Acts III: Turning the World Upside Down
Part 7
“Turning The World Back On Its Feet”
Acts 17: 1-9
Pastor Charles Price

Well let me read to you from Acts Chapter 17. And for a number of weeks we are looking at a section of the book of Acts that I am calling Paul’s missionary adventures – Chapter 13 up to Chapter 20.

And the theme that we have given to this who series is “Turning the World Upside Down”. And the passage I am going to read to you now is where we get that title from because in Chapter 17 and Verse 1 it says,

“When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica”

(By the way, of course, Paul and Silas are now in Greece.)

“…they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

“As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

“‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said.

“Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

“But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

“But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: ‘These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.’”

(Most translations put that in this way: “These men who have turned the world upside down have now come here also”)

“‘…and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.’

“When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.
“Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.”

Now please keep your Bible open there.

They tell us there are 6.8 billion people in the world today. The world population has doubled in my lifetime. Of those 6.8 billion, statisticians who read census statistics across the world tell us that 2.1 billion claim to be Christian.

Now of course that is the broadest possible figure you could come up with. It includes all kinds of Christian – nominal, people who have just been baptized as kids and never gone back. It includes cults and sects and therefore that figure of course is fraught with difficulties.

How many of those are truly spiritually alive, it is impossible for us to tell, though the World Evangelical Alliance estimate there are probably around half a billion of the world’s population who would fall into the category of being evangelical Christians. That doesn’t mean they are all alive, by the way. You can be an evangelical church and sign off all the doctrines without knowing spiritual life.

But if there are half a billion Christians in the world, that’s approximately one for every 13 people. Now we might feel there is some encouragement about that. They tell us at the end of the first Century there was one Christian for every 200 people in the world (and the population of the world was much less of course); now there is one Christian for every 13. Hold these figures with flexibility of course, but that is a vast growth.

However there are some less optimistic figures as well. There is a group based in California called the Joshua Project. They research the peoples of the world to identify where the unreached peoples are.

A people group is a group of folks who share the same history, the same ethnicity, the same culture, the same language; probably live in the same geographical area though not necessarily so.

And they have worked out through extensive research - they identify 16,350 people groups. But of those there are 6,642, they tell us, who are completely outside the reach of the Christian church when it comes to a church in their community, a group of Christians in their community that they could know, bump into, meet in the marketplace, meet in the workplace, meet on the street and have an opportunity of hearing an explanation of the gospel. I know there are radio waves that carry the gospel globally, but you have got to be tuned in, you have got to have reason to tune in.

But they estimate that there are 2.75 billion people in our world today who are outside the reached areas with the gospel.

That would be if we were to be, in this building this morning, representative of the world, there would be over 600, probably 700 people in this building this morning who would
not only have never heard the gospel but would have little opportunity to do so because there are no Christians, no church, within their community or area.

This fact constitutes the job description of the church of Jesus Christ because the job description given it by Jesus was “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Elsewhere Jesus said, “You will be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” You start in your locality and, in fact, the book of Acts could be seen to be an outworking of that statement. That could be the index of the book of Acts: witnesses in Jerusalem (first 7 chapters), Judea and then Samaria (Chapters 8 to Chapter 12) and then out to the ends of the earth (Chapter 13) when they set off on their missionary journeys, they went to new territory.

And the story that began in the book of Acts is an unfinished story. People often comment on the fact that the book of Acts finishes rather abruptly and rather surprisingly. And they speculate, did Luke drop dead? He wrote the book and so that was it? What happened to stop so suddenly as it does?

What I suggest to you, the reason why the book of Acts seems to stop so abruptly is because the story hasn’t finished yet. And the story now includes not the Paul’s and the Luke’s and the Peter’s and Silas’s and the Barnabas’s but the Mary’s and the John’s and the Craig’s and whoever else is here this morning.

