Upside Down and Right-Side Up

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[0:00] Tonight we pick up with Paul and Silas and Timothy and they are in Thessalonica and the events that happened there.

! I'm going to read that scripture passage and then we'll go through it. Acts chapter 17 verse 1. And now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.
And Paul went in and as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.
And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out of the crowd.
And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.
[1:30] And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things, and when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. And then just verse 10 says, The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.

I doubt that any of you would disagree with me that this world is not the way or it's not how God created it to be.
This world is cursed by sin, and we see the effects of that every day, don't we? We see that right now in what's happening up north in Minnesota. And I don't know if you guys have had an opportunity to see it, but the church service that was interrupted on Sunday during worship by protesters, and Don Lemon, who was putting a microphone in the pastor's face and the parishioners' faces, and doing that and defending the perceived rights he believed the protesters had, while not acknowledging the rights of the church to have the ability to gather and worship the Lord without any kind of interference.
And so we see things like that in the world, the double standards that exist, and we think our world is turned upside down.
The good news is that the way things are are not the way they always will be. The Bible tells us that Jesus will return in Revelation 19. He will take back the earth in Revelation 5, and he will establish his rule on it and over it.
[3:13] We read about that in many places, Psalm 2, one of those places. The curse of sin then will be lifted, and the earth will be restored, and the millennial kingdom of the Lord on earth will be inaugurated, and the earth will be uncreated and then recreated by him.

And we read about that in Revelation 21. And then things will be as they should be. But because things aren't now the way they ought to be, doesn't mean that God isn't active in the world right now.
God has sent messengers to proclaim his light of truth to lost people living in the darkness of sin. We see in Scripture that when such people are sent with a message from God, it challenges and it disrupts their desire to sin, and oftentimes they respond with rage.
Those who have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, who call evil good and good evil, don't like it when God sends someone to them to share God's perspective, which sets their upside-down world

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right-side up.
1 Kings records how God used Elijah to upset, or really to rewrite and correct, King Ahab's upside-down world.
[4:36] If you remember, Ahab was an evil king who was truly ruled by his even more wicked wife Jezebel. Jezebel's influence on Ahab led him and the nation of Israel down the ruinous path of idolatry.

Ahab's sin caused other people to sin, and that incured God's wrath. 1 Kings 17, verses 31-33 say, And as if it had been a light thing for him, speaking of Ahab, to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him.
He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria, and Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.
And the kings of Israel before him were not good men either. In chapter 17, God sends Elijah to Ahab with a message. Chapter 17, verse 1 says, Now Elijah, the Tishbite of Tishbi in Gilead, said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word.
Later, after God stopped sending rain, which led to a famine in the land, as a result of Ahab's sin, in which he led the nation to sin, Elijah and Ahab meet face to face.
[6:14] 1 Kings 18, 17 records that meeting. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, Is it you, you troubler of Israel?

And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you have. In your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. It's Ahab and his sinful leadership that plunged Israel into sin, which incurred God's wrath.
But Ahab is so blinded by his sin that he blames Elijah for the troubles that he brought upon himself. We see this pattern throughout scripture.
We see it with Jeremiah, with Amos, and we see it with Jesus. All falsely accused of causing trouble by testifying to the truth. In Acts 17, Paul and Silas and Timothy enter the city of Thessalonica. There Paul preaches the gospel in the synagogue on three Sabbaths with the results that some Jews, along with Greeks and leading women in the city, were persuaded to trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
[7:25] However, not all the Jews believed. Like Ahab, they accused Paul of causing trouble, of upsetting their way of doing things, of turning the world upside down.

The truth is that the sinful world is upside down. And when we proclaim the gospel, we encourage people to repent of their sin, turn to Christ, and be part of his right side up kingdom.
In this passage, we see what happens when Christians proclaim the gospel. When we encourage unbelievers to repent of their sin, turn to Christ, and be part of his right side up kingdom.
And so the main idea for our study tonight is a question. How are Christians used by God to turn an upside down world right side up?
And there's three ways that we see in this passage. First, Christians use scripture to convince unbelievers to trust in Jesus. Christians use scripture to convince unbelievers to trust in Jesus.
[8:29] Paul, Silas, and Timothy leave Philippi after being in prison there for preaching the gospel. And if you remember, while they were in prison, God sent an earthquake which led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household.

