

# The Gospel Turns the World Upside Down

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[ 0 : 00 ] As we remain standing, let's just pray and commit this time to God. May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Good morning, dear friends. I want to begin by bringing greetings on behalf of Bishop Don Harvey and Bishop Stephen Leong and Bishop Trevor Walters.

I know those two have recently been here at St. John's and Bishop Don, I believe, is coming in March. And then you'll be covered by bishops for a while. But it's been my delight for the past week to be with you.

I thank you so much. I've met many of you and look forward to another opportunity to meeting everyone else. I am very grateful for the opportunity today to open God's Word.

This is a delight and a great privilege. I'm very grateful for the series that you are making your way through, the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Many of you, most of you probably were here last week when we looked at, with Keith Gantzer leading us, this pivotal chapter in this great portion of Scripture.

[ 1 : 24 ] Now, my text for this morning, actually there are two. I'm not good at choices, so I'm making two here. One is what was described as going on in Thessalonica.

It says, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. This is an indictment on Paul and Silas and Timothy.

And Jason has received them and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus. And then, at the sort of climax of Paul's talk to the Areopagus, what we'll get to pretty soon in Acts 17, verses 30 and 31, Paul says, This great chapter, as I said, comes on the heels of Acts 16.

If you remember, Paul and Silas were on this missionary journey. They had picked up Timothy along the way. They thought they were going to go to Mithynia and Mysia and Asia.

But the Holy Spirit said, No, no, no. And so, in some frustration, they find themselves up in Troas, desperately seeking the will of God.

[ 3 : 03 ] And in the night, Paul has a vision of a Macedonian saying, Come over and help us. What an understatement. The scriptures are great at understatements. Come over and help us. But that was enough to cause Paul and Silas and Timothy to immediately buy their boat tickets, concluding that God himself was calling them to preach the gospel in Macedonia.

So they made their way over there. They started trudging along what's called the Ignatian Way. They found themselves finally in Philippi, this great center, this great Roman center, named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great.

And there, a church is founded. You'll remember, in extraordinary circumstances, much turmoil, much conflict, even violence.

Innocent men flogged cruelly. But out of that, Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, she and her whole household came to faith in Christ.

A slave girl at the name of Jesus was freed from the oppression of Satan and his demons. And Keith, I think, rightly surmised that it's reasonable to believe this woman was not only freed from the power of Satan, but came to faith in Christ.

[ 4 : 23 ] And then, out of the circumstances whereby the men who thought they owned this woman had lost gain, out of that came a turmoil, court case, sort of.

They ended up being flogged in prison, an earthquake. A jailer led to Christ miraculously. He and his whole household been baptized. And they end up ministering to Paul and Silas in their wounds.

So a church was founded. But at the end of chapter 16, the authorities begged Paul and Silas, please get out of town now. And having spent a little more time with Lydia and the church, they made their way along the Ignatian Way.

And they find themselves having passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. I know nothing about these places, but I like their names. And so finally they came to Thessalonica.

Now, I'm going to try to look at this lengthy chapter under four headings. Number one, you see the gospel is what's it, the bearers of the gospel are Paul, Silas, and Timothy and Luke.

[ 5 : 28 ] But it's the gospel that's the critical issue here, isn't it? And so we're seeing a geographical shift, a move of God into Europe and through Europe to the whole known world.

So there's a geographical movement. We'll look at that very quickly. And then there's the question, okay, what is this message as portrayed, as articulated in Acts 17? We see it, interestingly, both in the synagogue and in the halls of learning in Athens, the great culture and academic center of the world.

Then we're going to talk about, okay, what was the response? Give you a little bit of a clue. It was mixed. Sounds pretty typical, doesn't it? And then finally I'm going to ask the question to personally, to me and to you, to the people of St. John's, what do we do with this?

What is the impact on our life right now here today in good old Vancouver, on the edge of Olympics, the whole world centered on this great city? Now, very simply, what we see is a familiar trend in the book of Acts.

Controversy moves people on, but with it goes the gospel. So, for instance, in Acts 7, it ends with the martyrdom of Stephen. So the Christians, under this great persecution, headed by a familiar guy, Saul of Tarsus, who's now one of the ones being persecuted, but he is the key, and so the Christians are fleeing for their lives, but as they go, they gossip the gospel.

[ 7 : 04 ] And so, Philip is in Samaria, and all of those things. So turmoil leading to the move of the gospel is familiar. It's not only turmoil. By the end of Acts 9, after Saul has been converted, and is now soon to be Paul, there is a season of peace, and the gospel goes forward then.