And this story is the story of the church that today continues launched, if you like, in the book of Acts, but still in operation, with the same responsibility to take the whole gospel to the whole world by the whole church. The same resources – the Holy Spirit indwelling men and women and living in them the life of Jesus Christ and doing through them the work of Jesus Christ.

The explanation is His power, His strength, and the reason why we have the opening 30 years of the story (which have now gone on for 2,000 years) is that we learn the truths, the principles of operation that are going to remain applicable for all time.

Scripture is not just true in its record of history; it is also sufficient in what it tells us in how to get the job done. And we are looking at Paul in particular over this particular series we are looking at – Paul’s missionary adventures, I like to call them, his missionary journeys. He makes three in the book of Acts. We are already with him on the second.

And if you take a look at the map that we have on the screen, you will see that when he left Antioch in Syria, he initially went back to follow up his visits to Cilicia and Southern Galatia area, places like Derbe, Lystra, Iconium.

And then God calls him to come over to Macedonia, which is Greece, a totally unreached area so far. And he goes across to Greece. And the rest of the second journey of Paul

Acts III: Turning the World Upside Down—Part 7 - Price 2010
involves the great cities of Philippi and then Berea, then Thessalonica, then Athens and then Corinth. You can visit those cities today; they are still thriving cities.

I have not been to Corinth but I have been to Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea and Athens. I stood with a friend in the old coliseum in Philippi and I guess it would seat many thousands of people. It was empty except a few tourists.

And my friend went down into the center of this coliseum; I sat up in the (this is many years ago), and he read out loud the first two chapters of the letter to the Philippians and then he came and sat up and I went down and I read the last two chapters. And we read the letter of Paul to Philippi, and if anybody happened to be listening, they probably thought we were crazy. But right there in Philippi, it’s still there.

And I want to look at what happens when Paul comes into Thessalonica, which was the second city. And it tells us that he came to the synagogue, which was his strategy when he came into a place like this. The reason why: because here is a nucleus of people who already have an open Scripture.

The Jewish Diaspora had spread out to the Mediterranean world and they had little communities and they were here in Thessalonica. As it says, “As was his custom, he went into the synagogue and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them.”

But the effect of his doing that is there were some who responded, some who reacted (there are always those two reactions).

And people came to get hold of Paul and his companions and drag them down into the city square. And what they said in Verse 6 was,

“These men who have caused trouble all over the world” (as the NIV puts it)

Or

“This men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”

And what I want to do this morning is just look with you at what deserves this description that turned the world upside down. Is it an exaggeration? What do they mean by this? What caused this reputation? because I think that what we find here is going to be what has to happen in this city of Toronto, this country of Canada, in our world today, if we are going to have anything like the same kind of effect.

And there are three things I am going to point out to you from these verses. And they are very simple things.

Number 1, Paul was an upside down man.

Number 2, Paul preached an upside down message.
Number 3, Paul talked about an upside down Messiah.

Let me point this out to you. In other words, that in order for this kind of impact to take place, we have got to think and act totally radically about what kind of lives we are to live and what kind of message we have to offer people.

So often the message we offer is to say to people, “Okay, this is what you are like; well I’ll tell you how to make it better: take Jesus into your life - you will be healthier, you will be happier, you will be wealthier. Life will be even better with Jesus. He is the icing to slap onto the cake.”

No, that isn’t the message Paul preached. It was a radical upside down message. But let me first point out to you that Paul was an upside down man, first of all.

You know, God’s first methodology in our world is not strategies and systems and tactics and methods; it’s people. Again and again in Scripture, God does not drop abstract plans out of heaven. He looks for people, whether it’s a Noah or an Abraham, or a Moses, or a Deborah or a David or an Elijah or a Mary or a Paul.

And having got the man or having got the woman, then He can begin to implement the plan. The plan doesn’t come before the person. God is looking for people.

E.M. Bounds wrote a book on prayer, a very well known book on prayer. And he says in the first paragraph of that book (and the book is worth it for this sentence),

“Men are looking for better methods. God is looking for better men.”

