

What Does This Mean?

Series: Hanging On in an Upside-Down World

Acts 2:1-21, 33-41

May 23, 2021

Folks, it's so good to be together today. I want to invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin, or if you are online, grab your spiritual notebook.

Today, we conclude our series "Hanging On in an Upside-Down World." In this series, we have discovered important keys to dealing with a world that seems turned upside down, when a marriage and family is disintegrating, when people are barely getting by, when life seems blocked repeatedly by obstacles and detours and troubles.

Thank you for your encouraging words during this series and for those of you who have purchased the book. All the proceeds during this series are going to the mortgage. And by the way, if any of you win the Vax-A-Million, your pastor strongly recommends you tithe your winnings to the mortgage. Just some helpful spiritual advice.

So, what have we learned during this series? Well, we've learned that to hang on in an upside-down world, you need to remember that:

1. Jesus Calls Your Name.
2. Stay Close.
3. You Don't Have the Whole Story.
4. Listen to the Witness of the Holy Spirit.
5. Peace.
6. Jesus is still Lord and Master.
7. Love is the right response.
8. Your Solution to Your Situation is Probably Not God's Solution.
9. You are a living testimony.
10. Power to Cope.

There are two more things that you need when you are trying to hang on in an upside-down world. Two more things you need when your world seems to be in turmoil and chaos, when the change that you knew was coming finally comes, even though you didn't want it to. What do you need?

Well, let's look at our Scripture passage. Acts 2 records the Day of Pentecost. Held 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the Festival of First Harvest. It was one of three major annual festivals¹, a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and He ascended 40 days after His resurrection, so this is 10 days after the Ascension. Jews from many nations had gathered in Jerusalem for this festival. And as we shall see, it is the birth of the Church. Let's look at verses 1-12:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they

¹ See Deuteronomy 16:16

heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other.²

First, or #11 in our list, you need, you want, you hope you can find the answer to the question the God-fearing Jews asked on Pentecost: **What does this mean?** What does this mean?

When our lives are being tossed in all directions, when we face uncertainty and struggle, when we face complete disruption, we want to know, "What does this mean?" When we have gotten over the shock of the prognosis, when we have finally caught our breath after receiving the pink slip or the investment statement or the foreclosure notice, we want to know, "What does this mean? Is there a purpose, a reason for all this? God, are you trying to tell me something, teach me something? What is your plan here?"

Paul wrote in Romans 8:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.³

In the Message Bible, Eugene Peterson paraphrases Romans 8:28-31 this way. Listen to this when your world seems upside down:

... we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun. So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose?⁴

My friends, God is working your situation for good. You may not know it right now, it may not feel that way right now. We may think that God doesn't know what He is doing. But I am here to tell you that the upside-down world events I have gone through, God has used them and continues to use them to make me and make you like His Son.

Your situation, whatever it is, as long as you love God, it will be for good. He knows what's going on. He wants you to be like His Son Jesus. He has called you by name. He is establishing you in His family, and He will stay with you to the end, and it will be a glorious end. "So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose?"⁵

² Acts 2:1-12 (NLT2)

³ Romans 8:28 (NIV)

⁴ Romans 8:28-31 (MSG)

⁵ Romans 8:31 (MSG)

So, when your world seems upside down, when you want to know, “What does this mean?” you need to trust God that He is working your situation for good, a good that shapes you more and more like Jesus, and good that has a glorious end.

Because in the end, you will need to discern what all of this means. Else, you will fall into the erroneous thought that God does not care for you. Your question must move from “Why God?” to “What God? What are You now trying to teach me through this?”

There is a second need when you are trying to hang on in an upside-down world. The second thing you need, number 12 on our list, is to realize something. Hear me on this; this is profound. Your world before the trauma and chaos, before the thing that changed everything, the world you thought was right-side up, was really upside down, but you just didn’t know it. The world that surrounds us, the culture and society and its morals that are all around us, that bombard us every day, are the values and standards and rationales of an upside-down world. We just don’t realize it.

What do I mean by this? When God created our world, He called it good. Then He created us and called that creation very good.⁶ But then sin entered this good and perfect world and corrupted it, turning it upside down. And we just became used to it.

But a shift began to occur with the day of Pentecost. Let me read to you from Acts 17 and an account of Paul’s travels into Greece on his 2nd missionary journey:

After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.” Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason’s house.

When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, “These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also.”⁷

There it is. The people claimed that Paul and Silas and the movement that would be called Christianity were turning the world upside-down. The power of the Gospel revolutionized lives, broke down all social barriers, threw open prison doors, caused people to care deeply for one another, and stirred them to worship God. The Gospel wasn’t then or is it today in the business of merely improving programs and encouraging good conduct, but of dynamically transforming lives.⁸

Here’s my point. Before the disciples met Jesus, before we met Jesus, before you made Him your Leader, we lived in an upside-down world. We didn’t realize it; we had gotten used to it, but it was not the world God intended.

So #12 is this: **Jesus Came to Turn Your World Right-Side Up:** Your world without Christ was already upside down. You just didn’t know it. Christ now wants to turn it right side up. He wants your life to become exactly what He wants it to be.

⁶ See Genesis 1

⁷ Acts 17:1-6 (NRSV)

⁸ Life Application Bible Notes, Acts 17:6

Jesus came to restore the world, turn it right-side up again. He showed us what God was like, taught us how to love God with everything we are, and love people as ourselves.

And that's what happened to the disciples. Since Easter and up until now, they were still living in upside down worlds. But when the Holy Spirit came, their lives turned right side up. They started doing exactly what God intended them to do. Verse 14:

Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike— and they will prophesy. And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below— blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives. But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.'

Verse 32:

"God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.'" "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.⁹

There you have it. Jesus wants to turn your world right side up. And the things that you are dealing with may be the very things God is using to reorient you to the right-side up world He has purposed for you. Just like what happened to the followers of Jesus when they saw their Master led off to be crucified – that death on the cross was part of God's purpose to give them, and us, new life – resurrection. These same followers waited in Jerusalem then for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and when the Spirit came, nothing was ever the same. Their worlds became right-side up, reoriented towards God's purposes for them.

That's why James can say this:

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

⁹ Acts 2:14-21. 32-41 (NLT)

So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION

¹⁰ James 1:2-4 (NLT)