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. And during this time in that place, to inflict corporal punishment on Roman citizens was a big no-no. And so after informing the magistrates of the city that they had broken Roman law, they became afraid of what they'd done.
And they apologized to Paul as Paul said, you know, no, you're not just going to sneak us out of here. You're going to walk us through the street. And it's going to be clear that you did the wrong thing.
And so leaving Philippi, the missionaries traveled southwest through Amphipolis and Apollonia before they came to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia.
Today that's northern Greece. And it was, and it still is, a major port city. So let's look again at verses two and three. It says, And Paul went in the synagogue, as was his custom, and on three

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Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer to rise from the dead, and saying, This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.
[9:56] Now when we get to verses 16 through 33, we'll see that Paul uses a little bit of a different tactic with the Gentiles in Athens. He'll begin there by talking about an altar to an unknown God.

He starts his proclamation of the gospel with the Athenians in that way because they don't trust the Old Testament scriptures as being the word of God.
But though he starts that way with the Athenians, he eventually gets to the truth revealed in scripture. Paul didn't have the New Testament like we do, and though we may start a gospel conversation without beginning it with scripture, we should never conclude a gospel conversation without using scripture or presenting the truth about Jesus, who he is, and what he's done to save people from their sins.
God has chosen to use those whom he's been gracious to save to share the gospel with unbelievers whom he's chosen to likewise graciously save.
The Bible says that God is sovereign in salvation. It also says that people have a responsibility to believe the gospel. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate persuader, and he uses Christians as his witnesses to reason with unbelievers that they would see their sin, that they would see their need to be saved from their sin, and that Jesus Christ is the only way for them to be saved.
[11:29] For unbelievers to see their need to be saved, they must hear the bad news before they hear the good news, before they can really understand why the gospel is good news. But, unbelievers don't like hearing the bad news.

They don't want to admit that they are sinful because in their mind they think that they're a good person. And, for the most part, usually we can find somebody who we appear to be better than, and if not, there's always somebody like Hitler, right?
I mean, hopefully people can say, well, I'm not as bad as that guy was. But they are offended by the thought that a holy God would punish them for their sin.
Unfortunately, the fear of offending others, offending unbelievers, has led many to share the gospel in a way that I think offends the Lord. John MacArthur said, some Christians believe it's all important not to offend non-believers.
Accordingly, they focus their gospel presentation only on what Christ has to offer the sinner to improve his life and time and eternity. To declare to the non-Christian that his sinful life is an offense to a holy God and call him to mourn and repent is considered poor marketing technique.
[12:45] The true gospel must offend the non-believer by confronting him with his sin and judgment. Paul proclaimed the whole gospel which is the true gospel.

He used Old Testament scriptures to reason, explain, and prove that Jesus is the Messiah. Joy asked a good question about what's expository preaching.
This is what we see Paul doing. He takes Old Testament scripture and he explains it so that they understand and points to them as Jesus as the one who is the interpretive key to understand it.
The Greek word translated as reasoned is dialogomai from which we get our English word dialogue. To have dialogue is to have discussion.
And so we can imagine Paul in the synagogue reading scripture then explaining scripture and proving from those scriptures that Jesus is the Christ and why it was necessary for him to die on the cross and then rise again and then after he reads the scripture explains the scripture he would have answered questions.
[13:58] And so to be an effective witness for Jesus we must know what we know and be willing to be able to answer unbelievers questions about the truth we believe. 1 Peter 3 15 says but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect.

I've shared this story before about my best friend in college who was an unbeliever and who I witnessed to one night in our apartment and God didn't save him that night but after we graduated anytime I would see him or talk to him he would always say hey I remember that night in our apartment and what you said to me and I can't ever forget it and so I'd try to you know share the gospel more with him I encouraged him to read the Bible I said start in the gospel of John he said no I'm going to start at the very beginning I'm going to start in Genesis and I said okay just glad you're reading the Bible and he did he started reading in Genesis and he got to Judges 19 and the

