

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Preaching That Turned The World Upside Down

By Earl E. Robertson

From victorious preaching efforts in Philippi and Macedonia, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica via Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 16 and 17). Here in the synagogue, as in other places of opportunity, Paul reasons with the Jews three Sabbath days out of the scriptures. Out of these efforts the church in Thessalonica came into being; however, some of the Jews **“believed not”** but acted through envy and using lewd and base men created a riot. The preaching of Paul and Silas was so powerful and impacting that the Jews said they were violators of Caesar’s laws and that in other places had **“turned the world upside down”** (Acts 17:1-9).

Is the present-day Christian surprised that religious folk would react to this quality of preaching by Paul and Silas as they did? Did the world need “turning upside down”? Was the message preached by these men of God sufficiently capable of doing what the charge says? Was God giving impetus through the pure messages of these men upon the hearts of the hearers? Was error impervious to the power of truth about Jesus proclaimed by Paul and Silas? Could weak, non-distinctive, platitudinous sermons often heard today turn that world upside down? Can such preaching change our world for the better today?

Yes, the world that God so loved (Jn. 3:16) is ever in sin and needs to be changed – saved (1 Jn. 5:19). God-fearing saints know the power of scripture when faithfully preached to benefit both the lost and the saved. It was not Paul and Silas that turned the world upside down, but the truth of their message! God’s power is **“unto salvation.”** Power and salvation are reciprocally related here – no power, no salvation. The preposition **“unto”** denotes the purpose, the aim, the consequent result in preaching this God-power gospel: it is unto salvation (Rom. 1:16-17). This scripture-power turns people from darkness and sin to light and salvation; it changes the world from wickedness to righteousness (see Acts 26:16-18).

Apostolic preaching constantly reflected the concept that their message must connote a true relationship with scripture. This says their preaching had to be “as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). Noble people searched the scriptures when they heard the apostles preach (Acts 17:10-12). Such action of pure motives denotes logically the essential attribute of the absoluteness of scripture; all assumed standards for life’s belief and conduct must be measured by God’s inspired word! Some having heard Jesus, but confused as to who he was, said, **“Hath not the scripture said”** (Jn. 7:42). That which is **“noted in the scripture”** (Daniel 10:21) was especially true, and not to be controverted.

So, Paul and Silas **“reasoned with them out of the scriptures”** (Acts 17:2). Of what benefit would it have been to the worshipers in that synagogue if Paul had challenged them with mere human philosophy? The doctrines and commandments of men have never been good for anyone religiously (Matt. 15:9). Though the Jews were religious they were lost (Rom. 10:1-3), and Paul and Silas had the message of truth that could change their condition. Christ was their subject: **“This Jesus whom I preach unto you, is Christ”** (Acts 17:3). They were explaining and showing them God’s plans for Christ in saving the world. Christ can’t be preached without using scripture, and using it faithfully. The Ethiopian was reading scripture (Isa. 53) when Philip the evangelist met him (Acts 8:27-34), and the preacher using **“the same scripture, preached unto him Jesus”** (Acts 8:35) that led to his conversion to Christ (Acts 8:36-39). This is the preaching that saves – turns the world upside down!

Preaching without scripture will not save anyone; it is not the preaching that God bids (Jon. 3:2). Though God ordained preaching to save (1 Cor. 1:21) because the world is lost in sin (Rom. 3:23; Jn. 3:16), the marvelous ends cannot be achieved unless the right and full message is declared. Scripture is the sure basis on which we can impact the world for change (2 Tim. 3:15), and we know the scripture cannot be invalidated (Jn. 10:35). Preachers must use **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Eph. 6:17) for the benefit of others. It is a poor and vain thought if one thinks he can preach the saving Christ to a lost world and not use scripture. Even Paul preached Jesus **“according to the scriptures”** (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul said Christ died and rose from the dead **“according to the scripture”**! This is where the power is, brethren. There is power in the scriptures (Heb. 4:12). When the sinful audience at Pentecost heard Peter’s preaching it gave ground for their change, and they enquired for a remedy (Acts 2). The inspired scripture has to be known for salvation (2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 10:14), and it has been used faithfully to the salvation of all that are in Christ Jesus (Acts 9:6, 10

-20). As Paul faithfully preached Jesus to these synagogue Jews he showed that Christ had to suffer for sin (Isa. 53; Lk. 24:13-51), and that God raised him from the dead for our justification (Rom. 4:25). They so affirmed with confidence because they knew the scriptures do not speak in vain (emptily), not meaning what they say (Jas. 4:5)! They also affirmed apostolic teaching cannot be successfully contradicted (1 Cor. 15:12).

