

## "ON MAKING AN IMPACT"

TEXT: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also"

Acts 17: 6

### INTRODUCTION

Take the word "impact". What do you think of when you hear that word? Perhaps it's a car, speeding down the highway, suddenly going out of control - the squealing of brakes, the screeching of metal - as it makes impact with another car. Or, maybe it's a batter with a powerful swing connecting with the high fast ball of the pitcher and driving it deep into the right field bleachers the way Reggie Jackson did three times last Tuesday night. Impact. Or, do you think of some system-cracking idea that suddenly takes the country by storm?

Jesus wanted His followers to have an impact on the world. Therefore, the heart of our Lord must have been warmed by those early Christians of whom it was written,

"These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also".

### HOW TO MAKE AN IMPACT

How does one make an impact? How do we go about turning the world upside down, or perhaps we should say - right side up. That's the question before us today, and it's an important one for us to consider as serious followers of the Man from Nazareth.

A textbook on physics will tell us that two factors are necessary for impact to occur. First, there must be weight or mass. Second, there must be velocity or speed. For instance, a ping-pong ball that is dropped into a pile of feathers makes little impact because there's no weight to speak of. On the other hand, a huge boulder that inches against a tree makes little impact because there is no velocity. Weight and velocity - these two factors are important in a spiritual sense if we're going to have an impact on the world around us. ~~for the sake of Christ.~~

### WEIGHT

First-off, we must have weight. I'm not speaking here of the kind of weight that some of us would be glad to surrender for the cause. Rather, I'm thinking primarily of the weight of conviction. How strong are our beliefs. ~~Are we really prepared to put our lives on the line for them.~~

Two Hollywood starlets were sunning themselves on a California beach. One turned to the other and said, "Have I shared my horoscope with you?" The other said, "I didn't know that you believed in astrology". Her friend replied, "Oh, I believe in everything...just a little bit".

We believe...just a little bit. ~~How strong and~~ How deep do those beliefs go in our lives. I think we mean well. I think we live in a time that is somewhat impatient with real conviction. We prefer deeds to creeds. We would rather act than reflect. Some aren't sure just what they believe.

I'm aware that the early Christians were not written up in a book called "The Contemplations" of the Apostles, but rather, "The Acts" of the Apostles. But I am suggesting that the impact that the Church is making on life around it is not in proportion to the busyness and its budgets. We should have a much

greater impact.

Recently in the NY Times I read of a man who had been a drug addict for 23 years. He somehow got turned around and managed the tough task of getting himself together, and now he's involved in a program designed to help others get themselves together. "The first thing" he said "he noticed when he got into the program was that people were talking about things he'd never heard of - things like values, principles and convictions". As far as he was concerned, "values were what you got at Macy's, principles ran schools, and convictions were what we got from the judge". He came to care deeply about individual persons, and to believe that human values are real, and that human life is of supreme worth.

At the end of the day we are only as strong as our convictions. There are too many going about in the name of Christ who do not know what they believe, who have never really come to grips with the demands of the Christ that we experience in the words of the Sermon on the Mount. George Santayana once commented, Receptive to something...

"Our dignity is not in what we do, but in what we understand. The whole world is doing things"

Perhaps the place for the Christian to begin is with his understanding of Jesus Christ. There are questions that Peter Forsyth raised many decades ago that are still valid for us today. Speaking of Christ, Forsyth asked:

"Is He our spiritual hero or our eternal Lord and God? Is He the prophet and the champion of man's magnificent resource, or is He the redeemer of man's spiritual poverty and moral failure? Did He come to transfigure before men the great religious and ethical ideas or to infuse into men new power in the thorough, final and Godlike sense of endowing them with a new and ransomed life? Did He refurbish humanity or did He redeem it? Did He release its best powers or bestow them?"

That is the last issue, however may blunt its edge or soften its exigency in particular cases. It is between a rational Christianity and a redemptive Christianity."

I am suggesting that we will not make the impact on the world that we ought to make until we have had a serious encounter with and made a real commitment or surrender, if you will, to Jesus Christ who confronts us on the pages of the New Testament. It is only after a person has experienced God in Christ that he can say, "I know whom I have believed". Without such weight, we tend to be carried about with every wind that blows and the Church will have little impact on the world in which we live.

VELOCITY In the second place, velocity is needed. How shall we translate this into spiritual terms. I'd like to suggest that we let velocity stand for the willingness to take the initiative for God's sake in the world.

The recovery of initiative is desperately needed in the Christian Church today.

