

**Advance: Our Church in the Next Century**  
***The Church's Challenge-Part 2***

**Review:** Last week we we began this very important series looking into the life of GT in the second century of our existence.

***Advance: Building on the VALUES of our PAST while pursuing the VISION of our FUTURE***

We talked about **Our Church's Challenge**—we have a world that is upside down.

- We call good evil and evil good
- As Isaiah the prophet prophesied concerning 2800 years ago

**Three things we discussed:**

1. **Acknowledging the challenge we face** (cultural values of past have been replaced, our world is upside down).
2. **Identifying the cause of the challenge we face** (rejection of divine authority and denying of Scriptural authority).
3. **Implications of the challenge we face** (a culture that has lost its way, spiritual bankruptcy, and hopelessness beyond this life).
4. Our world is broken.

But, ***"The local church contains within itself the seeds of a remade world."*** (Christopher Ash)

This is the challenge we **FACE** (world upside down)

Today, the challenge we must **EMBRACE**

**Backdrop to our Text: (Acts 17:1-6)**

- The Apostle Paul and his entourage left Philippi where they had been severely mistreated (Paul and Silas flogged and imprisoned because of the exorcism of the girl whose deliverance has decimated her master's revenue stream).
- Flogged without trial (Roman citizens) miraculously delivered but Paul made the magistrates come and release them personally (Acts 16:35-40)
- Came to Thessalonica where Paul, per his custom, taught in the synagogue for three Sabbath days (3 weeks total)-preached Christ and had some converts but many Jews rejected and created a stir in the city
- Attacked the home of Jason (one of the converts who had housed them) and dragged him and others out with this accusation... ***"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."***

*This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.*

### Consider the resolve of Paul

- Just been treated horribly and got right up and went back to face the same thing...there was no retreat.
- David Livingston once said, *"I am prepared to go anywhere as long as it is forward."*
- This is what GT is committed to...**ADVANCE!**
- Never entered Paul's mind to rest, recoup, go to a safe area to find some familiar people to relax with.
- He and Silas (2 men) of them it is said... "they turned world upside down."
- Some people live and no one even knows they lived-not these two men.
- Paul and Silas were faced with a challenge not unlike ours.
- Polytheistic and pluralistic world, hated the name of Christ and the preaching of the cross.
- They turned their world upside down.

The Challenge We Face-An upside down world

The Challenge We must Embrace-Turn our world upside down (or right side up?)

Today: Today we can mention any religion and speak on any subject, but the minute we mention the name of Jesus, the red flags come up and the ire and threats of the world are stirred!

- We can expect to be threatened for the testimony of Christ and it will be hard going.
- We must now cover.
- Since 1859 (Darwin's Origin of the Species) and German liberalism, now entrenched in America churches, the church in America has declined
- Churches not preaching or upholding the authority of the Word, marrying homosexuals, denying the reality of Hell and failing to proclaim the exclusivity of Christ.
- The world has turned the Church upside down instead of Vice Versa.

What are the marks of the church that embraces this challenge?

That turns their world upside down?

Four of them:

#### **I. The Church that embraces the challenge of the day is COURAGEOUS.**

- A. Every new city Paul and Silas went to they went first to the synagogue
- B. Every time they went to the synagogue, they ended up in trouble

1. Paul lived his life courageously trusting the Holy Spirit
2. He entrusted himself to the Spirit's leading no matter where it might take him

***“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:22-24 NKJV***

3. Note the persecution they experienced

Acts 13:6—met sorcerer—Bar-Jesus who tried to withstand them

In Galatia

***“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” Acts 13:44-45 NKJV***

***“But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” Acts 13:50 NKJV***

In Iconium

***“Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” Acts 14:1-2 NKJV***

In Lystra

***“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” Acts 14:19 NKJV***

In Philippi—we already discussed, flogged and imprisoned

4. But, full of courage, they would not stop...this is why they turned their world upside down
- C. As we approach our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and follow the vision God has given us, if we want to embrace the challenge of the day and turn our world upside down, we must be people of COURAGE!

