

Radical and Royalist

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of patience, endurance, and reverence in presenting the gospel, and calls Christians to radical action to turn the world upside down and see it right side up.

Duration: 35:49

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 17:1-3, Acts 17:10-11, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of presenting the Gospel with patience and clarity. He highlights how the apostle Paul repeatedly reasoned, explained, and proclaimed the word of God on three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue. The preacher encourages the listeners to follow this example and patiently explain and proclaim the Gospel in their own lives. He also discusses the response to the Gospel, noting that while some accepted it with clear commitment, others rejected it and even resorted to violence. The preacher urges the audience to live in a way that honors Christ and seeks to overturn the materialistic and immoral aspects of society.

Transcript

Reading this evening from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17, beginning at verse 1. When they had passed through Amphipholus and Apollonia 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, that is the unbelieving 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 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They're all defying Caesar's decree 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.

As soon as it was night the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Many of the Jews believed as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea they went there too agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.

The men who accompanied Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. We're going to concentrate on the ministry of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica but before coming to that it is helpful to make a comment on the concluding section of tonight's reading and that has to do with the procedure followed by the people of Berea. They not only listened to what the Apostles were saying but they turned to the scriptures to check it out to see if what they were saying was really true.

That is a very sound procedure. Students in theological seminaries and Bible colleges ought to follow it. The fact that a man has a thousand sheepskins on his walls that are indicative of academic achievement do not at all mean necessarily that he is teaching the pure unadulterated truth of God.

The teaching of every professor must be evaluated through the filters of scripture measured by the rule of scripture weighed in the scales of scripture. And no preacher, even if called by a hundred and ten percent of a congregational meeting, must be taken exactly for what he says all the time without comparing his teaching with what the Word of God says. We must stand against potpourri of the Protestant as well as the Roman Catholic sort.

No man is infallible. It is scripture alone which is our infallible rule of faith and practice. Therefore let everything be measured by the Word.

And if it should ever happen that any interpretation of scripture that I give you is at clear variance with the light which comes forth from the sacred page and the Holy Spirit shows you, take me aside and give me the benefit of your wisdom at that point. The Bereans listened and then they checked it out with the scriptures to see if what these missionaries were saying was in keeping with the scriptures which had come down to them by the inspiration of God. This, not this, is the final standard.

Well now we come to the episode that speaks of the spread of the gospel and the planting of the church in Thessalonica. The author is careful to point out just how the gospel was presented and what the gospel was that was presented in Thessalonica. Notice first of all the manner in which the gospel was presented.

It was presented with patience for we read that on three successive Sabbaths Paul went into the synagogue of the Jews and there he reasoned, there he explained, there he proclaimed. It was not something that he did in a hurry and then dashed off to something else. It is something that he repeated Sabbath after Sabbath with patience, seeking to explain, making God's Word plain.

He reasoned with them. He showed them the arguments in support of the position that he was espousing. He proclaimed as an authentic herald of God authorized by Jesus Christ and he did it Sabbath by Sabbath.

He showed patience in this. Some of you teach Sunday school. Some of you lead a regional weekday Bible study group.

Others of you are involved on campus in the study of the scriptures and in leading a group. Be patient, reason, explain as well as proclaim. Follow the pattern laid down by the Apostle who Sabbath after Sabbath endeavored to give people a clear understanding of the Word of God.

Patience was part of his procedure. And endurance. Remember that Paul had not just come from a cruise in the Caribbean under the warm winter sun.

Paul had come to Thessalonica after a hair-raising experience in Philippi. There he had been maligned. There he had been maltreated.

There he had been stripped. There he had been beaten. There he had been thrown into jail.

There he had had his hands and feet made fast in the stocks, treated as a common criminal under maximum security. And here he comes to Thessalonica and he continues the very same ministry that got him in hot water in the Macedonian city of Philippi. He not only showed patience in reasoning and explaining, he showed endurance, persisting, faithful to the God who called him no matter what the consequences and no matter what the cost.