We've been playing a defensive game so long - not acting, but merely reacting. Let those New Testament metaphors instruct us here. Jesus spoke of His followers as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven in the loaf. Salt says to meat, "be seasoned". Light says to darkness, "be gone". Leaven says to the loaf, "Get up - whether you want to get up or not".

One of the adversaries we face in the Church today is summed up in that pernicious little word, "adjustment". Paul says to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind..." J. B. Phillips puts it this way in his translation, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold".

The Church in the Book of Acts was anything but a Church playing a game of defense. It did not see itself as being in the world simply to co-exist with evil or make its adjustment to it, but rather to win the world for the sake of Christ - to carry the "good fight" to the enemy.

Some of you will remember those television shows of the late fifties and early sixties - the quiz shows - shows that were so widely received until it was discovered that they had more rigging than the Mayflower. Remember the one that was on late Sunday nights. I can't remember the name, but two contestants were to be found in separate isolation booths. The suave Master of Ceremonies would ask a question of one. The answer would be given. Of the second man he would then ask, "Did you hear the answer". Mopping his brow, biting his nails, the nervous contestant and candidate for the big prize would say, "I did". Then came the question, "Do you accept it or do you challenge it?"

This is God's question to the Church of Jesus...to those who march in that group. Do you see the discrimination around you that makes a mockery of justice? In all honesty we must say, "Yes, I see it". Then the question, "Do you accept it or do you challenge it?" Another question. Do you see the poverty on every side that binds like a heavy chain. Do you see the problems of world hunger that we face? "Yes" we say, "We see it" Do you accept it or do you challenge it". And so on. Anything that ought not be, need not be. We are called upon to put the stubborn ounces of our weight against all that lives in opposition to the will of God.

"Some men see things as they are and say 'why'.

I dream things that never were and say 'why not'"

CONTACT Weight. Velocity. This is the formula for impact. However, at the risk of disappointing those who thought they were going to get away with a simple two point sermon, I dare to suggest a third factor that is needed if we're going to make any impact at all. It's implicit all the way - namely contact. If we had the weight of a mountain - the speed of a jet and there was no contact, there would be no impact.

Where does the contact take place between the Church and the world. It's basic to my understanding of the Church that this contact does not happen primarily in the church and that it happens not through the clergy but through the laymen.

The point of contact is where the layman lives and works and studies and fraternizes and politics and "coffee breaks" and commutes. If it does not

happen there, it does not happen. You have the ministry. It is commonly assumed that the clergy have the laymen in order to have them help the ministers with their jobs. The truth is just the opposite. You have the ministry and it is our job as clergyman to enable you to do it effectively. If the lost provinces of government and labor and management and education are to be recovered and claimed for God, they will be recovered through you. You live and work where the action is...and where the impact can take place.

There is a story to my purpose of a Quaker who took his friend to a Quaker meeting. The friend, unfamiliar with the Quaker discipline, waited and waited for the service to begin. Nothing happened, all was silence. After what seemed an eternity the friend leaned over and in a soft voice asked, "when does the service begin?" The Quaker replied, "the service begins after we leave the meeting".

So it does with us all - especially for those who claim the name of Christ. After you leave this meeting and return to your place in the world - home, school, office, hospital room...whatever. Before you begin your work-a-day week, sit down and ask yourself these three questions:

If not ~~my own~~ I, who?  
If not here, where?  
If not now, when?

PRAYER Lord Jesus, look with favor upon your people gathered in worship this day. Give us a hint of the tremendous influence we might exert for You had we your way uppermost in our minds and hearts. Help us to make it first in our thoughts, first in our hearts in all we do this week. Amen

## "ON MAKING AN IMPACT"

TEXT: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also....." (Acts 17: 6)

INTRODUCTION What is it that you think of when you hear the word impact? Is it a car speeding down the highway, going out of control, the squealing of brakes and the screeching of metal, as it plows into another car? Impact. Or is it a batter with a powerful swing connecting with the fast ball of the pitcher and driving it over the center field fence the way that Tommy Agee did last Monday afternoon. Or do you think of some system-cracking idea that suddenly takes the country by storm. Impact.

Surely, it is the desire of Jesus for His church that His people make an impact on the world. Therefore, the heart of our Lord must have been warmed by those early Christians of whom it was written: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...."

HOW TO MAKE AN IMPACT How to make an impact? How to turn the world upside down, or perhaps we should be saying - right side up? This is our question, and I think it's a good question for us to consider especially in light of the fact that today is Laymen's Sunday.

