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TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.

– ACTS 17:1-12 – JANUARY 18. –

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet." – Psa. 119:105.

WHEN released from the prison at Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy went about a hundred miles direct to Thessalonica, the largest commercial city of that district – Macedonia. Nothing daunted by their experience at Philippi, apparently not even waiting for their backs to thoroughly heal from the wounds there received, Paul at once began a vigorous presentation of the Gospel. As was his custom, he went first to the Jews. The propriety of this course is evident: the Jews were familiar with the prophecies of the Messiah, and although making their home amongst the Gentiles, nevertheless, as the Apostle declares, they were continually hoping for the fulfilment of the grand promises made to Abraham, confirmed unto Isaac and unto Jacob, and that by divine oath, or affirmation. – Acts 26:7.

Not only were the Jews, acquainted with the prophecies and looking for their fulfilment in a Messiah, better prepared than other peoples for the message of the Gospel, but, additionally, it was part of the divine will that the first offer of the Gospel should go to the Jew, the natural seed of Abraham, who was, by divine intention, to have the first opportunity of becoming a part of the spiritual seed. Furthermore, the Jewish synagogues were ostensibly conducted on a liberal plane, anyone of reasonable ability being free there to show what he could of the teaching of the Scriptures. Thus the Apostle met with the Jews on three Sabbath days; and, according to his own narrative, he labored with his hands for temporal necessities between times. (1 Thess. 2:9.) It was during this stay of probably three to six months that he twice [R3130 : page 11] received financial aid from the brethren at Philippi.

The result of his labors was the nucleus of a flourishing church, to which two of his epistles were addressed. The Apostle's attitude toward these brethren may reasonably be taken as the criterion of his general attitude toward all of the Lord's dear flock. He dealt not with them as a lord or master amongst slaves or subordinates; but, using his own words, he was gentle toward them, as a nursing mother to her children. (1 Thess. 2:7.) He admonished, comforted, instructed them, "as a father doth his children." (1 Thess. 2:11.) He lived an unblamable, unselfish life in their midst, giving them the Gospel, and with it his very life. – 1 Thess. 2:5-8,10.

The method of the Apostle's teaching is expressed in the statement that he "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures," opening and showing forth "that it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead." The Greek word used signifies that the teaching was in the nature of a dialogue. He appealed to the Scriptures, offered explanations of their meaning, pointed out how this meaning found its fulfilment in the experience of our Lord, and heard and replied to queries and objections. Like other Jews, these had, of course, thought chiefly on the Scriptures which predict Messiah's glory and Kingdom, and the grandeur of the position of Israel as his people, dispensing blessing to all the families of the earth. The Apostle pointed out the other Scriptures which spoke of "the sufferings of Christ," and how it was necessary that he should redeem the world before he could properly deliver it from the power of sin and death. We may be sure that he had the prophetic statements well in mind, and also the various types of the law, and that these were called up in order before his hearers, and the evidences adduced that our Lord fulfilled these; and not only that his death was necessary, as typified in Isaac, but also his resurrection from the dead, that he might be the distributor of the mercies of God. The word "opening" carries with it the thought that these Scriptures had been closed previously, and this is in harmony with the statement of Luke, when mentioning the Lord's discourse with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, it is declared that

he "*opened* unto them the Scriptures," saying, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer." – Luke 24:26,46; 1 Pet. 1:11.

The work to be done today very closely resembles that which was done by the Apostle as here recorded. There is need for us to go with the "meat in due season," first of all to those who have already been the recipients of divine favors and great advantages every way, to *open* to them other Scriptures which are now due to be understood; – which show the grand purposes of our heavenly Father in connection with the blessing of all the families of the earth through the Church glorified; and that the glorified Church, under its glorified Head, Christ Jesus, is to constitute the Kingdom of heaven, the divine agency for the blessing of all. It is appropriate that we adopt largely the same plan that the Apostle did, and *reason* with people out of the Scriptures, opening them before their minds gradually, that they may catch some glimpses of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine plan. Nevertheless, we know that it will be now even as it was then – that only those who have "an ear to hear" will hear, and that the others will be stirred up to antagonism, bitter envyings, jealousies, etc.

The Apostle's work was evidently well done, his arguments effective – the result was that some of them (Jews) were persuaded and took sides with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks quite a good many, – who had been feeling after God and who probably had realized that there was more true religion with the Jew than elsewhere, – were now, because of having less Jewish prejudice, more ready than their Jewish friends to hear and appreciate the Gospel of Christ. Of the chief women of the city, too, quite a number were influenced by the message, and became followers of Christ.