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story of the Levite and his concubine which if you know that story it's a terrible story about the horrors of sin and he wrote me an email and he was appalled by what he read and he basically was wondering why would God allow something like this to happen
I wrote him a long response in that situation saying to him well I don't I don't know you know just keep reading just forget about that part and you know why don't you just start reading in John like I told you to that wouldn't have worked he had a question and I needed to have an answer for him and even though I wrote that long answer to him I you know I think he said thank you and that was kind of it I didn't hear from him for a little while longer years later but thankfully the next time I did hear from him it was his wife telling my wife that they were being baptized on Easter because they both been saved down in Arizona where he moved so praise God for that but all this to say we shouldn't fear people asking us questions about our faith even the hard questions and maybe in the time you say you know what I haven't thought about that I'm not sure and that's okay as long as you are honest you say let me find out and I'm going to get back to you so we shouldn't answer people's questions answer the questions of the unbeliever and again the better we know scripture the better we'll be able to answer their questions
Luke doesn't record the details of Paul's arguments or the exact scriptures he used as he reasoned with his audience to prove to them that Jesus is the Messiah and why it was necessary for him to suffer and rise from the dead Paul may have probably referred to the Old Testament sacrificial system and to passages like Psalm 22 Isaiah 53 using those types and those scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Messiah who had to die in his first coming he likewise probably drew their attention to Psalm 16 to show that the Messiah would rise from the dead using these scriptures and types as well as others from the Old Testament and connecting them to Jesus proved his conclusion that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to die and to rise from the dead and that this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ I wrote my dissertation on the use of persuasion in preaching and this is one of the passages that I would have used to prove that persuasion has a place in preaching because the people were persuaded the
Bible says that right in that study I analyzed Paul's preaching I noted how he sought to persuade or convince unbelievers to believe the gospel however there's a large part in my dissertation that says that while we are called to persuade and to convince ultimately it's the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate persuader and convincer but he uses our proclamation of the gospel our passionate proclamation to save some we are like the farmers in Jesus' parable in Mark chapter 4 who scatters seed just goes around scattering seed and then he goes home and he goes to bed and he doesn't know how the seed grows but he trusts God that it will grow and so we are like that we are God's agents his ambassadors in this upside down world seeking to convince people to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus
[18:50] Christ his son this is what Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 5 20 therefore we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God verse 4 informs us of the results of Paul's explaining and proving from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ who died and rose again to atone for our sins verse 4 says 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 these would have been God fearing Gentiles who were meeting with the Jews in the synagogues so now second Christians endure conflict with those who reject Jesus Christians endure conflict with those who reject Jesus another passage from second Corinthians chapter two verses fifteen through seventeen Paul says of Christians for we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved among those who are perishing to one a fragrance from death to death to the other a fragrance from life to life who is sufficient for these things for we are not like so many peddlers of

God's word but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ as we saw in our overview of the first sixteen chapters of Acts last week and as again we see in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ some hear the good news they believe it and they're saved others hear the exact same good news but their reaction is to reject it in rage in anger such was the case for some in Thessalonica verse five says but the Jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason seeking to bring them out of the crowd so the unbelieving Jews at Thessalonica they were enraged by the success of the gospel they were like those that Jesus testified about in his meeting with Nicodemus in John 3 19 there he said and this is the judgment the light has come into the world and

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people have loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil!
And so these unbelieving Jews who heard the gospel and responded in rage and jealousy over those who were being saved by it they became jealous and they recruited troublemakers to do the very thing that they accused the missionaries of doing forming mobs and rioting is not something Christians do in fact it's the opposite when we see mobs and riots in the Bible it's persecution against Christians there's nowhere in scripture where we ever see Christians respond to any kind of injustice perceived or true by forming mobs and rioting when they arrested the apostles and they put them in prison we don't see the believers saying you know what we need to do is we need to find some troublemakers and we need to form a mob and we need to go riot when they arrested Jesus the disciples scattered they did what a lot of us would do they fled in terror as
Jesus said that they would but they didn't form a mob and riot it's the opposite Christians don't do that okay I gotta find my place here I get off my soapbox forming mobs and riots is not something Christians do it's something that those who belong to the darkness and are a part of the evil it's something they do this mob assumes that Paul Silas and Timothy were staying in the house of a man named Jason verses six and seven said and when they could not find them they dragged Jason and some of the brothers these would have been recently converted Christians before the city authorities shouting these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also and Jason has received them and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king Jesus I think this part is interesting the term in the Greek that Luke uses to describe the authorities is polytarchs archaeology done in this area has found inscriptions from this time with that exact word that describes the title of these leaders in
Thessalonica the unbelieving Jewish leaders brought two charges against the believers first they said these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also and Jason has received them the charge was that the missionaries are troublemakers the second charge before I say that again this is ironic because it was the mob who was creating the uproar in the city missionaries hadn't created any kind of uproar in the city isn't it interesting that those in the wrong accused those in the right of doing the thing that they are themselves doing I think of the again the videos from the church in Minnesota the protesters were terrorizing people gathered to worship in peace frightening their children the protesters accused Christians of not acting like Christ by disrupting the worship of Christ Don Lemon accused the Christians of being unwilling to have a conversation while the protesters were shouting and yelling and showing no interest at all in having any kind of peaceful meaningful conversation but by declaring that
[24:32] Jason had received the missionaries they secondly were were accusing him of a more serious crime harboring criminals who were who they said were acting against the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king Jesus in this time to acknowledge any other king but Caesar was one of the most serious crimes that a person could commit in the Roman Empire it was for allegedly claiming to be a rival to Caesar that the Romans crucified Jesus John 19 12 church history informs us that Paul's refusal to worship Caesar led to his execution like the magistrates in Philippi the authorities in Thessalonica did the easy thing instead of doing the right thing verse 8 and 9 said and the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things and when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest they let them go Jason and the other