The textbooks on physics tell us that two factors are necessary for impact. First there must be weight, or mass. Second there must be velocity, or speed. A ping-pong ball that drops onto a pile of feathers makes little impact because there is no weight. On the other hand, a hugh boulder that inches against a tree makes little impact because there is no vedocity. Weight and velocity - these same two factors are important in a spiritual sense if we are to make an impact on the world for the sake of Christ. Let's think about both of them.

WE MUST HAVE WEIGHT First of all, we must have weight. I'm not speaking here of the kind of weight that some of us would be glad to surrender for the cause. I speak rather of the weight of our convictions. How strong are our beliefs? Are we really prepared to put our lives on the line for them. I wonder.

We mean well. We should like to think that our convictions are strong, and that in moments of crisis, we'd stand by them. I think we live in a time that is somewhat impatient with convictions and strong beliefs. We prefer deeds to creeds. We would rather act than reflect. We aren't even sure what we believe.

Two Hollywood starlets were sunning themselves on a beach in California. One turned to the other and said, "Have I shared my horoscope with you?" The other said, "I didn't know that you believe in astrology". Her friend replied, "Oh I believe in everything - just a little bit."

Something of this same impatience with strong conviction has invaded the Christian Church. The verdict of history on our time may well be that we were long on motion and short on meaning. Consider the life of most any church in the western world today. Our mimeograph machines hum on late into the day. Someone has suggested that a strike at A. B. Dick Company would paralyze the Christian Church until it was settled. I thought of this this past week when our mimegraph machine experienced a break down. Our lights burn in the building five or six nights a week. Our committees meet with regularity. Our programs click off smartly.

One does not rise to protest all of this. I'm well aware that the earliest Christians were not written up in a book entitled, "The Thoughts of the Apostles", or "The Contemplations of the Apostles", but "The Acts of Apostles". I am suggesting that the impact that the church is making on life around it is not in proportion to its busyness.

At the end of the day we are only as strong as our convictions. There are too many people going about in the name of Christ who do not know what they believe, who have never really come to grips with the demands of the Christ that we experience in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, who have never grown up into a mature concept of Christian discipleship. Their names are on our rolls. I'm partial to the insight of George Santayana who said:

"Our dignity is not in what we do, but in what we understand. The whole world is doing things..."

Perhaps the place for the Christian to begin is with his understanding of Jesus Christ. There were questions that Peter Taylor Forsyth raised many decades ago that are still valid for us. Forsyth asked, speaking of Christ:

"If He our spiritual hero or our eternal Lord and God? Is He the prophet and the champion of man's magnificent resource or is He the redeemer of man's spiritual poverty and moral failure? Did He come to transfigure before men the great religious and ethical ideas or to infuse into men new power in the thorough, final and Godlike sense of endowing them with a new and ransomred life? Did He refurbish humanity or redeem it? Did He release its best powers or bestow them? That is the last issue, however we may blunt its edge or soften its exigency in particular cases. It is between a rational Christianity and a redemptive Christianity."

What I'm pleading for here is not that we distribute more religious information, or that we work for doctrinal tidiness. I am suggesting that we will not make the impact on the world that we ought to make until we have had a serious encounter with and made a commitment, or a surrender, if you will, to this Jesus Christ who confronts us on the pages of the New Testament. It is only after a man has experienced God that he can say, "I know whom I have believed". Without such weight, we tend to be carried about with every wind that blows and the church will have little influence, little impact on the world in which we live.

ALSO NEEDED: VELOCITY In the second place, velocity is needed. How shall we translate this into spiritual terms. I'd like to suggest that we let velocity stand for the willingness to take the initiative for God's sake in the world.

The recovery of initiative is desperately needed in the Christian Church today. We've been playing a defensive game so long - not acting, but merely reacting. Let those New Testament metaphors instruct us here. Jesus speaks of his people as the SALT of the earth, the LIGHT of the world, and the LEAVEN of the loaf. Salt says to the meat, "be seasoned!" Light says to the darkness, "be gone". Leaven says to the loaf, "Get up - whether you want to get up or not!"

One of the greatest enemies we face in the church is that pernicious little word, "adjustment". Paul said to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world, but

be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind...." J. B. Phillips puts it this way in his translation: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold". When will we wake up to discover that it is possible for a man, or a church, to make a good adjustment to a bad situation.

The classical illustration of this for me is the story of Jonah. Jonah, you will recall, was asked to go to preach to the people of Nineveh. Because of some deep-seated religious and racial prejudice, he chose instead to flee the directive of God and make his way toward Tarshish. Here is a man who made a very fine adjustment to his situation. We are told that he went down and bought a ticket. He made a good economic adjustment. When he got on board he did not involve himself with any of the wild bon voyage parties and cause a disturbance. He made a good social adjustment. And the record tells us that he immediately went down to his own quarters and was there but a short time before he fell asleep. He made a very fine physical adjustment. But God stirred the swells of the deep and invoked the winds from the vast expanses of his heavens to shake that ship and eventually to bring this man back to his proper destiny as a prophet of the Lord. I wonder who the best adjusted man was in Sodom or Gomorrah before those cities fell. It is not our mandate to fit in, but to stand out.