So it's not that turmoil is required. It's simply to say, the gospel goes forward either way, under the purposes of God. So there's this move along the Ignatian Way, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Pass Pass. Then Thessalonica, there's a synagogue. That's probably why he headed on that. And you'll see verses 1 through 9, that there's this time in Thessalonica.

Out of it comes a great church. 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, is Paul's letter to this great church. From Corinth, another great place. So, but there comes rabble-rousers who are stirred up because of jealousy.

This means that Paul and Silas and Timothy have to move on and they go to Berea. Now they're off the Ignatian Way and they're heading down south. There again a church is planted.

[ 8 : 18 ] Again they go to the synagogue. Again, and we'll notice some of the things that are distinctives of Berea. But the rabble-rousers from Thessalonica come down and they stir things up.

And this time Paul himself alone leaves, leaving Timothy and Silas to keep on fanning the flames of what God's doing in Berea. Paul is escorted to the coast, probably takes a boat, and ends up in Athens.

Now we're down into the south, into the Achaia area. So you've got the flow. Three communities we're thinking about in Acts 17. Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

Now what's the message? Well as we've already acknowledged, that Paul and Silas and Timothy seem to have identified the synagogue, if possible, as the beginning point, as the crack opening the gospel to a community.

Why would they do that? It's because they had all of the scriptures, we're talking the Old Testament here, at their disposal, as a given, as an understanding, as a vocabulary, which was available in order to bring them to Jesus.

[ 9 : 28 ] And so we read, for instance, in verses 2 and 3, and Paul went in, this is in Thessalonica, as was his custom, so this is his modus operandi, and on three Sabbath days, he had a sermon series of three, 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.

Now the word Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah, was a loaded term that every Jew would understand and have their thoughts about that and realize that the whole nation of Israel was

poised waiting for such a one.

Now what Paul and Silas and Timothy were saying is this Jesus, but therefore they had to explain why it was that he had to die and rise again. Now I am suggesting to you that I think Luke, who wrote of course the Gospel of Luke and wrote the Acts of the Apostles, his mind also went to a passage, a time where two desperate men, sad men on the first Easter, are trudging from Jerusalem to Emmaus and they are in despair and along comes one, they don't recognize who is of course Jesus, the risen Lord.

They don't recognize him, he asks them a question, what is going on? What are you guys talking about? They said, are you the only one in Jerusalem that doesn't know about this guy Jesus? It's sort of like, are you the only one in Vancouver that doesn't know that there's an Olympics going on? It's that kind of question. And so they proceeded, he said, what man? What's the deal? And so they told him about Jesus and the one good man and we had such hope in him. But now that they've crucified him, he's dead, he was laid in a grave, rumor has it his body's disappeared.

[ 11 : 25 ] Do you remember what Jesus said to them? Oh foolish men and slow of heart, was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise?

And beginning with Moses and all the scriptures, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained the things concerning himself in all the scriptures. What a walk that must have been as Jesus leafed through passage after passage.

See that? That's the Messiah. See that? Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Zechariah 12, Zechariah 13, and many more that he must have led them to.

All pointed to the fact that the Messiah was a suffering servant who had to die. Why did he have to die? He had to die because of your sin.

He was wounded for your transgressions. He was bruised for your iniquities. For our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

[ 12 : 31 ] And with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Paul proved to them that it was necessary because of your sin and mine for the Messiah, the Anointed One, to die.

When he went to Berea he must have preached the same message. But the difference in Berea was that in fact it says they were more noble minded. You remember the rabble rousers that in jealousy had an agenda and it was not to receive a Jesus.

In fact they were jealous because they felt they were losing their grip, their influence, their power. And so they had to stop this by any means possible. Berea though it says they were more noble minded than the Thessalonians because they received the word eagerly and searched the scriptures daily to see whether these things are so.

That's exciting isn't it? Imagine a group of people who are poised and ready and open and eager and hungry and ready lay it on me they say.

[ 13 : 52 ] And then as the person delivers it they're all the time taking it in receiving, receiving not swallowing hook, line and sinker but understanding the message and then returning to the scriptures it says daily to see whether these things are so.

I submit to you that every preacher who is worth his or her salt wants that kind of group of people. And I also submit to you that I have a sense right here in Vancouver City in St. John's Shaughnessy is a pattern and an environment where that's your way of thinking.

And if it is praise the Lord if it isn't make it so. Because your job is to receive but it doesn't matter how whatever the status whatever the person it's never yours to say well they have such credibility therefore I just have to believe it.