1. **Courage to follow when the Spirit is leading us** (Dunkirk is where we believe God is calling us)
2. **Courage to take faith risks** (been around this mountain long enough and why sit we here until we die)
3. **Courage to invest our best**
  - a. People
  - b. Time
  - c. Resources

(ILL)

*In Ronald Reagan's first inaugural address, he referenced the simple white grave markers in Arlington Memorial Cemetery. He said: Under one such marker lies a young man—Martin Trepton—who left his job in a small town barber shop in 1917 to go to France with the famed Rainbow Division. There, on the western front, he was killed trying to carry a message between battalions under heavy artillery fire. We are told that on his body was found a diary. On the flyleaf under the heading, "My Pledge," he had written these words: "America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone."*

4. New Testament Church acted this way
  - a. Stephen was a deacon (supposed to wait tables per Acts 6) but gave his all
  - b. Phillip too was a deacon and left Samaria to meet an Ethiopian
  - c. People gave so all could have
  - d. Lives of courage are necessary to turn our world upside down

## **II. The Church that embraces the challenge of the day is SERIOUS.**

- A. It's not a day to be sloppy or careless...this demands seriousness
- B. It was this seriousness that lead them to have such courage

### **1. Serious about their calling**

***"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began," II Timothy 1:8-9 NKJV***

- a. It is God who has saved us
- b. His calling is not religious...it is Holy!
- c. Bringing the Gospel to people is serious business

2. Serious about the exclusive nature of Christ and His sacrifice

- a. Paul...1 Cor. 2:2 "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."
- b. It was philosophy or self-help techniques the early church propagated...it was Christ

3. Serious about Hell—the words of Jesus are helpful here

***"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" Luke 12:4-5 NKJV***

- a. Early church believed in Hell and they were serious about saving people from it
- b. It led to courage and boldness

C. How serious are we as we approach this next century of ministry

1. The issue of calling (church is treated so casually...won't be here)
2. The issue of Christ's exclusivity (no compromise on the issue)
3. The issue of Hell (modern funerals put everyone in Heaven)

**III. The Church that embraces the challenge of the day must be CHRIST-CENTERED.**

A. The church that turned the world upside down in Acts had a message that always caused a stir—it pricked people's heart

1. In Ephesus—"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way." ***Acts 19:23 KJV***
2. Stephen preached one sermon and it cost him his life—"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." ***Acts 7:54 KJV***
3. Peter and John were confronted and told to be silent—"But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." ***Acts 4:17-18 KJV***

B. What always angered people was not them, but their message—the message of Christ.

C. But we have no other message...nothing else offers hope today.

(ILL)

*In a video based on his book 3:16 Stories of Hope, Max Lucado illustrates the odd nature of the statement that "all religions lead to God" All roads lead to heaven. Well, the sentence makes good talk-show fodder, but does it make sense? Can all approaches to God be correct? How can all religions lead to God when they are so different? We don't tolerate such logic in other matters. We don't pretend that all roads lead to London or all ships sail to Australia; all flights don't lead to Rome. Imagine your response to a travel agent who proclaims they do. You tell him you need a flight to Rome, Italy. So he looks on his screen, and he offers, "Well, there's a flight to Sidney, Australia, at 6:00 a.m."*

*"Does it go to Rome?" you ask. "No, but it offers great food and movies." "But I need to go to Rome," you say. He says, "Well, let me suggest Southwest Airlines." "Southwest Airlines flies to Rome?" "No, but they win awards for on-time arrivals." You're getting frustrated, so you reiterate: "I need one airline, to carry me to one place—Rome." The agent appears offended: "Sir, all flights go to Rome." Well, you know better. Different flights have different destinations. That's not a thickheaded conclusion, but an honest one. Every flight does not go to Rome. And every path does not lead to God.*

(ILL)

*2008 Pew Report- Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life demonstrates the myriad ways that faith in America is more variegated and nuanced than it may appear at first glance. Researchers for Pew's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey analyzed the religious practices of more than 35,000 U.S. adults and found that they generally embrace their own faith while respecting—and sometimes even practicing—aspects of other religions. "Many religions—maybe even most—can be perceived as having an exclusivity clause: We're right and therefore everybody else is wrong," said John Green, a senior fellow with the Pew Forum. "What we've found is that many Americans apparently don't invoke the exclusivity clause. "Researchers did not track which other faiths people might say lead to salvation, so a Protestant or Catholic might be thinking of, for example, fellow Christians like the Eastern Orthodox, or non-Christians like Jews or Muslims. Either way, respondents seemed more focused on pragmatism than conversion. "While Americans may have firm religious commitments, they are unwilling to impose them on other people," Green said. "It may be a kind of attitude that works very well on a practical level in a society that is as diverse religiously as the United States."*