Because God’s methods are people. Now we live in a day when people just become a means, they just become part of a system, part of a program.

The Economist Magazine, which I subscribe to, last September, had an article called “The History of Christianity” and then a dash and then it said “The First 3,000 Years.” So it’s a bit tongue-in-cheek, trying to make a few predictions about it.

But it quoted a man called Sam Pascoe as writing this:

“Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship. It moved to Greece and became a philosophy. It moved then to Italy and became an institution. It moved to Europe and became a culture. It came to America and became an enterprise.”

Now the problem with Christianity becoming an enterprise is we become pre-occupied with methodologies, with strategies that become mechanical. And we need strategies of course; we need structures; but God’s methods, first and foremost, are people.
And so the explanation for Paul having this kind of impact is not what was his method, how did he go about it – we can learn a lot from that. But what manner of man was he? And we don’t have to go far - just go back and forth a bit from Chapter 17. He has arrived in Thessalonica with this reputation.

Where did he come from? He came from Philippi in Chapter 16. What happened in Philippi is that when he went there he eventually was beaten, flogged, thrown into jail. He was locked into stocks. This is a man who is prepared to pay a price to be different, to be truthful to the gospel.

You go back into Chapter 15, he is prepared to stand on principle and fall out with one of the best men in the book of Acts, Barnabas. Whether he is right or wrong is irrelevant here; he stood on something that was far more important than his own personal friendships and relationships.

You go back into Chapter 14 and you find he is stoned in the city of Lystra, he is left for dead, presumably unconscious, concussed, and he gets up, it says, and he goes back into the city. This is a strange man, isn’t it?

You go back into Chapter 13 and he comes to Pisidian Antioch and there it says, “The Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”

This is a man who, in every chapter on his missionary journeys, has run into brick walls and been attacked and been humiliated and been beaten and been flogged, been left for dead, been stoned. And this is just in four chapters.

So move on into Chapter 17. He goes to Thessalonica and there are opposers there who start a riot in the city. He moves on to Berea. Some Jews came down from Thessalonica. They stir up opposition; they drive him out to Athens. That’s in Chapter 17.

Then in Chapter 18, he ends up in Corinth where there is opposition churned up and he goes back to Antioch. And that’s the end of his second journey.

And of course the rest of the book of Acts gives him more trouble and more trouble. This is a man who is willing to say, “I am prepared to pay whatever it costs to be a servant of Jesus Christ.

You know people often say sentimentally – I have heard it said many times – “Wouldn’t it be great to get back into the book of Acts? If only we lived in the book of Acts.”

Well, you are probably reading the nice bits when you say that. There are 28 chapters in the book of Acts and 22 of the 28 chapters the church is being persecuted, Christians are being persecuted – sometimes by the secularist world around them, sometimes by the
Jewish community out of which Christianity was nurtured and born, sometimes from within the Christian community itself.

But Paul was a man who was willing to pay the price. He said, writing to the Corinthians when he was defending his own position against what he calls some pseudo-apostles that were around. He compares himself by saying this:

“Are they servants of Christ?”

(This is 2 Corinthians 11:23)

“(I am out of my mind to talk like this.) But I am more.”

And here’s his evidence of being a genuine disciple.

“I have worked much harder than they have. I have been in prison more frequently than they have. I have been flogged more severely. I have been exposed to death again and again.”

I mean we live in such a mamby pamby world. We would take these as evidence, “Oh I must be in the wrong place.”

“I got into trouble, worked harder, imprisoned more frequently, flogged more severely, exposed to death again and again.”

This is the mark of being a genuine apostle. That’s what Paul’s argument is.

And then he gives some more detail. He goes on in Verse 24:

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

“Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

Let me ask you a question. Is there in your Christian life a ‘so far but no further’ line that you have drawn?
It says, “Yes, I am very happy to be a Christian, thrilled to be a Christian and I am happy to go that far, but no more.”

Is there a line like that?