It's your responsibility to search the scriptures and see whether these things are so. Well that's what the Bereans did and we can be very grateful for that. Now when Paul got to Athens he's now in this incredible place and he's all by himself.

He's stirred up it says because of the of all these idols the darkness spiritually in the midst of such learning such such an incredible heritage and he's devastated and while he's waiting for he's now called for Timothy and for Silas but while he's waiting he can wait no longer.

[ 15 : 20 ] He reasons in the synagogue and in the marketplace every day and finally word gets to the the big leagues the Areopagus that there is this guy who's saying pretty weird stuff and talking about resurrection and so on and so they decided to haul him up from the minor leagues up to the

Areopagus and say speak to us because they had a pattern which was to to argue and tussle with and engage anything and everything that was going and this was a new word and so they were wanting to hear from it.

Acts 17 verses 22 through to the end of the chapter is the record of that message and unlike the one to the synagogues Paul did not have the vocabulary of an Old Testament to draw the people to so he had to find other ways.

You can imagine in his stirring up in his longing Lord how in the world are you going to bring the gospel to such a darkened people though they feel so bright in their learning.

How Lord? And they're so religious and so if you follow the course of his argument he starts verses 22 and 23 says I perceive that you're religious in every way.

He said I saw all these idols I get the picture I see the Acropolis I know what that's about but I came upon a monument which was to be to the unknown God and to him who you have worshipped in ignorance him I proclaim to you.

[16:53] That's his opening that's his crevice that's his opportunity and then he begins to speak verses 24 through 26 he says this God is not like any of the other pantheon he's one who has made the world and everything in it he's one who's the Lord of heaven and earth he's one who does not need or does not leave live in temples no matter how great and of course he's under the shadow of this incredible edifice the Acropolis he does not need anything from man but from one man he's made all the nations of the world verses 27 and 28 he speaks about the fact that we've been made to lean after to feel after and to know this one and he quotes from familiar poets verse 29 he says that this God is not made of stone verse 30 he says he has been patient in your ignorance and of course to the unknown God speaks of ignorance he has been patient up till now verse 30 the times of ignorance

God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent this God who is the creator God who does not live in temples seems to feel that all the created humankind are answerable to him he lays claim on every life and you can imagine the stir as Paul spoke about these things verse 31 this God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed not your favorite not the one that you can relate to not the one that sort of fits in with your world view or whatever he apparently has his designated man who is the one through which all the world and everyone in it for all time will be held accountable but good news he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead see the resurrection of Jesus does at least two things it proves who Jesus is

Romans 1 4 says Jesus who was born of the seed of date according to the flesh but was declared with power to be the son of God by the resurrection from the dead the resurrection of Jesus was this incredible fanfare of the almighty God saying this is the man this is the Messiah this is the anointed one this is Lord and King but more than that it's good news because it says there's a way through that one by faith in him for all that holds us down sin death judgment Satan to be that has been defeated in this one critical act there's good news for all those who run by faith to him this is an assurance this is good news well what was the response well as we've already said it was mixed make no mistake though in Thessalonica that when it says things like 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 you know it sounds like oh well there's not bad you know a few people you know and and but this is this is the scriptures are the master of the understatement they don't talk the way we do it's not about hyperbole where you think last Sunday was great you know and sort of it's the getting better and better and better what product I have is better than the bath type thing but what this is saying is a lot of people came to Christ now if you tie that with 1st Thessalonians you discover this is Paul writing from Corinth to this great church you discover his feedback of what indeed happened and it was a revival it was an amazing work of the spirit of God let me read you from 1st Thessalonians verse 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake and you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word in much affliction this turmoil this controversy this violence going on but with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything see this is a miracle this is the work of the spirit of God which created this amazing

church so there was a great response but with that there was also jealousy there was the rabble rousers there was a work of Satan and Paul talks about it in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and 3 as it was Satan that hindered them that ultimately led to them having to leave 6 to 9 speaks about the indictment which was against them and this is interesting and when they could not find them they dragged

Jason and some of the brothers before the city authority 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 dear friends that is the critical issue isn't it they think they're talking as if everybody's answerable to someone other than Caesar there is a king which trumps even Caesar to which all flesh everywhere is answerable that's hot stuff and it is again when you get to verse 31 of act 17 you discover he's fixed today and this one has been appointed as the man through which all will be judged the response was not surprising violent either enthusiastic embracing of the Lord Jesus or enthusiastic repelling him and fighting him and trying to hold him down not unlike

