

The Message that Turns the World Upside Down

A Five Part Series from Acts 16 & 17

Part II – An Upside Down World

(Acts 17:1-9)

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6/10/08

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction ó

- A. The title of this message, in keeping with the entire series, is taken from Acts 17:6 where certain Jewish enemies of the Gospel referred to Paul & Silas as: *“**óí These that have turned the world upside down...**”*
- B. Recall that yesterday, we noted how the gospel message that Paul delivered to the Philippian jailer is further distinguished & amplified by our consideration of the descriptions of chapter 17.
- C. We gained further insight into that *“**word of the Lord**”* delivered to the jailer in 16:32 by moving forward to the description given to the Thessalonians in Acts 17:3. And so we observe that Paul’s message (this single message of Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2) ó sets forth the necessity of Christ’s suffering and resurrection. And so we’ll consider this further in our study today of Acts 17:1-9.

II. Discussion of the Text (Read Acts 17:1-9).

A. Comments on vs. 3. - *“...**must needs**...”*

1. The literal translation of that verse reads, *“**óí opening and setting forth that the Christ it behooved (was fitting and of necessity) to have suffered and to have risen from among the dead, and that this is the Christ Jesus, whom I announce to you.ö -- This Jesus, not another.**”*
2. Any gospel alleging that salvation is conditioned on the sinner ó Denies the necessity spoken of here. So we see that the Christ upon whom this Philippian jailer was to believe on (trust in, rely on) was one who *“**must needs**”* have suffered and risen. So again this should prompt us to examine whether our notions of this Jesus Christ is such that he must of necessity have died and risen again. Or is that merely an arbitrary note of biblical history? For Christ to be one upon whom you can rely on for eternal salvation, then what you believe concerning Him and the gospel that identifies Him, must necessitate His death and resurrection.

Verse 3 (Cont')

3. The prevalent notion that salvation is in some way conditioned on the sinner simply makes what He did at best a pre-requisite and truly not essential ó for if itø ÷the believingø that makes the difference, then that (÷the believingø) is the Savior and the what (or upon whom) we believe is secondary. God could have arbitrarily given you some other body of truth to believe upon to satisfy that condition.
4. But your faith cannot satisfy God. Weøve established that faith is not righteousness but rather subjective faith is described as the revelation of that righteousness (and its necessity) ó that which Christ alone accomplished in His obedience unto death, testified to be effectual by His very resurrection. So subjective faith (or believing) can form no part nor contribute anything to the righteousness a sinner must have to be accepted before our holy God. Only what Christ did in His perfect obedience unto death satisfied the Father and so resulted in His resurrection unto life.
5. Consider how Paul reasoned with them out of the scriptures meaning the Old Testament. Consider how He must have set forth this necessity of the Messiahø suffering and resurrection as they considered passages like Isaiah 53 where he well could have read, ÷***Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;...***” and ÷***...He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.***”

B. Verse 4 ó

1. And some of these at Thessalonica believed (these Jews) and so they consorted with ó that is privately conversed with them, associated with them, and identified with them and their ministry.
2. And also some of the ÷devout Greeks,ø referring to the Gentiles who converted to the Jewish religion.

C. Verse 5 ó

1. Here we see that those Jews who believed not, ***“moved with envy.”*** I.e. ó envious of the reception that Paul received by the others (including some of the leading women). Also this ***“moved with envy”*** suggests that they did so with a degree of zeal.
2. So it says that they gathered ***“lewd fellows of the baser sort.”*** Literal translation of this calls them certain evil men who were market-loungers (who stood idle in the market ó suggesting men with little purpose in life) and so they could easily be gathered together for their purposes.
3. And so they raised a mob to create an uproar and as we see from verse 8, they ***“troubled the people & the rulers of the city”*** with the accusations they made ó

D. Verse 6 ó

í Accusations which began with the outcry in verse 6 made by these unbelieving Jews unto the rulers of the city, as they referred to Paul and Silas as “...*these that have turned the world upside down...*” Iðl come back to discuss more on this verse later.

E. Verse 7 ó

1. Here we see that the accusation is one of sedition (i.e. ó insurrection or rebellion against the government.). They were accused of acting contrary (or in opposition) to the decrees of Caesar ó contrary to His power ó even going so far as to suggest these considered Christ as a competing king.
2. And yet Christ had answered as much to Pilate in John 18:36 saying, “...*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*”
3. Christ’s enlightened followers indeed called Him king but not an earthly king, not a rival with Caesar. Christ Himself related a law of His to be to “...*render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...*” So the accusation was blatantly false which is why it is likely the rulers allowed Jason to go.
4. Note the irony: Here those opposed to the message of the Gospel, who made this charge that Paul and his company were acting in rebellion to Caesar, were those who themselves hated Caesar and his government, who sought his ruin and who expected a Messiah that would be a temporal ruler and overthrow the thrones of earthly kingdoms such as Rome. And yet in such hatred toward the message that set forth Christ as He was, they set aside those contradictions because this wasn’t the Messiah they expected or desired. So they determined that the message of Christ had to be stopped by some means ó the desired end justifying their unscrupulous means. We see herein the truth of the adage often invoked in such situations when one concludes òthe enemies of my enemies are my friends.ö We saw that when the Jews and the Roman government came together to crucify our Lord and we see the same dynamic displayed here by the unbelieving Jews in their hatred of this truth.