You will never impact the world - we will never impact the world if there is. I mean what does it mean to be a disciple? When Jesus called His twelve disciples He didn’t tell them the whole story because that wasn’t the issue. The issue is “are you willing to leave everything and come with Me?”

Of those twelve one committed suicide – Judas Iscariot. Of the remaining eleven, it is, according to extra-biblical history and maybe legend, but the evidence would seem to be that ten of those remaining eleven were martyred. James was in the book of Acts. Peter is reputed of being crucified upside down. Thomas - stoned to death in India.

The only one of those twelve who died as an old man in his bed was John. You see being a disciple is something far more than just saying, “Jesus, You will be a great asset in my life. I would like to have You in my life, please.”

That kind of Christianity doesn’t excite you. It may be like the insurance policy you have got filed away somewhere, but it won’t excite you.

You know what Paul wrote later in Acts 20:24? (This is when he was being warned by leaders in Ephesus that he was heading for some trouble.) This is what he said:

“I consider my life worth nothing to me.”

Not my life is worth nothing – no, no; your life is worth a lot but my life is worth nothing to *me*

“…if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying the gospel of God’s grace.”

“So when you come to me,” as they did to Paul, “and you say to me, ‘Paul don’t go to Jerusalem, you’ll get into trouble there,’ that’s not a criteria, that’s not a reason not to go. The only reason to go is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me. And if He has given me the task of going to Jerusalem, I will take the consequences because it is His task, His agenda I am on, not mine.”

You know the great thing about this, and so many of us will probably miss this; the great thing about this, this actually is a doorway to liberty because when a man is prepared to die, he is actually equipped to live.

You are never really equipped to live freely if you are scared of dying. You will always have that fear in the back of your mind that maybe one day the guillotine will fall. You say, “that issue is settled.”
And I could give you other evidence of this from Paul – I am not going to read the first chapter of Philippians, read 2 Timothy, when Paul talks about his willingness to die. And I ask you, is this your kind of Christianity or is it too much?

If it is too much, just settle back and get comfortable and make the best of a dull Christian life because all the blessings of God kick in when you have come to that point of dying to your own interests and your own agenda.

And so the person who turns the world upside down first of all is an upside down person. The second thing, he had an upside down Messiah. He came into Thessalonica, looked for the Jewish synagogue and Verse 2 says,

“As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’”

(That is, the Messiah; the name Christ is not a name; it’s a title meaning the anointed one, the Messiah.)

“This Jesus is the Messiah.” Now he is talking to Jews in their synagogue, and every one of those Jews was expecting a Messiah. In fact, the messianic theme is the heart of Jewish theology because everything is going to come to its fulfillment when the Messiah comes.

But their expectation of a Messiah was not a crucified Messiah.

There are two messianic themes that run through the Old Testament Scriptures. There is the theme of a liberating king – and you can find that through the Scriptures. And there is the theme of the suffering servant, primarily in the book of Isaiah, but not exclusively so.

Now the Jewish people took the liberating king as the definitive understanding of the Messiah, that when He came He would throw off the shackles that have inhibited Israel, that had kept them under the heel of colonial powers, whether it’s Rome now at the time of this event in Acts, or whether it’s the Greeks beforehand or the Persians before that or the Babylonians before that, or for part of Israel, the Assyrians before that. And breathing down their necks before that, the Egyptians. This goes back centuries – 700 years at least.

And what they want now with the Messiah is that He is going to come and liberate them and give them back their dignity and make them a great nation.
The disciples had that understanding of the Messiah. That’s why they had a mental block about the cross. And even after the resurrection when they met with Jesus just before His ascension, they said to Him in Acts 1:6, it says,

“When they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’”

This was totally consistent with Jewish messianic expectation. “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

But the other theme is the theme of the suffering servant, the theme of the man of sorrows. And it’s in the Jewish Bible as well. So you have passages like Isaiah 53, which is one, but one of the most clear pictures of this, where in just part of that chapter it says in Verse 3,

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

And you can read the whole of that chapter. And we look back through the eyes of the New Testament understanding of Christ and say, “no problem with that chapter at all; this is talking about Christ.”

