

A Man On A Mission

Philemon

An upside-down world...

In **Acts 17**, during Paul's second missionary journey with Silas, when they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews, they were effectively evangelizing both Jews and Gentiles. But, the jealous, unbelieving Jews created a mob scene in the city. **Verse 6**: "And when they could not find them [Paul and Silas], they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have *turned the world upside down* have come here also." That was their assessment of the evangelizing ministry of the apostles. But they were wrong. What they actually were doing was *turning* people who trusted in Jesus _____-*side up*. When a person is effectively evangelized, he who was *upside down* is now *right-side up*. For, it is the world that's upside down.

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was asked what his concerns were in thinking about what 20th century would mean for the church. He replied, "My concerns for the church in the next century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without _____, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell." The world in which we live, is a world that's *turned upside down*. It always has been, since the fall of mankind into sin in Genesis 3, and it always will be until the habitation of righteousness dwells on the earth at the Second Coming of Christ.

The bad news is that there's no saving the world from itself until Jesus returns. However, there *is* good news. God *has* and *still is* saving people who are *in* the world, saving them *out of* the world, through His messengers of the Gospel, turning them from *upside down* to *right-side up*. That's great good news! However, there's more bad news. As the world becomes even more self-destructive, the church is becoming less assured of its _____. And to that, Alistair Begg said, "A diminishing sense of the church's mission is on account of a diminishing confidence in its _____, namely the truth, power, and relevance of the Gospel." Then he went on from there to remind us pastors of our calling, that we are, like Paul, **men with a message on a mission.**

But, that's not just the calling of pastors and preachers. That's the calling on the church. That's the calling on all of us. We are all supposed to be men and women with a message—the Gospel of Jesus Christ—on a mission of redemption and reconciliation, because our world is an *upside down, broken* mess! And, this little letter of **Philemon** is a powerful reminder of that truth. It's a description of the marvelous, transforming, reconciling, gospel-shaped grace of God. It is not our calling to do what we can't do. We *can't* save the world. Only Christ at His second coming can do that. But, *His first coming* calls us to share His transforming Gospel to the people of the world. **That's our calling, to be men and women on a mission with a message.**

The stages of the transforming grace of God:

1. The central issue: it's the _____-changing Gospel.

Onesimus (his name means *Useful*) was the unsaved slave of a believer, Philemon who resided in Colossae. This letter implies that Onesimus had stolen from his Christian master and ran away to Rome. And that's a big problem. Isn't it interesting that the central issue here *is not* one of the great social ills of history, **the great issue of human slavery?**

Question: "Why didn't Paul take advantage of the opportunity in this letter to call for the abolition of enslaving human beings?" Alistair gave two reasons: First, practically speaking, Paul was in _____ position to bring about the abolition of slavery in the Roman Empire.

But, second, and even more significant, Paul was driven by his theology—his _____-system in Christ, namely the doctrine of reconciliation. The real issue in a person's life is where they _____ with God. Where I, you, they will spend eternity. So, negatively stated, here's the heart of the central issue: *We are not here to reform the world.*

As important as political, social, economic issues are to us, they are not to be central to us. What is central is our mission and our message. And, it's central because Jesus Christ is central. Theologically speaking, what must drive us is **the life-changing Gospel of Christ!** Martin Lloyd-Jones: "As a Christian, I'm not primarily concerned about western civilization." Why not? "Because I'm primarily concerned about the kingdom of God that *transcends* all the _____ of the world. We must _____ take

up a position of antagonism against those whom we want to win to Christ.” If we spend our time speaking against them, we will never win them to Jesus! We haven’t been called to reproach. We’ve been called to a central mission with a central message, namely, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). The great concern for Paul and for us is the Gospel, for when it is received, it works anywhere in the world to set people right with God.

2. The transformation: Onesimus _____ saved.

Slavery didn’t come to an end ... yet. What happened is a slave got saved. No doubt, he knew Paul from his missionary ministry in Colossae and in Philemon’s house. He watched his master get saved, and many others in the household. And now, guilt must’ve been crushing his heart. So, he searched out the apostle, knowing he was imprisoned for his faith and his faithfulness to the Gospel. And Paul led Onesimus to the Lord, becoming his spiritual father (**10-11**).

How did that miracle happen? It happened by the transforming grace of God through a man who was on a mission with a message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ! And it’s the Gospel that brings such a transformation of mind and heart, that eventually an end comes to slavery in a culture.

3. The reconciliation: Philemon _____ him back.

Verses 15-17: And, that is the transforming, reconciling power of the Gospel! It’s Paul, it’s us, on this mission with a message, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God,” which allows us then to be reconciled to each other.

The lessons from the letter:

1. Our central mission in the world is to be _____ of our central message, the Gospel.

Our world is a sinful, selfish, self-centered mess, and it can’t fix itself. And we can’t fix it. Only the Gospel _____, one soul at a time, soul after soul after soul. For isn’t it true that the most influential people throughout history have been those who were *convinced* about the

immensity of God's love for sinners, the cost of Christ's substitution in the place of sinners, and the great need for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Convinced people made the greatest impact, people like John Wesley, John Edwards, D.L. Moody, William Booth, Billy Graham.

As people on a mission with a message our great concern is with the souls of men and women, boys and girls, and to see them become committed followers of Christ who are actually growing in their faith—it is the salvation and sanctification of people that _____ us. Why? So there can be more Christians in America. So there can be more Jesus-people involved in the arts, in science, in education, in politics, in media, in medicine, in the work place—people in those places who have a mission and a message, that of reconciliation.

2. Let the Bible _____ our course. Let true, biblical doctrine drive us, namely the doctrine of reconciliation.

When Paul walked into Thessalonica, Colossae, Corinth, there were all kinds opportunities to address the awful issues of the day. But, what does Paul do? **1 Corinthians 2:2:** "I'm determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Why? Because only Jesus Christ can save a soul! That's the Gospel: that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, which reconciles us to each other. That He loves and saves sinners. That the riches of His mercy and grace far exceeds our imaginations. Jesus wooed, "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for your souls."

Let us remember what the church today has largely forgotten. We are not meant to make the issues of our day central to our being. We are meant to be people on a mission with an life-transforming message!