Christians were forced to put up money kind of like a bond for a person accused of a crime and in this case they put up this bond like you know okay here's this money we're not going to cause any more trouble Paul Silas and Timothy no doubt prayerfully decided that the best course of action for them at this time was to leave Thessalonica however those Christians they left behind for a time endured not longer after his initial visit to Thessalonica Paul was in Corinth where he wrote the two letters that we call first and second Thessalonians in those letters he addresses the new found church in Thessalonica first Thessalonians is one of the first of Paul's letters or epistles to churches despite the hostile environment the new believer experienced in Thessalonica they were holding fast to the word that was preached to them and the news of their devotion to
Christ was becoming well known throughout Macedonia Paul writes about that in first Thessalonians 1 7 through 8 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia in Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything the attempts of those who hated Jesus rejected the gospel and opposed his messengers could not stop the work of the

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Holy Spirit a church was founded in Thessalonica full of believers who continued to endure and continued the work the Lord called them to do we don't know what the future holds for Christians in our nation but we know who holds the future we know that God is sovereign we know that he's in control we know that we need to continue to do what he's commanded us to do to share the gospel to defend the truths that we believe and to endure whatever hardships!
Paul Silas and Timothy were done in Thessalonica for now but they weren't done sharing the gospel and so third and I'll cover verses 10 through 15 in greater depth next week but right now what I want you to see is that Christians continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ we use God's word to convince unbelievers to see their sin and their need for Jesus as their Lord and Savior we endure conflict because of those who love the darkness!
rather than the light and! we in the hopes that they will believe there's good lessons for us to learn from the next passage of scripture that we'll look at hopefully next Wednesday how do we adjust we are called by the Lord to turn an upside down world right side up we're called by the Lord to turn an upside down world right side up and eventually!
[29:27] we know that He will return and he will uncreate and recreate the world where there is no effects of sin in your life and the life of other people we look forward to that day but until that day we are called by the Lord to have these conversations to share the gospel to be able to answer people's questions and to bleed with them to turn from their sins and to turn to Jesus Christ they need to know the bad news so they can understand how good the good news is so if we don't tell people about sin then why do you need a savior so we have to make sure that they understand that their sin is committed against God and God in his grace has made a way for them to be saved from it by sending!

we purify from our sins but we have a future and a world to come that's awesome let's pray Lord thank you for the time that we've been able to have tonight to gather and to pray and to share praises and to make requests to you Lord and to look in your word and read in Acts chapter 17 God and just see that though time changes that a lot of things don't change in time that Lord as we share the gospel there are those who thankfully Lord who have their eyes opened by you and who are transformed and who are saved and who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and there's others Lord who just reject the good news of who Jesus is and not only do they reject it but they get angry and they take out their anger on you they direct it at us your people Lord we see that happening more and more in our country we know it happens in other countries like it happened in Acts that there are brothers and sisters in Christ who aren't just having their worship services interrupted but they're being killed for their faith and so Lord we pray for them God we pray for their boldness and we pray for it's right side up world that you have prepared for those who have trusted in you and love you Father we do love you and we ask these things in Jesus name Amen

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