But the Jewish people didn’t see it that way. They saw the liberating king as being the Messiah. They saw the suffering servant as being the nation of Israel itself.

That is still their doctrine. You ask any Jew who knows his stuff, “How do you interpret Isaiah 53?” He will tell you exactly, this is the nation of Israel.

An they have a long history with plenty of anecdotal evidence that they are abused and persecuted, men of sorrows, right up to the holocaust, but going right back beyond that as well.

A Jewish document written in the Third Century about Isaiah 53, I’ll quote it to you; it says,

“These predictions bore reference to the whole people, regarded as one individual and as being in a state of dispersion and suffering in order that many proselytes
might be gained on account of the dispersion of the Jews among numerous
heathen nations.”

In other words it says there, it speaks of one person, one individual in Isaiah 53 but it’s
really about the state and they are being dispersed and persecuted. Why? That they bring
back proselytes from their dispersions.

And so their interpretation has blinded them. What does Paul do? There are two
processes that take place when Paul comes into the synagogue. There is an intellectual
process and there is an emotional process.

Here’s the intellectual process: it says,

“He reasoned with them (in Verse 2).”

“He reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the
Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is
the Christ.”’

Notice the language there. “He reasoned with them, explaining and proving.”

In other words, he took the Scriptures with which they were familiar and he opened them
up and he explained them in the light of the Messiah, Jesus. And he reasoned with them
and he proved to them and he did so sufficiently that it actually says there in Verse 4 that

“Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.”

It’s a great lesson in preaching here, by the way, for those of us who preach. But it
applies to us who explain the gospel to people that we meet with.

He reasoned, he explained and he proved. That’s a process. Don’t just bang people over
the head with the conclusion. Lead to it in a reasoned, explanatory way.

We tend to call that apologetics but actually it ought to be normal preaching and teaching
and witnessing. We must conscientiously reason and explain and bring the evidence.
That’s what Paul did. Of course all of this requires the working of the Holy Spirit as
well. But some believed.

But if there is an intellectual process going on here in explaining the Messiah, there was
also an emotional process that was going on. And in Verse 5 it says,

“But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the
marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.”
You know when people become emotionally aroused they are no longer able to think clearly or see clearly or listen clearly; they interpret everything in the light of how they feel.

You know that when you get into a fight with your wife, don’t you? She says something and your emotional response is to make it mean something she had never even thought of, (but actually once you say it, it’s a good idea because you really are like that).

And there are those who emotionally get churned up and they become jealous and they become blind to the truth and to the reality. And when you become emotionally aroused, you don’t argue back because you are not on that level anymore, it’s not about reason anymore; you fight back.

And they fought back. And actually it’s very interesting that the result of this was that Paul and his companions were driven out of Thessalonica, went down to Berea, and it says in Verse 11, the next verses, it says,

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians.”

It’s interesting that Paul didn’t put that in the letter to the Thessalonians because that would have been a bit of an insult for them. But he said, “The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians.”

And here’s why:

“They received the message with great eagerness” (listen to this) “and they examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

Why were they noble? Because they took the personality out of the equation. They took the emotions out of the equation in terms of “we don’t like you because you are messing up Judaism.”

They examined the Scriptures to see if these things were true. And then it says,

“Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.”

So in Berea you have a great response taking place. But sometimes the negative emotions keep us from the kingdom. Sometimes jealousy, sometimes anger, sometimes maybe disappointment - maybe disappointment with the church, maybe disappointment with God because we have had an expectation that hasn’t been fulfilled.

Listen, never allow your emotional – your negative emotions to keep you from the truth. We are emotional beings – of course we are – but go beyond that and examine the Scriptures to see if this is true and you will discover when you do that the Messiah is an
upside down Messiah, certainly for the Jews; it is a Messiah who is crucified, buried and then raised again from the dead.

