

Upside Down: Expansion  
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We follow a king that turned the world upside down, and when we commit to following him, our lives are turned upside down, and from that, there is a call to live upside down.

### Intro

In my younger days, one of the things I valued was getting a laugh. I would often times do things to get a laugh and may you were like this or you know people like this but they would go cause trouble or do things that were funny out of their own enjoyment. When I was in college this continued and there were plenty of fun pranks and things we did to cause trouble around campus. It was my junior year when I was with some people and I thought it would be funny to hide people's belongings. So, we took people's decorations, we took people's doormats, it started to escalate as one of my buddies who worked in maintenance joined us and started to steal people's bathroom doors, it was absolutely crazy. There was this hill on campus that could be seen from the parking lot of the boy's dorm, it was next to the baseball field and it was out of the way so you could see it but you would never look over there and there really wasn't anything over there but a gravel road that led to a shed. So, we thought it would be hilarious if we stole people's keys and drove their cars up there. And that's exactly what we did on a Sunday afternoon. We moved about 8 or 9 cars up to the top of this hill and put their keys back in their room, so they didn't know anything had happened. People were looking everywhere for them and word got out that cars were missing, but it was funny because we could see them all from the parking lot on that hill, it was just a ways away and no one looked over there. Now I thought it was hilarious however the people who didn't know where their cars were did not find it as funny. In fact, I was an RA at the time and my boss came to me pretty heated and frustrated and asked if I heard about a bunch of stolen cars, I sensed he knew that I knew as I had been involved with schemes like this before. But he asked if I had any idea where they were and I said I'm not sure but they couldn't of gone far. I bet we'll catch whoever did this and get them in trouble. In that moment my friends and I went and re-stole the keys and brought the cars back and acted as if we had found them. And we all survived, and I was not

charged with auto theft. But many of us have stories of troublemakers or someone who has caused trouble or problems; many are funny or maybe even more serious.

We have been reading in the book of Acts which I think is an incredible book and one that you should read along with. It is the story of the church exploding out, dealing with struggles, and expanding out.

In Acts, we see the expansion of the church through many cities around the Mediterranean Sea. There were many different religions, ethnicities, and cultures throughout all of these cities. And at this time other than Christians and Jews, the default, what you could assume someone was, was polytheistic. Most people had a bunch of gods that they worshipped and followed. Christians at this time were heavily persecuted for what they believed in, even hunted down and killed, it seemed like they were blaspheming rebels. A prominent Jewish leader who was extremely efficient at this was Saul of Tarsus. He was looking to snuff out any hint of the Christian movement. He was ambitious and did everything he could to stop this movement. He did horrible things, to see it from his perspective he was doing everything he could to make sure his people didn't turn to what he thought was a false God. So, in his thinking, he was excelling at the right thing. Saul goes to a city called Damascus to stop the Christians there, but he is stopped on the road by this blinding light which is Jesus himself. Jesus commissions him to work for him and help this movement. This is a complete life change curveball as his name is now Paul and he is preaching the word.

This character we see that comes to us in Acts is Paul, he travels from city to city to tell of this one true God and his son Jesus. He is sharing the good news about what has just happened. Jesus is like no other king before and Paul is sharing that with as many people as he can in this part of Acts.

It's debated but we believe that Paul went on 3-4 missionary journeys, It is estimated that from these journeys Paul had an effect on about 59 different cities, he established 14 different churches, and traveled more than 10,000 miles on foot. I did the math, I am a huge UT fan, so if I walked on foot to Neyland stadium and back for every football game I would go to about 31 games. If you were a Michigan fan you could go to 9 games on foot. If you loved Disneyland in

California, you could almost 3 times on foot. I don't think any of us care about those places enough to do that.

