their building to almost any organization in their neighbourhood that asked for space. They offered it for free as a gesture of love. And after just 5 years, their almost dead congregation has begun to be full of life again. The gospel of Jesus and his love is still attracting people and changing lives.

Friends, be grateful that the Spirit has revealed Jesus to you as King of kings and Lord of lords. Live for him as you love your neighbours. Whether it's the garage door repairman, the homeless, our church neighbours, coworkers, classmates or anyone else that the Holy Spirit lays on your heart, courageously go and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and watch as the gospel continues to change lives even in the 21st century in places like Edmonton. In a world that doesn't usually recognize that it's upside down, let the Spirit use you to show how God intends for the world to be—with Jesus as lord of Lords.