

40—Acts 17.1-9 (16.35-40)—Turning the World Right Side Up

- I. Introduction
 - a. We get another opportunity to see in this text how the world understands the world they live in. The people of Thessalonica say in verse 6 that Paul and Silas have turned the world upside down. That's how they understand it. But the reality is, humanity's sin against God turned the world upside down. Paul and Silas come with the good news of Jesus Christ to turn the world right-side up.
- II. Main Point
 - a. The Risen Lord Jesus is making all things new through the proclamation of the gospel by his messengers.
- III. Outline
 - a. Pushed out of Philippi but left a gospel community
 - b. Onto Thessalonica and many are persuaded
- IV. Exposition
 - a. Before we dive into the scene in Thessalonica, we need to backtrack to see how they got there. God had called them to Macedonia and their stop in Philippi turned out to be providentially hard and amazing. Let's take note that Paul and Silas are pushed out of Philippi but they leave behind a gospel community.
 - i. We left off last week with the salvation of the jailer and his family. The officials had people of the town beat Paul and Silas with rods and then ordered the jailer to lock them up securely with their feet in the stocks.
 - ii. But these two messengers of God begin singing praises and God shakes the foundations of the prison which opens the doors and loosens all the chains.
 - iii. The jailer, certain the prisoners had escaped, pulls his sword to take his own life but Paul stops him assuring that all the prisoners are still there.
 - iv. He comes trembling before Paul and Silas asking, "What must I do to be saved?" And as you know, Paul doesn't direct him not to Apollos but to Jesus Christ in whom he should trust and follow! Indeed, he does along with the whole family.
 - v. It appears the living quarters of the jailer were probably part of the prison. He gets word from the magistrates through the police to let Paul and Silas go in peace.
 - vi. But Paul has a problem with this.
 1. First he makes clear they were beaten publicly without a trial and thrown into prison.
 - a. This wouldn't have been a problem by law if they were merely Jews. But being a Roman colony, they were subject to Roman law and you could not beat an uncondemned Roman citizen.
 - b. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and this puts the authorities in the wrong and they know it because it says when they heard this they were afraid.
 - i. What could Paul and Silas have done at this point by law?
 1. They could report this to the emperor which would not turn out well for the magistrates.
 2. They could have remained silent and went out peacefully as they were ordered.
 - ii. I think it was important to make clear they had not broken any laws.
 1. For the community of believers that will remain there, the gospel witness is harmed by lawlessness.
 2. Most certainly, Paul and Silas believe God is the ultimate Ruler but insofar as Roman law does not cause his people to disobey then his people should be the best citizens of their earthly nation.
 - a. Pay your taxes
 - b. Obey the laws of the land

- c. Do good and not evil
 - 3. The church at Philippi might have had some explaining to do if the officials and people had secretly sent them away.
 - a. They would have at least been afraid they might be beaten and imprisoned for their association with this group missionaries.
 - b. It would have possibly made it more difficult for the believers too.
- 2. Therefore, Paul demands that the magistrates come and lead these Roman citizens who were condemned without a trial out of themselves. Come let everyone know that it was you who broke the law not us.
 - a. With much fear, the magistrates come and apologize to them.
 - i. This tells you just how serious this was. They knew the possibilities.
 - b. Having been in a few situations in cities for which I was not citizen and your citizenship is basically in your pocket (which will call a passport) there seems to be a level of confidence in the system for which you do not have in other countries.
 - i. Regardless of where you are and where your citizenship resides, we ought to be people of obey the law and if possible demand that even the officials obey the law.
- vii. Paul and Silas are taken out of the prison and asked to leave the city.
 - 1. They didn't immediately leave Philippi.
 - 2. They first visited Lydia where there seems to be even more followers of Jesus.
 - 3. Though the messengers are being asked to leave town, they leave a community of believers behind.
 - 4. At every point except the Ethiopian eunuch (and we have history to say a church did begin there), when people repent and believe in Christ they are added to the body of Christ.
 - a. In other words, they are added to the church. Christians are not meant to be alone. They are commanded to assemble together with each other for fellowship, and worship.
 - b. They are commanded to help each other grow. Hold each other accountable. Disciple those who refuse to repent. Send out. Support. Check on. Serve. These are things we are commanded to do together.
 - c. Paul and Silas leave a community of faith to do these things.
 - i. Here's some major encouragement. As you know, there's a book called Philippians. Later Paul will write a letter to the church there. Isn't that amazing?
 - 1. There are several promises from that letter but one I pray often and one that applies in this situation is this: (Phil. 1:6) ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Paul believed this before he stepped in Philippi. When he and Silas leave, they leave trusting the good promises of God!
 - a. (Phil. 1:1) Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons

Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

2. Wow...what a church!
 - a. Are they merely imitating Paul and Silas when they receive the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit?
 - b. Are they only imitating these messengers when their faith has gone out to the point that Paul and Silas need not say anything?
 - c. They are also imitating God! This is his mission. This is Christ's suffering.
- ii. In verse 2, Luke describes Paul and Silas' approach to making the gospel known in Thessalonica. For three Sabbath days, they reasoned from the Scriptures.
 1. This is a specific method. It is a public debate of sorts at the synagogue. To reason with them is to exchange each other's understanding of the Scriptures.
 - a. They would argue for a certain position. And as we know there are many positions but not all of them are correct.
 - b. This is the first time we hear of the messengers using this method but it becomes a very useful and common way of doing mission work the cities that follow.
 - i. Friends, it is all the more important that we know the Bible from beginning to end.
 1. We need to know it not merely that we can make it known to others but that's what you do with people for whom you are in a relationship with. It's what you do when you love someone.
 2. You know what they like. You know what pleases them. You know what doesn't please them.
 3. In this case, you know God and his ways! You know the hope you have in Christ.
 4. And out of that deepening relationship with the Lord you are always ready to have this exchange with someone.
 - c. Particularly in this debate, Paul is reasoning from Scripture by explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.
 - i. First I want to point out these two descriptions of reasoning: explaining and proving.
 1. Explaining means to open. It's as though Paul is opening the door to a room full of these truths.
 - a. Certainly someone can open a door to wrong ideas of God. In fact, that's the exact word the serpent used in Gen. 3 when he deceived Eve saying, (Gen. 3:5) "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 - b. And because these people know evil, they need to know...they need their eyes opened for salvation from this evil that they know. And Jesus is the One who came to crush the serpent and bring redemption for all who will repent and believe in him.

2. To prove is to place clear and compelling evidence before them.
 - a. Like one of those puzzles that has a series of dots that when connected you can then see what all the dots were describing.
 - b. Paul is connecting the dots.
 - c. He didn't merely open a door to the room and not arrange the furniture for them to see and enjoy.
 - d. He invites them in to a feast that's been prepared for them to taste and see if the Lord is good.
- ii. The second thing we need to see is what Paul is opening and setting before them. He focuses in on the fact that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.
 1. It was necessary is a divine necessity. Luke uses that often to make clear that God designed this and this was the only to accomplish redemption for fallen humanity.
 2. Most certainly Paul would have gone to those very important passages that describe this design of suffering:
 - a. Deuteronomy 21, Psalms 2, 16, 110, 118, and most assuredly Isaiah 52 and 53.
 - b. These have already been cited in the earlier sermons in Acts.
 - c. Indeed, Jesus predicted this again and again that the Son of Man must suffer, die, and rise again.
 - d. Then after the resurrection, did Jesus not reason with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus about this very thing?
 - i. They had said in (Lk. 24:21) we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
 - ii. (Lk. 24:25-27) ²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
 - e. And the very thing Paul is doing here in Thessalonica to open the door to understanding this, Jesus did for those two disciples.
 - i. (Lk. 24:31-32) ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"
 - ii. We open the scriptures...we tell the old, old story and God.
 - iii. This is our source!

- d. We are going to end here with what happened after Paul reasoned from the Scriptures!
 - i. Notice verse (Acts 17:4) ⁴ 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.
 - 1. Paul looks back on this in his letter to the Thessalonians: (1 Thess. 1:5) ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.
 - 2. They were persuaded as Paul proclaimed Christ and the Holy Spirit worked to open their eyes!
 - 3. This idea of being persuaded is so rich.
 - a. It carries this beautiful image of being secure. They thought they had imprisoned Paul and Silas securely but we know how that shook out.
 - b. This story proved that the word of God is not imprisoned!
 - c. To be persuaded is to be secure as in secure in God as your refuge.
 - i. I used to duck hunt and we would go to the refuge to see how many ducks were in the area. They were essentially safe and secure there. If you were to take a shot at them while in the refuge then you would end up with your feet in the stocks.
 - d. This image of being persuaded that is set securely in the refuge of God is amazing.
 - e. And one more part of this word means to trust. You can trust that you are forever secure in Christ. The One who suffered for you will protect you forever.

V. Response

- a. There's a hymn that says this in the chorus: "I know whom I have believed in, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day."
- b. This is should be our response! (Ps. 46:1) God is our refuge and strength
- c. If he's not, I plead with you to turn to him because outside of him it is not safe, it is not secure, it cannot be trusted. Come to Jesus.