Later on he would write to the Thessalonians about the experience that he had had in their city. And he would express himself in words like these, You know, brothers, that we had previously suffered and had been insulted in Philippi, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. Patience and endurance.

There's something else that the missionaries showed and that was reverence. Reverence for the written Word of God. For in his reasoning he didn't draw upon his own wisdom but upon the Word of God.

And what he explained was not his own speculative theological concoction but what God had revealed in the scriptures of the Old Testament. And what he proclaimed was not the latest fad but the Word of God which abides forever. You see, the Apostle Paul did not dismiss the Old Testament as an obsolete, irrelevant piece of literature.

He regarded the Old Testament as a message that was communicated by holy men of God who spake not by human impulse but as they were born along by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. He believed that all scripture from Genesis through to Malachi, because that's the only Bible that he had, was given by inspiration of God and therefore is profitable to teach us what we ought to believe and to show us how we ought to live. He had reverence for the written Word of God.

And you and I can do no less in propagating the Christian faith than by having a supreme reverence for the revealed truth of God given in the scriptures of the Old and completed by the fuller revelation of the New Testament. That was Paul's manner. Patience, endurance, reverence.

But what was his message? His message consisted of two parts, promise and fulfillment. Because he was speaking to Jews and to assorted Gentiles in a synagogue situation, he could assume that they had some acquaintance with the Old Testament, however defective they did know something about the Old Testament. When Paul goes to Athens on Mars Hill, he will begin with the people where they are at and quote some of their own poets and philosophers.

When he goes to the rural folk of Lystra, who don't know anything about Greek philosophy, let alone Greek poetry, and who have no knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, he will begin with the things that they know. Sunshine, rain, seed time, harvest, the providence of the God of creation. Paul had a knack of beginning with people where they were and we must develop that same skill if we would be effective in witnessing for Jesus Christ.

Now what was his message? His message was one of promise and fulfillment. You Jews expect a Messiah. You expect a Messiah who will have glory.

You expect a Messiah who is going to establish a kingdom. You expect a Messiah who is going to defeat all your enemies. You expect a Messiah filled with power, crowned with glory and honor.

But, he said, you do not take into account the full teaching of the Old Testament promise for the Messiah whom you expect, the Messiah who should fill the horizon of your hope, is not only one who has sovereignty but experiences suffering. He not only comes with power, he will know the meaning of poverty. He will not be forever riding the crest of popularity with the highest ratings in the land.

He will be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He will be crowned with glory and honor but he will also be crowned with thorns. This is indeed the picture that is given in prophecy after prophecy in the Old Testament.

And the Jews of that day clung with earnestness to all those things that spoke about the majesty of the Messiah and they put aside all those prophecies that spoke of his suffering, of his sorrow, of his sacrifice. Having shown them the fullness of the Old Testament promise concerning the coming Messiah, Paul then went on to say that Jesus has filled that job description to absolute perfection. For he died and the death he died was a death upon a cross and his crucifixion was not for any crimes that he had committed but because he was bearing the punishment deserved by the sins of the world.

And he whom men crucified, God now had raised from the dead, made him a prince, exalted him to be a sovereign as well as a Savior. What the Old Testament promised, Jesus has fulfilled, therefore Jesus is the Messiah. That was Paul's procedure in dealing with people who had a common starting point, the scriptures of the Old Testament, and so much then for the presentation of the gospel, his manner of presentation and the message that he presented.

But now we come to consider the response to the gospel. How did the people respond? Some responded with commitment. Among the hearers were Jews and God-fearing Greeks and prominent noble women.

These received the teaching that Paul gave. These saw in Jesus the fulfillment of all the promises concerning the Messiah. They accepted the message and they began to cluster around the missionaries as the nucleus of a new church planted in the city of Thessalonica.

Maybe it's right to say that the Apostle Paul was not so much a church planter as he was a synagogue splitter. For in preaching the message, those who believed and accepted the fullness of the testimony that he gave found that they could no longer find acceptance in the synagogue and therefore had to withdraw and form a Christian community in that city. Jews who saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecies, God-fearing Greeks, Gentiles, people with a heathen background who had gotten sick and tired of pagan mythologies and were looking for the reality of the true and living God and who now found it in Jesus Christ.