The church in the Book of Acts was anything but a defensive church. It did not see itself as being in the world simply to exist (co-exist, ie) with evil or adjust to it, but rather to win the world for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Some of you, I'm sure, will remember those television shows of a decade or so ago - those shows that were so widely received until it was discovered that they had more rigging than the Mayflower. Remember the one that was on late Sunday evenings. Two contestants were to be found in separate isolation booths. The suave master of ceremonies would ask a question of one. The answer would be given. Of the second man he would then ask: "Did you hear the answer". Mopping his brow, biting his nails, the nervous contestant and candidate for a big prize would say, "I did". Then came the question, "Do you accept it or do you challenge it".

This is God's question to the church. Do you see the discrimination around you that makes a mockery of justice? In all honesty we must say, "Yes, I see it". Then the question: "Do you accept it or do you challenge it?" Do you see the poverty on every side that binds like a heavy chain? "Yes, I see it". "Do you accept it or do you challenge it?" Do you see all the lewdness, the pleasure mindedness, the pornography, the evil that seems to be settling over our nation? "Yes, I see it" "Do you accept it or do you challenge it?" Do you see across the world the multiplied millions of people who live and die totally unmindful of God's love and grace? "Yes I see them". "Do you accept it or do you challenge it". Anything that ought not be, need not be. We are called upon to put the stubborn ounces of our weight against all that lives in opposition to the will of God.

CONTACT      Weight. Velocity. This is the formula for impact. At the risk of disappointing those who thought they were going to get away with a simple two point sermon this morning, I dare to suggest a third factor that is needed if we're going to make any impact at all. It's implicit all the way - namely contact. If we had the weight of a mountain and the speed of a jet and there was no contact there would be no impact.

Where does the contact take place between the church and the world. It's basic to my understanding of the church that this contact does not happen primarily in the church, and that it happens not through the clergy but through the laymen.

The point of contact is where the layman lives and works and studys and fraternizes and politics and "coffee breaks" and commutes. If it does not happen there, it does not happen. You have the ministry. It is commonly assumed that the clergy have the laymen in order to have them help the ministers with their jobs. The truth is just the opposite. You have the ministry and it is our job as clergyman to enable you to do it effectively. If the lost provinces of government and labor and management and education and the arts are to be recovered and reclaimed for God, they will be recovered through you. I hope as long as I am your minister that you will never say to me of yourself, "I am just a layman". I hope that no woman will ever say to me as a member of this church, "I'm only a housewife". Do not demean your possibilities - for you live and work where the action is and where the impact can take place.

In closing I should like to ask one thing of each of you. Tomorrow morning before you begin your work-a-day week - if you're a housewife, before you begin your chores in the home; if you're a student, before you trudge off to your first class; if you're a business man, before you begin to work through that first pile of correspondence, sit down and ask yourself these three questions:

If not me, whom?  
If not here, where?  
If not now, when?

PRAYER: Lord, look with favor upon thy people at worship now before thee.  
Give us a hint of the influence we might exert for thee had we thy kingdom and its righteousness upper most in our minds and thoughts. And help us to make it uppermost. For Jesus' sake. Amen

ALSO NEEDED: VELOCITY

In the second place, velocity is needed. How shall we translate this into spiritual terms. Shall we see velocity as standing for excitement, enthusiasm, passion. To be sure, it's needed, but I've been at this game long enough in a city parish to realize that religious enthusiasm tends to be short lived. I've seen people burst in here in one season with great enthusiasm, anxious to do their thing, full of promises only to note sadly that it fades rather easily when any serious demand is placed upon them.... or when they find a boy friend in another place....or when something else a little more exciting than church enters the picture. Rather let us take velocity to stand for the willingness to take the initiative for God's sake in the world.

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"Some men see things as they are and say 'why' - I dream things that never were and say 'why not'"

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to the will of God...

"Do you see the war in Vietnam as running contrary to all that Christ said on the subject of brotherhood, and all men as children of one God, and loving one's enemies....the war that has caused so much destruction in a small land, that has cost so much in terms of lives and money that could well be spent in far better ways....that seems to drag on month after month....year after year....

a war that was difficult to validate in the beginning and is now impossible to defend...

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