He started out in the city of Antioch which was his home base, and he would go out from there. When he would arrive in a city we would go and teach in the Jewish synagogues. Now some people would like this message, some didn't, and some would even see him as dangerous and thought he was trying to start a revolt so they would kick him out of town. Now Paul was also a tentmaker at this point in his life so he would go to the marketplace and make and sell tents, but while he was there, he would continue to share the good news of Christ. This news was so controversial people hated him and beat him and threw him in jail. Now you may ask why was this so controversial, in some of my research I found it described like this and I thought it was interesting. Roman gods kept peace and order in that culture, they kept the people safe, and they were responsible for a lot of things. So, Jesus wasn't going to be just another God, Paul was saying all of the gods you have are nothing, they are powerless in the face of Jesus. He is saying their whole culture, their way of life, is wrong. He would refer to Jesus as Lord and Son of God, which is the titles that people have given the Emperor of Rome. This was a big deal. However, people were drawn to the hope and love found in the church that you couldn't find anywhere else. People were being transformed and joining this Christian community and movement that created this new way of living. Paul would go from city to city doing this, enduring pain and suffering, but in doing this he brought the good news to people, and it was the power of God that kept him moving forward. Paul willingly put himself in danger and in harm's way for this cause. To all others, it looked crazy. The rest of Acts is telling of what happened on these journeys and it connects the church together in many ways.

Paul is planting churches and on one of his journeys, he gets to a city called Thessalonica. This is in Acts Chapter 17 I am reading the ESV. (Acts 17:1-5 on screen). The beginning is classic Paul. He gets to the city and is in the synagogue and he tells them the good news, he explains it, then he persuades them of the gospel, and he does a good job as many believed. I am sure by this point he had gotten pretty good at it. And then the Jews there got mad at him and formed a mob, which is also just classic. But I want to read verses 6-7 (on screen) here:

And when they could not find them, 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, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

We loved the way it is described here. Paul and his Ministry coworker were staying in the city with a man named Jason and they find him and drag him out into the street, they take his money we read in verse 8 and they ask where are they? Where are these people who have turned the world upside down (the NLT says where are the ones who caused trouble all over the world) the ones who are acting against Caesar saying there is another king, Jesus?

Little did these people realize they had given such a compliment to the Christian movement. That phrase turned upside down, also means revolt, or agitate. They gave us a huge compliment Christianity was radically impacting the world, it was changing things. The Kingdom of God was attempting to break through and turn the world back to what God created it to be. They described the grand redemptive story that is the bible, that is Christianity. And they said who's doing it? Where are these Christians, these Christian leaders? Well, Paul and Silas get sent away to keep doing this in other cities, Christianity, the Holy Spirit we talked about a few weeks ago, is turning the world upside down.

Now I think there are a few things that are particularly upside down about the Christian faith. I talked about this with our students last Christmas. The way that Jesus came to earth was completely backward from what people thought. Jesus was supposed to be this great king, the Messiah who would deliver his people from evil, what they thought Rome was. He came as a baby in most likely a cave with animals. He was laid in a feeding trough, he was poor, and his family was poor and surrounded by controversy as Mary was pregnant before wedlock. The first people to see him were shepherds who probably weren't super sanitary and definitely weren't wealthy or full of influence. He lived his life like this. He got teenagers who would not have been considered very bright to be his disciples who would spread his word. In his disciples there was a tax collector and also a zealot, two types of people who would have hated each other. He invited poor people, prostitutes, and Samaritans, and cared for women, children, widows, and all who were forgotten. He even ate with religious officials who called him an

enemy. He heals a man with leprosy and lets the unclean touch him. He taught to love our enemy, turn the other cheek, give to those in need, take Sabbath, and forgive sin. The more you look at it his whole life is upside down. It goes against the way of the world, He gives up power in the world rather than gains it. He even dies with a crown on his head, but the crown is of thorns. He a king, dies on a criminal's cross. This is everywhere.

Paul's life is completely flipped by Christianity, he goes from torturing Christians to saving them. He is hunting Christians now he is preaching the good news. He was persecuting and now he's persecuted. He was Saul and now he's Paul. In this Jesus transformed him with the Holy Spirit. Paul followed the King who turned the world upside down, he himself was turned upside down, and from that, he lived upside down. (on screen)

This whole concept raises some questions for me, things I have reflected on in looking at this.

How has your world been turned upside down? (on screen) What has the Holy Spirit done in your life?