Noble women, thinking women, women with a mind of their own, women waiting for the evidence on the basis of which to make a lifelong commitment, found it when Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Christ and they too made their decision for Jesus. Later on Paul was going to recall the tremendous impact of his preaching ministry among the Thessalonians and in the very first chapter of his first letter to them he was going to say, Brothers loved by God, we know that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words but with power, with the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction. You know how he lived among you for your sake.

You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering. You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit and so you in Thessalonica, you who came to believe, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, you became a model to all other believers in that part of the world. We know how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

The presentation of the gospel and the response to the gospel on the part of some, clear-cut and welcome commitment, but on the part of others there was not commitment but contradiction. There was not reception but rejection and the scripture tells us with a great economy of words of the devastating thing that happened. The Jews who refused to accept Jesus went around the marketplace looking for hands that needed work, the work of riot and violence.

In the NIV it's translated as bad characters who hung around the marketplace. The King James puts it far more picturesquely in calling them lewd fellows of the baser sort and that is what they were, looking for a fight. And here they enter into a strange alliance between those who had been in the synagogue and those who had come from the marketplace, between religious zealots, fanatics and bigots and men of violence, a mindless mob.

And so it has ever been in contrasting the Christian Church and contradicting the Christian word. On the one hand you had that worldly politician moved by expediency rather than principle, unscrupulous Pontius Pilate. Then you had crafty Caiaphas who manipulated the religious cult of the temple for the profit of himself and his family, a kind of ecclesiastical mafia.

And then you had Herod. Herod, he of sensual ill-fame. Herod, that sensual superstitious buffoon contemptuous of Christ and Christianity.

They each hated each other but they came together in their opposition to Jesus Christ. A strange alliance and we find it again here in Thessalonica. And having formed this strange alliance they begin to launch their accusations in order to whip up the crowd and get a mindless mob to do violence to the missionaries and their associates.

And the accusations are two. First, these are the men who have turned the world upside down and now they have come here to do the very same. They're disturbers of the peace.

They sow the tares of disorder in our community. We want them out. Not only do they sow the seeds of disorder, not only are they guilty of turning the world upside down, but they are going contrary to the decree of Imperial Caesar, the mightiest man on earth, and they are advocating another king in his place.

They are rebels. They are revolutionaries. They will ruin us unless we run them out of town.

The accusations of course were groundless. Far from sowing the seeds of disorder, these men were ambassadors for Christ, calling people to be reconciled to God and to each other. They followed a God who was not the author of confusion but of peace.

They were men dedicated to the Prince of Peace. The message they brought was a message of love and forgiveness and understanding and restored fellowship. How can you accuse them of being the propagators of disorder? And as for advocating the overthrow of Caesar, these are the men who in Romans 13 will say, let every soul be subject to the higher powers for the powers that be are ordained of God.

Honor to whom honor, custom to whom custom, tribute to whom tribute. These are men who follow him who said, give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and reserve for God the things that are God's. So both charges were wide of the mark and showed the deceptiveness of those who sought to instigate riot and the mindlessness of those who followed them in their evil intent.

And yet those accusers spoke more truth than they realized, for these men indeed were dedicated to turning the world upside down in order that it might be right side up. They could not be complacent with the corruption of their society which was idolatrous and immoral and intemperate and unjust and neither ought we in our time. There are many things happening in our time concerning which we cannot be complacent and which we would want to see dealt with radically and overturned.

On the peaceful crescent on which we live, a house gets sold. A lovely house like our own. It's only 30 years old.

It's good for quite a while yet. In come the bulldozers like prehistoric mastodons and butt right in and within less than two hours, 30 years of family history lie in dust and rubble. Why? So that you can dig a hole in the ground and put up a huge monstrosity that'll sell for more than a million and a half.