*Some highlights of that diversity include: More than half of evangelical respondents said that many religions can lead to eternal life, despite the central evangelical tenet that Jesus is the sole path to eternity with God. Twenty-nine percent of Catholics see God as an impersonal force, even though the Catholic Catechism teaches that "the faith of all Christians" rests on the belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One in five self-described atheists, whose main tenet is to reject belief in God, say they believe in God or a universal spirit. "I think it really underscores the sense that the issue with religion in America is not that Americans don't believe in anything, it's that they believe in everything," said Michael Lindsay, a sociologist at Rice University in Houston. "Religion is 3,000 miles wide, but it's only three inches deep."*

*One example of that, which doesn't surprise scholars, is that while the Bible has long been known as America's best-selling book, researchers found that 45 percent of U.S. adults say they never or seldom read Scripture.*

(ILL)

*According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control, every day about ten people die from unintentional drowning. Drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the U.S. But there's at least one huge misconception about drowning: Many people assume that a drowning person will splash, yell, and wave for help.*

*Actually, drowning is far from obvious. A report from The Journal of U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue has identified the "Instinctive Drowning Response." When someone is drowning, the person will instinctively display the following five characteristics: Except in rare cases, drowning people are physically unable to call for help. That's because we're designed to breathe first and speak later.*

*Drowning people can't stay above the water long enough for them to exhale, inhale, and call for help. Drowning people cannot wave for help. They are forced to extend their arms laterally and press down on the water's surface. Drowning people cannot voluntarily move toward a rescuer or reach out for a piece of rescue equipment. Unless rescued by a trained lifeguard, drowning people can only struggle on the surface of the water for 20 to 60 seconds before sinking. The Coast Guard emphasizes that the Instinctive Drowning Response is triggered by a host of autonomic nervous system responses. In other words, it is completely involuntary, unlearned, and unavoidable.*

***"And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." Jude 1:22-23 NKJV***

The only message that will save them is Jesus Christ!

#### **IV. The Church that embraces the challenge of the day must be CRUCIFIED.**

A. Not crucified the same way Jesus was...cannot be repeated

1. He did say we had to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).
2. A total death to self and worldly desires.
3. Complete dedication to Him and a rejection of all other idols (cannot serve two masters).

B. The early church was crucified in every manner

1. To their message—unadulterated Christ and Him crucified with no additions or deletions
2. To the ministry

***"You know that Stephanas and his household were the first of the harvest of believers in Greece, and they are spending their lives in service to God's people. I urge you, dear brothers and sisters," 1 Corinthians 16:15 NLT***

***"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)" 1 Corinthians 16:15 KJV***

***“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 KJV***

3. To the world

***“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Galatians 6:14 KJV***

- a. The world holds no attraction of him
- b. He is no longer tired to the world

They were crucified...sold out to the message, the ministry, and crucified to the world

They turned their world upside down!

**Conclusion:** This was the early church that turned the world upside down—they embraced the challenge of the day.

1. Courageous
2. Serious
3. Christ-Centered
4. Crucified

Can we be that today? Can we turn our world upside down?

One author wrote-*“There are people who watch things happen and there are people who make things happen. Then there are people who don’t know what’s happening.”*

The early church was a group of people who made things happen. Every time they took a step, the world shook. They had an effect. They mastered.

William Tyndle-1494-1536-wanted to get the Bible to English speaking world and get it out of the dead language of Latin controlled by the Roman Catholics. He printed in English in 1526 and smuggled in into to England where it met great opposition and book store owners were warned from selling it by the Bishop. He was betrayed by a friend and Martyred in 1536.

John Huss (1380-1415)-spoke out against the selling if indulgences and was going to trust the Scriptures and nothing else. Martyred on July 6, 1415.

John Rogers-translated the whole Bible in 1537 (Tyndale NT in 1526)-martyred for dooong this in 1555, first Protestant martyr under reign of Queen Mary (Bloody Mary)

All people who had courage, were serious, Christ-centered, and crucified. They turned their world upside down.

GT has a chance in this next year to make a difference as we soon enter a new century!

Will we embrace the challenge of today and make things happen?

Will we turn our world upside down?