Christian people in all denominations today are claiming great liberty – that they are not sectarian, and that all who love the Lord have fullest opportunity to worship with them. But we find that if we take them at their word and attempt to reason with them out of the Scriptures respecting the things now due to be understood, pointing

out that we are in the dawn of restitution times, that the Millennial Kingdom is about to be ushered in, and that Christ is not only the Priest who redeemed his people with his blood, but is shortly to be the great Prophet and King who is to rule and instruct the whole world of mankind, the majority are unable to receive this – it is too contrary to their preconceived notions. Especially do the leading ones, the preachers and elders and Sunday School superintendents, feel that they must oppose the truth; that they must not admit that there are in the Word of God "things new and old – meat in due season for the household of faith." Their objections are often inspired by jealousy or envy, as they note that the message of grace appeals to the hearts of some of the very best of their number, and some of the very best outside their number – of the world.

None like to complain, after having boasted of Christian liberty and fellowship; – they murmur that our preaching of the good tidings of great joy is proselyting – "attempting to steal their members," etc. They exclaim, "Why do you not go to the slums, instead [R3130 : page 12] of coming in amongst us to steal away our best members, our ripest wheat?" We answer that a similar charge of proselyting might with equal force have been brought against our Lord Jesus and against the apostles. The Apostle, as we see, wherever he went, sought for the most religious and most intelligent people, instead of seeking for the most ignorant and the most degraded. Why? Because he well knew that the Gospel he had been sent to proclaim was not intended of the Lord to convert the world, but to *gather out of the world* a "little flock," a people for the Lord's name. (Acts 15:14.) He knew that the Gospel he had to preach would not appeal to the most degraded hoodlums of society; on the contrary, it would appeal most to intelligent people, – and he presented it in as logical, reasonable and intelligent a manner as it could possibly be set forth. It is still proper for us to pursue the same course, and the conditions today of proclaiming the second presence of the Lord, and that the time is at hand for the establishment of the Kingdom and for the gathering of the elect wheat into the barn, can better be presented now to the intelligent,

thoughtful, devout people in all the various sects, and of the world, than to others.

Evidently the discussions of those three Sabbath days were all that the Jews as a whole could endure; – apparently the ministers of the truth, thenceforth excluded, went to the house of a prominent believer, Jason, and from there continued their propaganda, – possibly holding meetings at his house. Meantime the opposing Jews at Thessalonica received information from their brethren, opponents of the truth at Philippi, respecting these servants of the Lord, and the message they carried; – and, doubtless, the Adversary persuaded them that they were engaged in a noble cause when they gathered a rabble of market-loungers, "roughs and toughs," to raise a commotion, and as a mob to **[R3131 : page 12]** make an assault upon Jason's house, to take the Apostle and his companions before the authorities and have their work stopped. So some of a similar class in spiritual Israel today feel toward the truth and its servants, if we may judge from the epithets sometimes used. The inciting of Sunday school scholars to tear up religious literature and throw the fragments at the distributors is about on a par with the conduct of those Jews of Thessalonica in inciting a mob – the difference between their day and ours of more general intelligence and better police regulations being taken into consideration. A disinterested spectator would be inclined to query – What can be the evil teachings of the WATCH TOWER publications, that would lead a professedly "liberal servant of God" today to feel such an animosity against them? We would only reply that we know of nothing contained in this literature that should arouse any but the warmest sentiments of love toward God and toward the brethren and toward the world in general. It might similarly be questioned in the minds of disinterested persons why reputable Jews and rabbis should incite a mob against the Apostle and his companions? and why the high-priest and Scribes and Pharisees incited the multitude against our Lord? Pilate, evidently was in this position when he inquired respecting our Lord, "Why, what evil hath he done?" It is because the Lord's message was one of grace and truth that he was hated and

crucified. It was because the Apostles and their co-laborers were telling forth the same message of the grace of God in Christ and the blessings yet to come through them, that they were maligned and opposed; and it is the same Gospel, the same good tidings, the same joyful message, of which Christ is the center, the Kingdom and the blessings for all the world of mankind the circumference, that is hated and maligned today; – not by the world, but by those who professedly are God's people.

Not finding Paul and Silas, the mob dragged Jason and others of the believers before the rulers. The charges were very serious ones – inciting to anarchy and treason – turning the world upside down, and teaching that there is another king, Jesus, whose kingdom is to be universal in due time. While these charges were fraudulent as respects the true standpoint, they nevertheless had in them a sufficiency of truth to make them appear serious. It is true that the Gospel of Christ is revolutionary in its character; that whenever it enters the heart of a man it keeps turning things upside down continually, until it is either ejected or has produced a transformation of heart and life. There is no peace between right and wrong, or light and darkness, in any heart. Peace can be secured only by giving way either to the light or to the darkness; either to the truth or to the error; and since the error is the more popular, the more general, the majority choose peace along that line. The Lord's people, however, the sincere lovers of righteousness, can have peace on no other terms than those of loyalty to the Lord and his Word, and the principles of his righteousness. The same is true in respect to all the affairs of the world. It is the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel which *will be a Gospel of peace in due time*, that at the present time, because of evil and ignorance in the world, is setting on fire the very foundations of "the present evil world," and will ultimately result in the great figurative conflagration which shall consume this present order of things, political, financial, social, religious, – that upon the ruins of present institutions the Lord may shortly erect his Kingdom of righteousness – with peace upon proper foundations of justice and love. [R3131 : page 13]