And meanwhile, the land speculators get rich and young couples cannot even afford a very modest place to call home. A world that is as cold-blooded materialistic as that needs to be overturned and we cannot be complacent about that sort of thing. The pornography business.

Running into the billions of dollars and we are cowed into a corner by those who scream freedom from censorship. That needs to be overturned and attitudes changed and laws that regulate moral pollution as stringent as those that are supposed to regulate physical pollution. We're all astounded at what's happening in Bogota.

We're shocked at the daily bombings that go on because of the drug lords. But let's bring the matter much closer to home. If there were no demand for crack and cocaine and all the rest of it in so-called Christian North America, there would be no drug lords in Colombia, Peru, or Bolivia.

The market would dry up. With that kind of situation, we cannot be complacent. We want to see the world turned upside down and we want government at every level reinforced by Christian conviction to do what it can to stamp this thing out before it destroys us with the crime and vice and violence associated with the traffic.

It was a very sobering thing to see on the anniversary of the beginning of World War II the figures that Canada had supplied one million to wage war overseas and 45,000 of them over a five-year period died. And what about the matter of abortion that is virtually on-demand while judges and parliamentarians play a

shell game as to responsibility, where it is not 45,000 in five years but 63,000 on an average every year that fall hapless victims to this unrestrained practice? What about racism? What about the denial of Native rights? What about the plundering of lands and the exploitation of their riches before the question of ownership is even settled legally? Everything that defaces God's creation, everything that dehumanizes men and women made in the image of God constitutes an offense to him and an injury to others and Christians must be as those who would turn the world upside down because they want to see it right side up. These are guilty of saying that there should be another king, somebody called Jesus, in the place of Caesar.

In a sense far deeper than they realized, they spoke the truth. For Jesus Christ is indeed a king. His kingship was mocked by soldiers with their savage and crude ways.

They put a rag on his back and a scepter in his hand and crowned him with thorns and bowed the knee to him, Hail King of the Jews. Pontius Pilate saw this as a way in which he could rub salt into the wounds of his subject Jewish population by putting a label over Jesus crucified. This is a king fit for that Jewish rabble.

But he is indeed a king and it was part of the prophetic apostolic message that was given without compromise that whom you slew, God raised from the dead. Whom you subjected to humility, God has highly exalted. Whom you crown with thorns, God crowned with glory and honor.

He is King of kings and Lord of lords. And New Testament evangelization on the one side was sinners receive him as your Savior and on the other side, you who have received new life, submit willingly, everlastingly to the sovereignty and the authority of Christ the King. Call him Lord and serve him as such.

What is a Christian? A Christian is someone who has given his allegiance to Jesus Christ. What is a Christian? A woman who is truly liberated from self because she has surrendered to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. How do we arrive at our pattern of belief? How do we arrive at our way of living? Do we take a poll? Do we study the trends? Do we take soundings? Do we look at ratings? Do we judge by popularity? No, our standard of belief and our pattern of behavior come to us authentically and authoritatively from him who is our King.

It is not something that can be democratically decided by majority vote. When he speaks, the matter is settled and all we must do is bow humbly and willingly and lovingly before him and say, yes, Lord, another King named Jesus, turning the world upside down in order that it might be right side up. That's what it's all about.

What a powerful message was there. What a great result began to happen when the gospel was presented and received. And may the same be true in your life and mine that in the new week on which we have already entered, we might live as those who want to set things right side up, using our influence as citizens, helping to shape the conscience of the country in any way that we can, beginning with ourselves and our close associates and living in such a way that Christ the King will be honored in all what we say and all that we do.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, we give you our wholehearted allegiance. We would render to you a heartfelt and willing obedience.

We would see others come under the beneficence way of your sovereignty. Help us, Lord Jesus, so to live for the honor of your crown and the glory of your kingdom as you rule in us, in our families, in our church, and through us in the world round about us. And haste the day when you shall be revealed from heaven and power and glory and bring about the fullness of your kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This we ask for our good and for your glory. Amen.

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