

They Made a Difference

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I. Introduction

1. Paul and his friends went to the city of Thessalonica to preach the gospel there. Like many cities where they went to preach, people there worshiped idols and had never heard about worshiping Jesus.
2. But after hearing Paul preach, several people did believe, but many others did not.
3. And those that did not believe, stirred up some evil men in the city who started a riot in the streets, making a big uproar in the city. These evil men attacked the house where Paul had been meeting, but they couldn't find Paul because the new believers wanted to protect him and got him out quickly.
4. Those evil people didn't like Paul's preaching about Jesus because they were used to their own way of worshiping idols. To them, Paul had messed up their way of doing things and said:
*Acts 17:6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;***
5. What had Paul done that turned their world upside down? He merely preached the Word of God and told them Jesus had died for their sins and rose again.
6. But for that city and those people, Paul had made a difference.
7. That is what I want to preach to you this morning: They Made a Difference

II. Thessalonica difference

A. Calling evil good because of blindness

1. Paul preached that Jesus was their Savior and wanted to save them, but to them, that was turning the world upside down.
2. But what Paul was doing was trying to turn the world right-side up. He was trying to fix the destruction that evil was bringing to the world.
3. But that is not how the people in the town saw it. The world was in such bad shape that to them, upside down seemed to be the way it should be.
4. What was evil was good. What was good was evil. Down was up and up was down.
5. Isaiah warned of this:
Isa 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
6. They had drifted so far from truth that they didn't recognize how far off course they were, and they did not see Jesus as the solution to get them back on course.
7. The truth was hidden from them by a veil over their eyes: Good or Evil? VEIL | EVIL

8. The devil, whom the Bible calls, “the god of this world”, has blinded people to truth so they don’t see it as truth:
2 Cor 4:3-5
3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:
4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.
5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.
9. But Paul when Paul preached the truth, that veil came off and many believed and a great church began there.

III. Our world is upside down

A. Spreading God’s influence and truth one-by-one

1. What I’m preaching to you about today is how the church TODAY can make a difference in our world that is turned upside down TODAY.
2. Right now, our world really is turned upside down, and it is not just the pandemic that has changed the lives of almost everyone in the world, or the fights about wearing masks or not wearing masks.
3. It is not just the riots in cities across the world.
4. It is not just the fighting about politics, or arguments about religious freedom.
5. We are in a place very much like Thessalonica where down is up, up is down, evil is good and good is evil.
6. But what happens to that upside-down world when people are filled with the power of the Holy Ghost and their world starts turning right-side up?
7. We can make a difference in our world.
8. But what if the church was to make a difference by spreading Jesus—one-by-one to people who are hungry for something that can help them?

B. Our 2020 vision

1. May I remind you of our theme this year: 2020 Vision: The Treasure in the Field.
2. And that theme comes from this passage:
Matt 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.
3. There is something priceless in that field that requires an investment—and often a significant investment as that verse speaks of.
4. But hidden in the field are some children who need the gospel preached to them. Like the 35 kids we had here for children’s revival who were praying at this altar.
5. Yes, we are working with restrictions because of spreading disease in our county and state, but we have not lost the vision of children who we can help.
6. This Wednesday, children’s ministry will be at the Village once again to minister to the kids.

7. Or like the lives of many adults whose lives have been touched through the Word preached here, or those whose lives have been touched by the CIP class.
8. These are people who come to us hungry for help, and we are able to put hope into their lives through the power of God's Word and the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost.
9. Listen—we ARE making a difference as we go looking for treasures hidden in the field.
10. But don't forget the fact the part in that verse that says there is a sacrifice involved. And investment is involved.
11. Sacrifice and investment for the sake of making a difference in lives.
12. I want to challenge you to find the way in which you may make an investment into lives so that you can make a difference.
13. We can make a difference.

C. There are road hazards

1. And sometimes as we are finding, it requires more than just sacrifice and investment. There are hazards in the way.
2. But that is nothing new either. A letter went out from the church in Jerusalem talking about Paul and Barnabas who were:
Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. That word "hazarded" means, they gave up, or delivered up their lives.
4. There are hazards along the way as we minister the gospel.
5. I am aware that Clay county reached its highest peak of Covid cases 9 days ago, and 3rd highest peak 6 days ago, and our positivity rate is right now twice the rate of Marion county.
6. Don't misunderstand. We are exercising caution and not taking this lightly.
7. But as is the case with the church of Paul's day, and every generation since, many have willingly suffered through hardships, faced violence, sickness, disease, and even death to preach the gospel.
8. Does that sound like the world we live in?
9. Can we still make a difference in our world?
10. A conversation I had with a new student in CIP on Thursday only confirms to me that what the world needs now is for the church to make a difference!
11. And however we can to get into the harvest field and find the buried treasures there, invest what is needed to get the Word there regardless of hazards.
12. Even if there may be some who say we are trying to turn their world upside down, there are those who are thanking us for helping them turn their world right-side up!