That was an upside down Messiah for the Jewish people. No wonder it’s tough for a Jew to become a Christian. You have got to radicalize their understanding of the Messiah and change it.

But if Paul was an upside down man with an upside Messiah, the third point is that he had an upside down message. In fact he had a message that was illegal, because in Verse 7 it says, when they brought them into the street and had this big riot,

“They are all defying Caesar’s decrees” (they were breaking the law), “saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”

And you remember that the context of the Roman Empire was, as they said to Pilate when he challenged whether Jesus was a king, the Jewish people themselves who were under the heel of Rome said, “We have no king but Caesar.” That was the mantra of the Roman Empire, no king but Caesar.

Now here’s Paul preaching an upside down message, “There is a king. It is this Messiah who suffered, died, was buried, who was raised again and He is King.”

And the reason why this is an upside down message is because if Jesus Christ is king, that strikes a blow to our own independence, our own agendas, and it must bring us to a point of surrender.

The kingship of Christ, the lordship of Christ, is an overwhelmingly constant theme of the New Testament. In the book of Acts alone Jesus is called Lord over 100 times, in this book alone.

It was the message of Jesus to His disciples. You remember the time that He asked them, “Who do men say that I am?” and they gave Him the various rumours that were being passed around about who He was. And then He said, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And Jesus said, “This was not revealed to you by man but by My Father who is in heaven.” He then from that time told them He would go to Jerusalem, suffer, die. They didn’t like that idea.

And then Jesus said this in Matthew 16:24; this is what He said. Once they had recognized who He was, He said,

“If anyone will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”
“Now you know who I am, now you recognize who I am” – and He didn’t tell them this at Galilee when He said, “Leave your nets” because they wouldn’t have had a clue about what He was talking about.

But now He says, “Unless you deny yourself”. What that means is this: unless you come to the point of saying, “What happens to me in the process of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is totally irrelevant to me. If I live till I am an old man, as John did, and die in my bed with my grandchildren around me that’s fine. If I die prematurely like James his brother did, that’s fine.”

Denying self is simply saying what happens to me is not the criteria, it’s not the issue.

“And take up your cross”. They had just talked about His cross and they said, “No, this will never happen to You.”

“And now unless you follow in complete obedience, even unto death.” Paul wrote about that when he said that Christ was obedient even unto death on a cross. That was the ultimate in His obedience.

And said Jesus, “This is not an add-on, this is not an extra. If you are going to be a disciple at all, the terms of that discipleship is that you no longer live for yourself. Deny yourself and take up your cross.”

And then He said in the next verse, Verse 25,

“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it; whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

Now he is not inviting them to be martyrs there but He says, “If you will lose your life, if you will give your life away to Jesus Christ (lose it), He will give His life away to you and you will find life.”

You find life not in having your old life made better, but in having your old life crucified with Christ that it might be His life now that lives in us and becomes the focal point of our existence.

And Jim Elliot writing about this said,

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

You can’t keep this life anyway. You can walk out of here today and lose it. You can’t keep it.

He is no fool who gives what he can’t keep (my life) to gain what he can’t lose (the life of Jesus that is itself eternal life.)
And the world still needs upside down people who will not compromise an upside down Messiah nor compromise an upside down message.

You see so often we so pussy foot around with the gospel that we are just telling people, “Hey, Jesus can make life even better than it already is.”

That may be true but that is not the point. That there is no life that is as full and rich as life in Christ. But it’s coming to the point of turning from everything that we are in order that He (Christ Himself) might fill us and work in us and through us.

And if you think this makes people miserable, you haven’t understood how life operates. This leads to liberty and freedom and joy.

The only way the world was turned upside down in the book of Acts was that God had some upside down people with an upside down message about an upside down Messiah. And they declared it boldly.