I believe Christianity is a very upside-down movement. We see from the beginning Christians are worshipping together, they are living sacrificially and giving to the poor, they love one another. We are called to live like Jesus and that is still very upside down. I think many of you have stories of being turned upside down by the Spirit.

We see plenty of characters in the Bible who's lives were turned upside down. Paul is a great example of this but so are the disciples of Jesus. Matthew 4:18-20 (on screen) says, "<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

These were normal everyday people, really they were pretty young. But they were not the brightest, most spiritual, they knew scripture but not as well as most other candidates he could have chosen from. But they dropped everything to follow this guy, because Jesus was calling them.

Going to Johnson I got to hear a lot of people's stories and testimonies and I heard some crazy stories of how God used the right people at the right time to transform people. I think there are plenty of incredible testimonies describing that. But what I have seen in my own life is similar to what I have been able to see here. I appreciate my interactions with many of you some of them have probably to you seemed like nothing or something simple, but the meals I have shared, the trips to waffle house, the golf rounds I have played, the workout sessions, the events I've worked with many of you, the conversations, the visits. I have the Spirit working and moving through many of you. I had multiple people call and ask to make sure I wasn't alone on Christmas this year. The heart this community has is incredible. I have seen this impact in every stage of my life and I am sure there are many of you who have been shaped and molded by the Spirit throughout your life so I encourage you to look back and find those moments when your world was subtly changed or altered back towards the kingdom.

I want to make sure I say this if you have never had a chance for your life to be turned upside down by the Holy Spirit come talk to one of us, I will be out there after service we will have a number of people out there who would love to talk to you, sit down, get coffee, whatever we can, because we believe that this movement we are a part of, this faith we have is so important and we want you to be a part of it and find that peace and meaning in your life. WellSpring has been upside down many times.

**What does it mean to live upside down today?** (on screen)

If we look at the lives of the early disciples, Paul, and Jesus we can see that in the same way their movement was upside down, so were their lives. In 1 Corinthians 4:10 Paul is talking about true Apostles and he says they are fools for Christ, He describes them as weak and dishonored. How does this compare to today? If we look at their lives we see that they all went out. Whether it was around the known world, throughout their country or simply in their community they went out. They met people where they were. We see Paul over and over again going to his fellow Jews in the synagogue and then going to the city markets. Jesus does the same thing.

To be a part of this movement and to follow the model set before us we need **take the gospel into the world** (on screen – building bulleted list). Whether that is in your job, neighborhood, school, gym, or community in general we need

to take the good news of Christ there. The message of the Spirit turning lives upside down and it can do the same to you should not be kept still.

We need **to have relationships** (on screen bullet 2) like the early disciples. Paul had partners like Silas, Barnabas, and Timothy. He loved the people he ministered to. We see in all of his letters he thanks the churches he works with and he talks of his love for them. **2 Thessalonians** (on screen) says 1:3 it says, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing." He did this often. We see Jesus loved others and maintained relationships well, he loved and cared for the 12 and brought them with Him everywhere. He had friends in Lazarus and Mary Magdalene. So not only do we need to be going out into our world, we need to be forming relationships in the same way. Maybe this looks like going out with new friends, learning more about coworkers, learning more about people that live near you, or even getting to know the families of your kid's friends.

In living upside down we see in the lives of those early followers they **took risks** (on screen – bullet 3). Just meeting together was a risk to call yourself a Christian or a Christ follower was a risk. We see later in Acts there is famine and disaster in Jerusalem and the church is pooling together money to send to the church in Jerusalem as a relief. Paul is going around collecting money and **Acts 20:22** (on screen) says, "And I now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there." Later in **verse 38** (on screen) the Ephesians are upset and it says, "What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again." Then they accompanied him to the ship. He was going to Jerusalem where there were a lot of people who wanted to kill him, so he is taking a big risk by going there. He took big risks when he went into any city. The stories in the Bible are full of risk after risk trusting God will deliver on his promises. If we are to lean into the Spirit and let it turn our lives upside down we need to be willing to take some risks.

