

What's wrong with this picture? [Image of the world upside down]

That's right, the world is upside down!

It's been that way for a long time...so long that people don't even notice.

- Children die needlessly from disease and malnutrition.
- Children are enslaved in sex-trafficking.
- Greed and excess are held up as the goal while people die for lack of clean drinking water.
- We value the wrong things in life merely to satisfy our selfish pleasures.
- People are devalued.
- Relationships are thrown away without a thought for the lives that are destroyed.
- People carelessly hurt and demean others without giving thought to their words, actions and attitudes.
- Truth is exchanged for what works in the short term or for the satisfaction of a few.

Well now it's time to set things right! It's time for you and me as disciples of Jesus to set the world right-side up!

That will not be easy because many people like the world the way it is- upside down. That was the case in a story we find in the book of Acts.

It seems that everywhere Paul went he stirred up some kind of commotion. That happens when you are trying to hit the reset button on a world that has been upside down for so long that everyone thinks it's ok the way it is.

On one of those occasions when Paul and Silas had been preaching in the city of Thessalonica some people took exception to disciples of Jesus trying to right the world. You can understand why these men were upset since the actions of Paul and Silas were cutting into the status quo. These men even went so far as to cause a riot in Thessalonica to call attention to the actions of Paul and the other disciples of Jesus who were turning the world upside down.

When the rioters couldn't lay their hands on Paul and Silas they grabbed Paul's hosts- Jason and some other disciples of Jesus- and drug them before the city officials. That is when the leader of the riot protested: "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." Acts 17:6 (NKJV)

First of all notice that to those who are living in an upside-down world they think the world is fine and that Paul and Silas are turning the world upside down. Says something about our perspective on life!

'They've come here too,' yes, this was a rather common event wherever Paul went! But that's what the Good News does; it rattles lives and systems and beliefs that are built on this upside-down world in which we live. And when you start rattling the system, the people who depend on it get rather testy! Just look back at Acts 16.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were arrested for setting a slave girl free from her captives who had been using her to make money. Let me pick up the story here in Acts 16:19-24...

Seems like the only world getting turned upside down was that of Paul and Silas!

Now before you think that Paul and Silas were just hanging out in the jail at Philippi I want you to understand what happened. They were stripped and beaten- severely flogged. Each lash had ripped open their skin exposing them to more pain and suffering with each blow.

Notice that the jailer put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. I've heard this described as sitting with your legs spread eagle...

So you've got the picture; Paul and Silas are sitting in the dark, they are bleeding from being beaten within an inch of their life, they are sitting in a combination of sweat, blood, human excrement...and why are they here?

They are here because they are trying to right the world that is upside down. They are here because Jesus called them to preach the gospel, to change lives, to right the wrong, to bring justice...

You could understand if they just gave up.

You could understand if they asked, 'Why me?'

You could understand if they just wept.

You could understand if they started singing...wait, they started singing!

Yes, look at verse 25: About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

First, could you imagine singing in conditions like this?

No, we don't sing, let alone keep trying to change the world at this point...

But here is what I want you to see in verse 25: the other prisoners were **listening**. Men who were in this hole with Paul and Silas, men who could not conceive of singing were listening to the most unusual thing they had ever heard.

In this upside-down world, Paul and Silas were living in a way that demonstrated what it means to live right-side-up!

Why?

Because, *when you know who you are, you'll know what to do.*

Paul and Silas knew who they were- they were God's, they were loved, and most importantly they were free-even in prison!

When you know who you are...

This is why it is so important for us as disciples of Jesus to know who we are; because when we know who we are...then you'll know what to do.

Paul and Silas knew who they were. They knew that they were filled with the same spirit that had raised Jesus from the dead and so they knew what to do. That's why they began singing.

And when they began to sing...well listen to what happened: 26-34

Paul and Silas' singing in prison was literally turning the world upside down! But their actions also turned the world of the prisoners and their jailer upside down; or is that right-side-up?

In an upside-down world people who choose to live right-side-up will not only stand out—they'll demonstrate that right-side-up living changes us and changes the world!

People living right-side-up will sing in the midst of tragedy, they have hope when hope seems lost, they have peace when storms rage, they'll fight for justice where justice is demanded even when others turn their backs, they'll care for those no one else will care for...

The story of Rachel Beckwith explains how even a 9 year old could turn the world upside-down. <http://vimeo.com/46300983?action=share>

Rachel knew that disciples of Jesus can turn the world upside down! And God even worked through the tragedy of her death to make a bigger impact than anyone ever expected.

When you know who you are, you'll know what to do.

Now how about you? Who are you?

I want to give you two words to remind you today who you are so you'll know what to do.

Look with me at the two images Jesus uses in Matthew 5:13, 14 to describe who we are as disciples.

Jesus said that you and I are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Salt was a valuable commodity in the ancient world that had many uses. Salt was a preservative used to keep food before the days of refrigeration. Salt was a purifying agent. Salt was a healing agent.

Salt is a change agent! And I believe Jesus used salt as a metaphor to remind his disciples that they are called to be change agents in this world.

As salt, you and I are poured out of the salt shaker so that we can be agents for change- we can season the world and enhance the flavor of the life Jesus came to offer all people.

But Jesus also said that his disciples are the light of the world! You and I are called to live as a light in the darkness. We're here to run into the darkness shining the light of Jesus so that we can right this upside down world!

When you know who you are; you'll know what to do!

When you know that you are salt; you know that you are here to create a thirst in others' lives. To add flavor or seasoning to other's lives; to spice things up in a sense by teaching God's truth and ministering to others; have an impact by being a good example for others; just like salt melts ice we are to thaw people's hearts with kindness, making them open to friendship, relationships, and to God's truth.

When you know that you are light; you know that you are here to shine the light into darkness. To speak out when we should; not allow our light to dim with apathy; our light should express the ways of selfless love and outgoing concern for the well-being of others; the light of the world overcomes our separation from God by the darkness, we are to get our life out there where it can make a difference by simply being what it is - a vessel of Christ.

Next week we're going to dive into the last part of our summer series on Identity by looking at the story of the Good Samaritan and asking the question, 'Who is My Neighbor?' One reason we need to know who we are is because we are called into our neighborhoods to be salt and light- so when we know who we are, we'll know what to do..

God has placed each of us where we are so that we can shine. And God has put us into contact with others so that we can be a change agent.

My challenge to you for this week is to be an agent for change. Look at your world- the upside-down world that needs disciples who are willing to turn it right-side-up—even at the cost of their life! Be a change agent!

And be a light! Shine into the lives of others the good news of Jesus. I can assure you that people are watching; waiting to see if you sing in the dark.

When you know who you are, you'll know what to do. So now that you know, go and shine!