F. Verse 8: Notice that this accusation had some effect for it “...*troubled the people and the rulers.*ö We can see how this would instill fear in them for had the accusation proved true, then that could have meant:

1. A genuine threat of revolution and upheaval *and / or*
2. For those found consorting or identifying with this message, that they too might come under suspicion or charge by the Roman government.

G. Verse 9:

1. Here we can conclude that the magistrates received some satisfaction from Jason and the other or possibly by the defense they made for themselves and the apostles and how the doctrine of Christ pertained to a heavenly rather than temporal kingdom.
2. And so it says that they let them go after having “*taken security*” from them. This security may have been in the form of their assurances that it was not sedition or (as some suggest) may have been a form of bail or a bond that would carry with it assurances that they would be forthcoming with Paul and Silas were they later to discover there to be some legitimacy to the accusations.
3. In any event the release took place & they sent Paul and Silas away by cover of night to Berea.

III. How this Message Turns the World Upside Down

- A. What they intended in verse 7 when they described Paul and Silas as “...*These that have turned the world upside down...*” was to falsely accuse these preachers of the Gospel of provoking civil trouble and mischief, discord, of inverting all order and regularity. So these enemies set the city *an uproar..*” (vs. 5) and then put the blame on the Paul and his company.
- B. But there is a truth that their message (not them) is indeed one that turns the world upside down.
 1. It does so because it is disturbing and disruptive:
 - (a) First to those such as these unbelieving Jews it runs counter to all that they believe and trust in. Again, “Light has come into the world and men love darkness.” Don’t tell me that there is nothing I can do.
 - (b) To the ones for whom Christ lived and died, to whom it is revealed, the Gospel also does upset our order of things it just as the Philippian jailer’s ground was shaken not only by the earthquake, but the natural presumption of how deliverance might be found from God it by what He does in Christ.
 2. And this message (not these men) turns the world upside down for it proclaims something that it is not just different it but a way of salvation diametrically opposed to the one which seems right to us. And this disturbing, 180 degree reversal as it pertains to our understanding of how God saves a sinner is why genuine God-given faith is always accompanied by initial repentance from idolatry (God as we imagined Him to be based upon a false notion of how sinners were saved).

III.B. How Upside Down

3. And this repentance is likewise from dead, religious works that we sinfully had thought possessed some merit that would commend us before a holy God. So this repentance involves a total rejection and repudiation of the way that seemed right to us.
4. This is an important concept to consider as we heed the command to make our own calling and election sure. For we also hear the command of our Lord in Luke 13 saying, ***“Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”***
5. So, we had best be able to identify that such has been the case with us ó that there has been a 180 degree reversal in that which we once imagined concerning God and how He saves sinners. Why, it requires a new birth and the accompanying faculties of life to even see, hear, and believe with the heart God’s gospel! That’s how upside down it is from the natural religious notions that the spiritually dead (such as we all were) initially entertain.
6. Consider these passages which set forth how upside down the truth of the Gospel is compared with what we naturally presume or imagine:
 - (a) ***There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*** Prov. 16:25
 - (b) ***í for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*** Luke 16:15b
 - (c) Consider our Lord’s words proving that we need a revelation beyond our own wisdom (and therefore our wisdom must be turned upside down) when we read in Luke 10:21-22: ***In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: <newborns> even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. ²²All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.***
7. Reference frames ó [Review a fundamental concept in elementary physics, illustrated by the various frames of reference relative to the speed of a moving train ó whether riding on it, riding at a different speed alongside it, or observing it from a still position at a railroad crossing]. Our understanding of God and how He saves sinners likewise depends on our frame of reference. And one who is given spiritual life has been given a new understanding ó for he has a totally new (upside down) frame of reference. And that new spirit given frame of reference has the born again believer embracing the gospel of grace in stark contrast to the religion of works which we otherwise will cling to. Dead men can’t see it any other way.

IV. Closing: (Read Acts 17:30-32a)

- A. We will examine these verses in more depth in part 5 of this series, but know that the necessity of this righteousness by which we all shall be ultimately judged is why He “**must needs**” die and be raised from the dead. We need a righteousness before God’s justice that we cannot produce.
- B. Sadly, many (even most who sincerely attempt to celebrate the event of His resurrection each Easter holiday), deny its necessity and thereby they too unwittingly, mock our Lord and Savior.

But I pray better for you. Believe on Christ ó seeing the necessity of His death and resurrection as the establishment of the only ground and basis upon which this holy God is reconciled unto any sinner.

And rejoice in seeing His resurrection, even this day, in certain assurance that satisfaction was made for: “***That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***” (Rom. 5:21)

As you are privileged to sit under the sound of the Gospel that God calls óí ***the power of God unto salvation...***”, I pray that if God hasn’t already done so ó that as was the case (not only for these believers in Macedonia but) for all who truly believe on Him ó that likewise He will turn your world upside down!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself ó the Bible.