[ 23 : 24 ] Matthew 2 where the magi came into Jerusalem and said where is he born king of the Jews and of course Herod and all Jerusalem was stirred up they were this was trouble right here and so though they feigned interest in the desire to worship there was only one thought in Herod's mind it was to get that guy and do away with him dear friends when something is not submitting to Jesus it is in ultimate terms at war with Jesus it is about saying there will be no other king here but numero uno who is myself the response in Athens was interesting some mocked some said we'd like to hear more and some believed this reminds me of John 1 where it says he came to his own and his own received him not but as many as received him to them gave he the power to become the sons of

God even to them that believe on his name let me conclude dear friends with some questions which I would ask you as an individual and as members of this great church of St. John Shaughnessy first of all the urgency which Paul and Silas Timothy demonstrated we'll find a way to bring the gospel to these folks if it's the last thing we do it's we'll become all things to all men that kind of approach I ask you is there similarly in your heart an urgency a whole heartedness in your life in response to the lordship of Jesus and in your desire to make the message of Jesus known secondly do you believe there is a day fixed are you living as if there's a finite time between now and the return of Jesus and are you allowing that to impact the way you live today thirdly do you believe that there is one man

Jesus whom God has appointed he's not really interested in our vote he has made his choice the Jesus who said in John 14 I am the way the truth and the life one way next do I believe that Jesus has a claim on every life and that my neighbor my family friend what they do with Jesus hearing the message of Jesus is an issue of life and death does my prayer life reflect this urgency am I seeking a way to show Jesus to them here's an interesting one I think it's interesting are you are we allowing the conflicts the setbacks the disappointments which invade our lives individually and as a church to afford us new opportunities for bringing the gospel to these communities the good news of this great portion of scripture acts of the apostles begins by

Luke saying I wrote to you Theophilus of all that Jesus began to do and to teach which is in the gospel of Luke and it ends in Acts 28 I hate to spill the beans before you get to Acts 28 but just a clue it's sort of an unsatisfactory ending it's just Paul in house arrest in Rome boldly preaching the gospel and you think yeah but what next under the spirit of God it was God's purposes not to give us a resolution because the beat goes on because the gospel continues to have to be reached because there is to be a move of the gospel to your borders to your people to your family to your neighbors and you my friend in Christ have been equally solicited just as Paul and Silas and Timothy were when they heard the message come over and help us the spirit of God is calling you and me to an engagement with this world that we live in with the good news of

Jesus because God has fixed a day in which he will judge the world and this man Jesus is the key to the whole thing the Jesus who died and rose again let's stand to pray Lord Jesus Christ we thank you for the story of the spread of the gospel which could be described as turning the world upside down because truly that is what happens when the gospel enters the equation of a life or a community we offer ourselves as living sacrifices afresh today asking you by your spirit to give us a fervent wholehearted desire to bring the message of Jesus to our neighbor for we pray in his name amen shall we kneel let us pray today for that great mystery the church of

[ 28 : 51 ] Jesus Christ in the wonderful light of what we've heard this morning let us pray especially for for missionaries pray for evangelists pray for all who are confessors for all who announce that Jesus is Lord our God may this confession be heard and for the sake of the elect may it be heard everywhere for you are God you are sovereign over the gospel and over its proclamation Lord in your mercy and we would pray in praying for the church we pray for our leaders we pray this morning for our bishops especially we would pray this morning for the one who's opened the scriptures for us this morning bishop charlie pray lord for a rich blessing upon his work among the churches and we would pray of course for donald and for stephen and for trevor we would remember and pray for our primate robert and we continue to remember and pray for the archbishop of canterbury he struggles with so many issues lord we pray for our clergy for david for dan for jim remember the ministry of keith amongst us lord we pray for all who lead in this place lord especially today we would ask for your divine leading as we gather on tuesday for a special vestry lord simply grant us your wisdom as we gather grant us wisdom in the way forward lord in your mercy and of course we would continue to pray for peace and for good order in our most troubled world lord we would continue to pray for haiti that you would bring order there bring good order to those people we pray for peace in places of conflict in iraq and afghanistan throughout the middle east lord teach the nations the way of peace lord in your mercy we pray today for the suffering especially by name we remember rowena and lynette we pray for betty and harold for allison and for lori and for ken remember beth allen and her mother and sisters in the loss of their father and spouse in silence we would pray today for those on our hearts lord give to all who suffer give them a patience not their own give them a hope in your good purposes and give them healing and freedom in your perfect time lord in your mercy and finally lord form in us always the desire to pray form in us always as individuals and as a church the desire to confess indeed that Jesus is lord work in us lord work in us that which is well pleasing in your sight to your glory for to you all praise is due lord in your mercy you as you do you you