You know there is a little quirk in this. When I was young, a teenage in the little village church that I used to go to, there was an elderly man there and I knew him for about 20 years. He was always in his 80’s for twenty years it seemed; he was always old. I went to his funeral.

He had never been to school for a day in his life. I don’t quite know how that happened. But he was born back in the latter part of the 19th Century and he used to own a public house, a bar. And actually it was my grandfather who met him on a bridge one day in the village that I still lived in when I grew up, and led him to Christ.

And he became a key person in that church. And I used to love listening to him pray in the prayer meeting because he prayed as though he knew God and he did know God. It is wonderful to hear somebody pray to a God they know.

He used to speak occasionally. He would drop very wonderful thoughts that he thought were worth nothing, but I could tell you some of them today. But he often used to get his grammar mixed up and his metaphors mixed up. And we used to laugh at him a little bit as kids.

But one day he stood up in the prayer meeting and he prayed this, and he said, “Lord, we need turning upside down and putting on our feet.” Well that’s a mixed metaphor in case you hadn’t noticed.

But you know he was right. You see, who was the wrong way up?

What Paul was doing was not turning a right world upside down, but turning a wrong world the right way up. We need turning upside down and putting on our feet. It’s putting the world right.
And given to you and to me is the privilege of being part of this exciting adventure. But you will never be part of the adventure if there is a ‘so far and no further’ to your discipleship.

And we have to be straight about that because Scripture is straight about that. “Many walked no more with him,” it tells us in John 8, because the cost was more than they were willing.

And Jesus didn’t round them up and bring them back and say, “I am sorry. We’ll make it a little bit easier for you.”

And the reason why this church exists is the reason why the church in the New Testament existed. And the theme you will find every week in your bulletin has become our slogan. “Growing the Body of Christ for God’s Global Mission.”

That is, growing the body, deepening our knowledge of God, our knowledge of His Word, our availability to Him, our surrender to Him. Why? That we can sit back and say, “Wow, this is really nice being a disciple,” but that we participate in whatever way God directs personally in His global mission.

And so it’s very convenient that halfway through these missionary adventures of Paul, the local pagan people picked up a beautiful description. “They are turning the world upside down. They are upside down men with an upside down message about an upside Messiah.”

And the Bereans sat down and said, “Is this true?” They believed, and you need to do the same. Maybe there are some of us here this morning; you have never believed.

And there are people every week who have never come to know Christ. I know because every week somebody contacts me Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, “I was there on Sunday. I am not a Christian. I was interested by what I heard.”

And you can come to Christ this morning but you understand, although it is a free gift, the exchange is you give everything you are and you receive freely His gift of salvation. You confess your sin; you surrender to Him as Your Lord.

But many of us are Christians. I know how easy it is in my own life to allow things to clutter up the Christian life and we are pulled back. We don’t bring the lordship of Christ into every part of our lives. And we wonder why it is, “you know, this Christian life is pretty dull.” And of course it’s dull unless you are living in the fullness of a surrendered life, Spirit-filled life, with your eyes open to the task. There is nothing more exciting.

Let’s pray together. I don’t know where you are individually this morning; we are all in different places. But my prayer has been that somewhere along the way this morning in the hearts of each of us, God will move us a step further.
Perhaps for some of us, that vital step from death to life – you need to acknowledge your need of Christ and find Him to be your Savior and Lord.

For others of us, you have found yourself getting entangled in things that are holding you back. You need to confess those and just in your heart humbly say, “Lord Jesus, occupy the throne as my King, and fill me and energize me with Your Holy Spirit. Open my eyes to see the needs around me and the grace to follow Your leading and guiding.”

And there will be lives in Toronto who today would never even think of being in a place like this but they will be turned upside down in the next weeks and months as through your witness Christ becomes real to them.

Lord, we thank You this morning that You are alive and active. We are not down here trying to do things for You. We are being brought into union with yourself that You, by Your indwelling Spirit, may do things through us that are life-changing. Help us to be part of this we pray, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.