

Acts for today**'The Growing Church in the Acts of the Apostles'**

No. 9: Thessalonica

In reading Acts we are made aware of the impact that the first believers made upon their world. In Acts 17, where Paul planted a church in the tough, north country city of Thessalonica, the Christians are described as having 'turned the world upside down' (v6)! So what can we learn from their experience?

Paul and Silas went straight to the synagogue to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. After three weeks they were able to establish a church, with some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and women. Paul's preaching was 'not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction' (1 Thess. 1:5). Don't forget what God can do in a relatively short space of time.

Inevitably this brought opposition from the leaders of the synagogue in the city. As today, opposition arose from expected allies - i.e. those who were also trying to honour God. This can often be the underlying cause of conflict within growing churches. However, Paul and Silas didn't withdraw or compromise the message; they simply lived blamelessly (1 Thess. 2:1-4).

The new church quickly learnt to proclaim the gospel in culturally appropriate ways. The Jews charged them with troublemaking; a more accurate translation of 17:6. By speaking of Jesus as 'king' (7), they posed a political threat to the Emperor. Michael Green comments: 'I think this rare example of referring to the 'kingship' of Jesus shows why, as they launched out into the Greco-Roman world from their Jewish one, the apostles reinterpreted the 'kingdom of God' language of the gospels in terms of allegiance to or faith in Jesus himself.' How can we be faithful to the gospel, while expressing it a form that will not be misunderstood?

However, the challenge remains for us: in what ways will our church 'turn the world upside down'?

**The Rev Paul Hardingham
continues his series on the early Church.**

**There can be no peace when there is hunger and intolerance.
Peace is of God and is for all.**

**Jesus is peace itself – peace does not exist apart from him.
His presence is the assurance that peace will come and is
already in our midst.**

**His is the life we live, a life that can make use of every effort
we make towards the making of peace.**

Fr James S Behrens