Preaching that turns the world upside down is preaching that is true to the world of God by men who perceive they are representing God to the people! – *Fifth Street East Church of Christ Bulletin*, November 9, 2008. ■

Preaching the “*Whole Counsel*” of God

By Greg Gwin

Fill a banquet table with all manner of food. At one end, place a variety of nutritious foods such as fruits, steamed vegetables, lean meats and the like. At the other end, load it up with candy, cookies, and a tempting selection of sweets and desserts. Now, to complete the experiment, turn a company of youngsters loose to choose whatever food they like from the table. Do you have any doubt as to what they will choose? Of course not! Repeat the exercise again and again, and the result will always be the same. The kids will rush to the sugary end of the table every time. Immature children will not discern what is best for them. They do not recognize the need for a carefully balanced diet. They are, after all, only kids!

Try another experiment. Select an array of Bible subjects. Be sure to include an ample supply of lessons that are of the positive, “feel good” variety. These should speak about the love of God, the blessings He provides, the hope and promise of His Word, etc. In addition to these, pick a sampling of negative issues. Include things like denominationalism, moral challenges facing Christians in the modern age, and doctrinal errors prevalent among brethren. Now, let Christians decide which ones they will prefer to hear on a regular basis. The result of this test is also obvious. Folks do not like the unpleasant negative lessons and will repeatedly favor the more positive themes. In particular, immature Christians will flock to preachers and places that cater to their specific appetites.

If preachers and teachers plan their lessons based exclusively on what the people like to hear, they are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of letting kids choose a constant diet of sugary treats. Unfortunately, some seem to be doing this. Certain subjects are purposely avoided from the pulpit. Others are dealt with so ambiguously that the hearers miss the point entirely.

Some may defend this approach by saying that no error is being taught. They console themselves by suggesting that – while others may prefer to do the negative work – they choose to emphasize the positive side of things. Those who go this route will not be able to say with the apostle Paul: “*I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you,*” and, again, “*I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:20, 27).

Paul instructed Timothy to “*preach the word,*” and to “*do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Tim. 4:2, 5). To do this he would need to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (vs. 2). Others have noted that two thirds of that instruction involves what some would call “negative” preaching (“*reprove, rebuke*”), and one third “positive” (“*exhort*”). While we would not argue that any specific percentage is being set forth here, it is, none-the-less, clear that the work of preaching cannot be satisfied with an exclusive emphasis on the so-called “positive” themes.

A specific example may help illustrate the important need for balance in our preaching. Consider the subject of marriage. It is right and proper that we teach again and again the positive scriptural truths that pertain to husbands and wives. Let us stress the blessings of this relationship and the great wisdom of God’s plan for the home. Let everyone know how following His wonderful design for our families will enrich our lives. But, wait, this will not be enough. No matter how much we wish it were not so, the ugly question of broken homes and divorce is out there. Brethren must know the truth on this subject, for it will certainly impact someone close to them. It is not a pleasant thing. And, it is made worse by the controversy that arises when some teach error on this topic. Their errors must be exposed before others are carried away. This is altogether “negative,” but it is essential. Do you see it?

It is a serious responsibility to assume the role of teacher, and all who do so are promised an increased accountability (Jas. 3:1). Be sure to do the full work. Strive for the important balance between “negative” and “positive” subjects. Realize that your work, when done properly, will not always be popular (2 Tim. 4:2), but it will always be needed. – *Colleagues church of Christ Bulletin*, October 1, 2017. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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