

Acts

Part 44 – “The Message that Turns the World Upside Down”

Acts 17:1-15

After leaving Philippi, where they were disgracefully mistreated, Paul and Silas head southward toward the Macedonian cities of Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, and Berea. Their experiences in Thessalonica and Berea illustrate the diversity of responses to the gospel provokes. At Thessalonica, the conversion of many synagogue attending Gentiles stirred up jealousy among the Jews. Indeed, so great was their jealousy that they provoked a mob of unsavory characters to act against Paul and Silas.

At Berea, however, the response from those within the synagogue was radically different. These Jews and Gentiles gave Paul a fair hearing, testing what he taught by the Scriptures. As a result there were many of those within the synagogue who were converted along with Greek noblewomen and men.

But the opposition continued. The rabble-rousers from Thessalonica pursued Paul and Silas to Berea. The charge leveled by the



trouble-makers was that Paul and Silas were guilty of sedition. That is, the evangelists were proclaiming a king other than Caesar. The claim was that their message would cause civil unrest and eventually violent revolution. The irony was that the civil unrest was being caused by those who accused Paul and Silas.

However, there is another sense in which the charge against Paul and Silas was unintentionally accurate. They certainly did not advocate any civil unrest. Quite the opposite in fact. However, their message of a crucified and risen Savior had indeed been turning the world “upside down,” only not in the sense that the accusers claimed.

Main Idea: God’s mission to advance the gospel around the world is carried out through the proclamation of his word and will be met with both belief and fierce opposition.

As it typically true, there are contemporary lessons we may learn from the mission of Paul and Silas to the region of Macedonia. We are reminded of the fact that the enduring mission of God for this fallen world is the powerful advance of the gospel to all nations and peoples. That being the case, the primary directive of the church remains from generation to generation: to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit for the salvation of the nations.

1. The indispensable activity in God's mission

Vv. 1-2, 10-11

The proclamation and teaching of God's Word is the indispensable activity for the church. Again and again in the Book of Acts we see that central to the ministry of the apostles was the ministry of the Word.

There will be various good activities and projects that accompany our efforts to advance the gospel. But the proclamation and instruction of God's Word is the one indispensable activity of the mission.

The differing responses of those in Thessalonica from those in Berea highlights the fact that faith has an orientation of trust rather than skepticism toward the Word of God (Vv. 3-4, 11-12).

2. The effectual power for God's mission

Vv. 3, 10-12

Not unsurprisingly, the mission of God is fueled by an otherworldly power. It is not a power that derives from human competence or mystical experiences. The gospel is the power of God entrusted to the church for the salvation of the nations (Rom 1:16-17; 10:17).

The goal of Paul's instruction from the Scriptures was to get his hearers to the gospel (Vs. 3). Ultimately it was not Paul's skillful rhetoric or powers of persuasion that brought about faith in the unbelievers. It was the power of the gospel.

3. The inevitable opposition to God's mission

Vv. 5-7, 13-14

Unbelief is unable to overcome the gospel with rational argument so it often manifests itself in jealousy, dishonesty, and violent opposition.

Vs. 6 – "These men who have turned the world upside down..." There is something disorienting about the gospel to those who set themselves against it.

a) The gospel challenges all contrary truth claims.

The gospel could not peacefully co-exist with the claims of the leaders of the synagogue.

b) The gospel challenges all contrary claims to authority.

While the Christians posed no threat to the civil authorities it is nevertheless true that their message proclaimed a King whose rule would eventually supplant that of Caesar.

c) The gospel challenges typical human responses to opposition.

The believers refused to respond in kind to the jealousy, dishonesty, and violence to which they were treated.