Maybe this looks like inviting someone to easter. That may not seem like a huge risk but in reality, it can feel like it. Maybe there's a coworker or neighbor whom we can go up to and simply invite to church or form a better relationship with them. Easter is in natural conversation right now so that's a great risk. We don't all have to go start a church or travel the world because those are great risks. But there are risks we can take in day-to-day life. Even if they don't work it

feels good to try and you usually get something out of it. I want to encourage you that when you take a risk for the kingdom God will be right there with you and when you are in the midst of a risk with God by your side it feels good. It's a great way to take responsibility in the church and it's something we want to do even as a church.

When we are a follower of Jesus our lives are turned upside down. We are called to live as such, going into the world, having real relationships, and taking risks.

**How can we help turn the world upside down?** (on screen)

It's important to look at the church today. We have seen some ways we can turn the world upside down. In this time in Acts the Christians are turning the world upside down, are we having that same effect today?

I think there are times when we are better at it and times where we struggle. I look at things like the Well. The Well is a local food pantry that was started here in this church, and the numbers are crazy to look at it. Last year to now the Well has fed 7,727 families through its food pantry, and it's fed 2,925 families through its mobile food pantry, it has provided 175,000 meals through the jetpack program which many of you have helped with. It has made a difference. There was a need and Christians went out into the community, formed relationships with people, and took a risk. They are now serving this community. This isn't some huge country-wide organization. This is happening just down the road. I have seen so many organizations, and so many mission partners doing great work. But you don't need to have this grand plan, you can turn the world upside down right where you are at.

I think many of us know of Christians who don't have that same effect. Places where there have been big moral failures, places where leaders have messed up. There are churches and organizations that have led people astray, that lived the way of the world, nothing upside down about it, and that is a hard and damaging thing. I know many people who have seen this, who have been effected by it. This is why it is so important to live upside down today.

We have talked about the risks you can take but man are they so important. You don't realize how much they can affect someone. I have had some of my best friends be people that were invited to church one day. One of my best



friends in the world was invited to my church when I was in high school, he and his family decided to come to our church and they kept coming to our church. We have been friends ever since. There have been some hard times in my life and I am so thankful I have had him around. There are so many like that, people that have played a huge role in another person's life because they took a risk.

The kingdom of God is an upside-down kingdom, so when we are living in accordance with God's plan people will notice. When we are living seemingly upside down in this world, people will notice. I believe that is one of the greatest ways we can share our faith. **Romans 12:2** (on screen) says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

There are so many things this world will use to try to trick us and convince us that their way of living is the right way. That it's better to live the way of the world, it's the right side up. Chasing money, success, power, or influence. That what other people do is ok, that it won't hurt anyone. This struggle you have always had, won't hurt anyone else it's ok. The world tells us, no we can live one way during the week and a different way on Sunday. It tells us our lives would be better if we put our hope in the things of the world, in the money, in the relationship, or in security.

The Upside down the kingdom of God brings fruit, it brings love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When the Spirit is in us this is the fruit.

**Paul followed the King who turned the world upside down, he himself was turned upside down, and from that, he lived upside down.** (on screen)

**We follow a king that turned the world upside down, and when we commit to following him, our lives are turned upside down, and from that, there is a call to live upside down.** (on screen by itself)

If you have not made that decision, I want to offer that again and encourage you who have made that decision. We are called to live this way and it is God. One thing I have learned about the world is that a lot of the time it hurts and living in it is very hard. The way of the world brings a lot of pain, but when we

live upside-down we look to God in that. It will be the best decision you ever make and I promise you that because it leads to so much good.

The kingdom of God turns the world upside down, I want to give you a challenge or a charge. There are many times when the church as a whole has not been upside down. Where there are those who can't tell a difference between the way a Christian is living and the way someone who doesn't know God is living. We live in a place in need of people willing to live like this. So I want to challenge you to live like this.—If it's inviting someone here maybe for easter then that's great. If it is deepening your walk and committing to prayer, reading, or serving then that's awesome. If it's forming real relationships with neighbors or people in the community, or people in this church then that is great. But do not leave here today without committing to live upside down. It is so good, it is so important, and it is what we are called to do.