

## **“TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**May 2, 2021, 9 and 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Acts 17:1-9**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the responses of all our hearts glorify you, exalt Jesus, honor your Word and edify your people according to our need. Come, Holy Spirit, help us I pray. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### **Introduction.**

Do you ever wonder why things happen in your life? Why did this happen and not that? Why were we born here and not there? Why did we marry this girl and not that girl, this guy and not that guy? Why am I in this job and not that? Why am I in this church and not another? Why does some stuff happen and not other stuff?

I find myself asking this question each week as I come to preach a text. Lord, why this text, why now, who is it for, what are you doing in our midst?

I saw an article this week with the title, “Let Go of the Myth that Everything Happens for a Reason.” I was immediately struck how there are countless souls around us who live their lives without any sense that there is any greater purpose or meaning in their lives.

They are the people about whom Henry David Thoreau said, “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

If there is no God then everything is random, fate, chance, luck, an accident. And when you come to that conclusion then everything is meaningless. And meaninglessness leads to despair.

But if there is a God then not a sparrow falls to the ground and not a hair falls from our head without the knowledge and purpose of God. Our God is a God of reasons and purposes.

I am aware of events that happen throughout my week when it just so happens I do something or go somewhere or make a decision or a visit someone or whatever and it just so happens to be the perfect moment or amazing timing. In every coincidence I see the fingerprint of God.

### **Passing Through Amphipolis and Apollonia.**

Why did Paul and Silas pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia but stop in Thessalonica?

Some speculate that maybe it was because those towns didn't have a synagogue or they were too small and not as important as Thessalonica. I can give one definitive answer.

The Spirit of God moved them on. They were praying all along the way seeking the guidance of God. They may have tried and had no success there, or they may have just been imperceptibly moved along by the Spirit, the way we are imperceptibly moved to go this way and not that.

**Acts 16:6-8** They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

There is a reason for everything and the purposes of God led them to Thessalonica and God knew completely all that would and would not happen while they were there.

### **Preaching a Reasonable Faith in Thessalonica.**

Think about what Paul does. He is still bruised and battered from the severe beating he received in Philippi. Why is he back to preaching the Gospel in Thessalonica? Does he think nothing bad will happen there?

Where do you get that kind of courage to carry on, that kind of endurance, that kind of unbroken spirit to continue doing what you are called to do? How do you endeavor to persevere in difficult circumstances? How do you persevere with joy?

**I Thessalonians 2:2** Though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at *Philippi*, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

The call of God and the cause of the Gospel were of such supreme value to him no one could keep him from it. Let this be a reminder to us of supreme treasure the Gospel is, that people in every generation willingly die for it.

Chuck Colson, who was special counsel to President Nixon, tells the story of his conversion to Christianity while in prison for the Watergate scandal. He tells about how all the men who were closest and most loyal to President Nixon, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell, Dean, himself and the rest, believed passionately in the President.

Yet when facing the threat of embarrassment, perhaps jail, the instinct for self-preservation was so powerful each deserted their leader to save their own skin. This convinced Colson of the truth of the Gospel. Eleven ordinary men endured 40 years of persecution, beatings, prison, and death, without ever once renouncing that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

All but one of the apostles died a martyr's death joyfully proclaimed their monstrously offensive statement that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Only an encounter with the living God could have kept those men steadfast. Otherwise, the apostle Peter would have saved his own skin. He had already done it three times.

Why did Paul suffer as he did and over and over again? Two reasons. His great love for the Gospel and his great love for the people.

**I Thessalonians 2:8** Being *affectionately desirous of you*, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

**I Thessalonians 2:19-20** For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

**III John 1:4** I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

The churches in Macedonia gave Paul the greatest joy, partly because they suffered so much together. Do you have joy in the truth and power of the Gospel? Do you have joy in your fellowship in a church founded on the Gospel? Do you have joy in your worship of the risen and living God? Do you know the joy of seeing salvation take root in someone's life? Do you find your greatest joy in what is eternal?

Paul was a worshipper, and loved the Sabbath day and the assemblies of God's people. And he loved the Scriptures and reasoning from them concerning Christ and the necessity of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection. Our faith is a reasonable faith. You don't have to sell your brains as some in the world think you do.

The confidence we have in the Gospel is that it is the revelation and truth of God for the entire human race.

In fact let it be said clearly, the solution to our nation's problems and our nation's division and our violence and hate is found only in the Gospel and nowhere else. We don't have a systemic racism problem, we have a systemic sin problem. The government cannot solve the problem of the sinful human heart. More money, laws, education or police will not fix it.

The essential trouble and problem in our nation and world is man's rebellion against God and the greatest needs is salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus. If the creator of all creation and the Lord of the entire universe has given us the final answer to the human race, and if we know this truth, shouldn't we use every means and opportunity available to us to bring people to know this message and believe it and live it? Paul was willing at any cost.