IV. The difference making church brings

A. Apostolic doctrine

1. There are four things that I believe the church needs in order to make a difference in our world.
2. (1) Apostolic doctrine, (2) prayer, (3) demonstration, and (4) spiritual warfare.

3. When we study the Book of Acts, we can see what the Apostles did in the first church. And if we want to see what they saw, then we must do what they did. We must keep preaching the message that delivers.
 4. And what did they preach?
 5. They preached a message called “the apostles’ doctrine”
Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
 6. That was the message that culminated 4 verses before:
Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
 7. The message is this: we must come to God with faith that includes us repenting of our sin.
 8. Being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
 9. Being filled with the Holy Ghost.
 10. That is where lives begin to turn right-side up.
 11. If the church is to make a difference, we need to preach the Apostles Doctrine like the apostles did. That deliverance message has not changed since it was first preached 2000 years ago.
- B. Apostolic prayer
1. But if we want to be that same church of Acts 2, we must also be the church of Acts 3, Acts 4, Acts 6, Acts 8, Acts 9, and about every other chapter in Acts, where it talks about the church being **a praying church**.
 2. There is no way to overemphasize the need for us to be a praying people and be a praying church.
 3. Church prayer meetings must be a top priority.
 4. Praying in our homes must be a top priority.
 5. Praying in places you go must be a top priority.
 6. Prayer puts us in close alignment with God’s purpose for us, and it will also put us in close connection with people in need:
Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.
 7. And it seems like the more we are in prayer, the more contacts we connect with who need something from God. It was there in front of the temple where they met the lame man, and when they prayed for him, he was healed and ran and leaped all around the temple.
 8. That itself drew a crowd of people around Peter which gave him another opportunity to preach the apostolic message to them. And guess what?
Acts 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.
 9. 5,000 people were added to the church that day simply because the church was a praying church!
 10. In order to make a difference, the church needs to be a praying church.

- C. Apostolic demonstration
1. And speaking of prayer and lame men walking, the church that makes a difference is a church of miracles, signs, and wonders.
 2. When we pray for a sick person, it is not merely to make them think we kind and care for them. Yes, we want to be seen that way, but we pray because we expect them to be made whole.
 3. We read this just one chapter later:
Acts 5:12-15
12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.
13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.
14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)
15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.
 4. Recently I saw a deeper truth of this miracle.
 5. Yes it was God using the apostle to work miracles among the people, but something even greater than that was going on.
 6. When Peter's shadow passed over the sick, they were healed. Why?
 7. The sun was in view and was shining on him.
 8. And Peter's shadow was merely the sun's glory being cast in Peter's image over the people.
 9. And what I see in that, is when we are near the glory of God—through being in prayer—the glory of God shines on us and God's glory is cast in our image onto other people.
 10. People see us, but it is God's glory working through us onto them.
 11. Not that we are something in ourselves, but something in Jesus! And Jesus in us. And Jesus shining through us.
 12. There are evidences all through the Book of Acts of God working signs and wonders.
 13. I cannot say that I understand all that is going on with this Covid pandemic. But one thing I do understand, is that through prayer and intercession, I saw my wife rise up from a miraculous turn-around. She was descending into great sickness, weakness, painful coughing, and unable to breath. And in a couple of days, rather than descending deeper into despair, God turned her case around in the direction of recovery.
 14. I wish I had made a record of the MANY MANY prayer requests that have come to our church prayer group that turn around from a mess to a miracle.
 15. We pray for needs, the glory of God shines through us, and then God turns their situation around miraculously.
Mark 16:17-18
17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;
18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

16. *John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*
17. For us to make a difference, we need to believe we will see God demonstrate His miraculous works when we pray.

V. Closing

1. Apostolic doctrine, apostolic prayer, apostolic demonstration, and apostolic spiritual warfare.
2. I want to close with this final thought about making a difference. When God called me to preach back in 1988, He made it clear to me that my ministry was going to involve spiritual warfare.
3. That at some point God was going to call us into a work that was going to not be possible without slugging it out with the adversary through the Word of God.
Eph 6:10-13
10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.
11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
4. It was a passage like this that the Lord launched me with a call to preach. And it is passages like these that make up my daily prayer.
5. Luke 10:19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.
6. *Matt 10:1, 8*
1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.
8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.
7. Let us be a church that makes a difference in our world.