We must not be surprised if this Gospel of peace has the same influence today as it had in the days of our Lord and of the apostles. Mark the effect of the precious message at Thessalonica and at Philippi and elsewhere. Mark the effect when the message was delivered from the lips of him who spake as never man spake, and of whose wonderful words it is recorded that "all the people bare him record and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." Nevertheless, however graciously stated, the truth is a sword which penetrates in every direction, and which, as our Lord foretold, frequently sets parents against children and children against parents, because the darkness hateth the light and opposeth it in every possible manner.

The decrees of the emperors respecting riots and treason were very strict, and all rulers were held rigidly to account. Hence, when the charges were made of anarchy and treason, both the multitude and the rulers were "troubled;" the multitude, because more or less of a riot had occurred, seemingly because of treason; – and this might lead to the taking away of some of the city's privileges and liberties, its loss of commerce, etc. The rulers were troubled because they were in danger of being called to account unless they took active steps for the repression of anything resembling treason. They knew, nevertheless, that the charges were fabrications, and, hence, got out of the difficulty by placing Jason and his companions under bonds to keep the peace – to see that similar riots did not occur again. This necessitated the sending of Paul and Silas away as quietly and as quickly as possible.

It need not surprise us to have, at no distant day, charges of anarchy, etc., made against those who today are proclaiming present truth, the harvest message, the establishment of the Kingdom, etc. It might be claimed against us that we are not sufficiently in accord with Caesar's government, the kingdoms of this world; that we do not manifest sufficient interest in the elections, nor in the militia, etc.; and that our teaching that the Lord is about to establish his Kingdom, and that it will be set up at the expense of all present institutions, which

will fall in a time of trouble and anarchy, implies sympathy with anarchy. The charges would be no more true in our case than in the case of the Lord and the apostles; nevertheless, it may be used as a powerful weapon some day, and if it is we must trust to the same God who guarded the interests of his cause then, and who is equally able to guard it now. We may be sure that the door of opportunity for proclaiming the good tidings will not close until the true "wheat" shall have been found, until the elect shall have heard the message that is now due, that they should come out of Babylon and be gathered to the Lord, instead of being bound to human institutions.

In view of the Lord's teaching regarding this subject, and of how the wisest presentation of it may be ultimately misconstrued, it behooves everyone who would serve the truth faithfully to be as careful as possible not to be misunderstood; – to let it be clearly understood that we neither participate in nor advocate anarchy of any kind; but, on the contrary, are standing for righteousness and the highest of all laws, the divine law; and that we believe that the poorest of laws are better than none, and that the anarchy that will inevitably come upon the world, according to divine predictions, will be a great curse, a great disadvantage in many respects; and that the only reason why we are able to look upon it with any degree of complacency is because of the assurances given us in the Lord's Word that it will be speedily followed by the Kingdom of God's dear Son; – in power and authority, to fully control all the turbulent elements.

Leaving Timothy at Thessalonica, Paul and Silas journeyed about fifty miles to a rather obscure Grecian city, called Berea, and, according to their custom, realizing that the preaching of the Gospel of Christ was their chief business, they lost no time in engaging therein. Again they sought the Jews in the synagogue, and this time found some specially susceptible to the truth, referred to as "more noble than they of Thessalonica." The Greek word used here for "noble" seems to imply persons of noble birth, a higher and nobler class than those of the more commercial city. Nobility of character is

favorable, wherever it is found, and from whatever cause, and true nobility implies reasonableness, as distinguished from prejudice. The Bereans were reasonable, professing to believe all that was written in the Law and the Prophets; to be looking for the Messiah; etc., and they welcomed the servants of God who sought to draw their attention particularly to the "things written aforetime." With all readiness of mind they began to examine the Scriptures, not merely on the Sabbath days, but daily, – to see how well the Apostle's arguments were supported by the testimony of the Law and the Prophets. As we should expect, many of so noble a class accepted the good tidings. Indeed, the wonder is that any person of noble and reasoning mind, once becoming acquainted with the glorious message of God's love and mercy in Christ – his plan for selecting the Church now, and by and by of blessing all the families of the earth through it – could disbelieve or could attribute such a Gospel to any human source. Surely its internal evidences are convincing that it is not of man nor by man, but of the Lord.