*Devout Greeks. Jealous Jews.*

A great many Gentiles believed, and a some Jews. But a great many Jews were jealous and acted in the most wicked manner. They reject the truth and in their blindness are driven to hate it.

Paul reasoned from the Jewish Scriptures the necessity of a Messiah who suffered and died and rose from the dead. But this is a stumbling block to the Jews. There is nothing more counter intuitive to them, nothing more impossible to imagine, than a Messiah who comes and suffers and dies on a Roman cross. This turned their world upside down.

Paul was peacefully, respectfully preaching a message of truth, love, forgiveness, and redemption in Jesus Christ. This was seen as a threat to the Jews.

The proof of this is seen in the sorts of people the Jews go trolling to enlist to help them. Wicked men of the rabble. These were the worst sort of folks, lowlifes, like members of gangs, who are glad to be incited to violence. There is no justice in mobs, but then they weren't looking for justice.

This is like some of the people that show up at those riots we have seen across the country. They have no interest in the cause of justice, they only want to destroy property and steal and loot.

Increasingly there will be those incited to oppose Christianity and what Christianity teaches, but they will be the one causing the trouble. The devil loves to stir things up, create chaos and confusion.

*They say they are against the decrees of Caesar.* This is sheer hypocrisy. The Jews hated Caesar and wanted nothing more than his downfall. They believed their Messiah would overthrow him completely. They are more the enemies of Caesar than Christians.

*They say Jesus is another king.* Well, it is true, Jesus is a king, King of kings and Lord of lords. But His kingdom is not of this world. He is not an earthly king, so He is not Caesar's rival. He Himself said "unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's."

**They say they are turning the world upside down.**

In what way is our message a message meant to turn the world upside down? Our message, our Gospel is meant to overturn the kingdom of Satan. The Gospel is preached to turn people from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from hate to love, from discord to peace, from idols to the living and true God.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and turn them upside down (I John 3:8).

Jesus said He came to serve, not be served.

Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.  
Jesus said we must become like a little child to enter heaven.  
Jesus said love your enemies and pray for them.

Jesus came to turn the world upside down.  
Jesus came to turn our world upside down.

The Gospel comes to turn our souls away from a love of the world and the pleasures of the world and the ways of the world. In this way our message is meant to turn our world and our souls upside down.

God would have us give up our worldly views, worldly ways, worldly pleasures and pursuits and dreams. How has Jesus changed your life, how has Jesus transformed your thinking? How has Jesus turned things around in your world? Has He?

What is different between your former days and now?

### **Conclusion and application.**

Acts recounts the journeys of a group of joy-filled, Gospel-proclaiming, Jesus-loving suffering followers of Christ who turned the world upside down. They feared God more than people. They went out in the Spirit's power and under the Spirit's guiding. They sang in prison, they prayed for boldness not safety and comfort. They were confident in the purposes of God.

They knew that through many tribulations they would enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

And so will we.

All of us have experienced more conflict and tension in the last year than we ever imagined. We have experienced being more on edge, shorter fuses, harsher words, quicker tempers, snarkier attitudes, darker moods.

We have noticed more fault lines than ever before, between family, longtime friends, neighbors, church members. Things seem more personal, maybe in your face.

And add to that that our spiritual lives have been disrupted and some of us may be running on empty, or at least with less reserves.

But as I said at the beginning, this is all for a reason. Not only is conflict a normal reality in our fallen world, not only is it no surprise between sinners, but it is actually part of God's purpose in sanctifying us and growing us and maturing us.

Consider what happened as a result of the conflict Paul faced in Macedonia. Several strong churches were planted and grew. Christianity grows out of the soil of conflict and opposition.

Scripture is filled with adversity, conflict, wars, slavery, exile, persecution, imprisonment. And Jesus experienced the very worst of it all while on earth.

The Bible was born in adversity and it is born for adversity. It is a wartime manual. Almost every story of Paul is one of conflict.

But notice what is happening through all this. God is prevailing. The truth is standing, the church is joyful and thriving, countless people are coming to salvation in Jesus' name. The light is shining in the darkness, the Word of God is alive and powerful and prevailing over the works of Satan. Our presence here this morning is proof.

God has given us His Word to equip us for times of trials and conflict, but He has also given us trials and conflict to make His Word more alive and real in our lives.

**Psalm 119:67** Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.

Here is the take away.

Don't let conflict shake your confidence in the Word of God and in the presence of God. Yes, it is hard, uncomfortable, messy, humbling, put press into God and His Word. God gave His Word for just such a time as this. You will discover new power, greater strength, fresh grace you could not have known any other way.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
We have already come  
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far  
And Grace will lead us home.