

Righting a Μιουδ-ζιγε-ηβ World: A Kingdom Task

When Jesus' disciples arrived in Thessalonica the people warned their rulers, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." (Acts 17:6) They were not wrong. Jesus' people were turning the world on its head. Rather, the Thessalonians were mistaken in failing to see that the world was already wrong side up.


Today, we too struggle to see clearly. Our world is increasingly complex and our cultural baggage biases our perceptions. Wherever we go we hear competing messages of how the world ought to be righted. All around us, on the news, in schools and from politicians there is a conflict of visions. Cutting through the confusion lies with us, the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14)

The stakes are high. We must be mindful that the world's visions are a sham. Only Jesus' reign—only His vision for the world—will result in human flourishing. As we make disciples around the world, we shouldn't fail to equip them to reorient their norms and challenge their institutions to more faithfully align with Christ's reign.

We need the Spirit and we need each other in this task. Our sight is clouded by our culture. Peter, despite spending years living with and ministering with Jesus, did not grasp God's heart for all peoples until Jesus sent His Spirit to Cornelius' house. It was then Peter learned "God shows no partiality." (Acts 10:34) He saw more clearly how Jesus purposed to create in Himself one new humanity from Jew and Gentile. (Eph. 2:15) This revelation ran counter to the voices that informed Peter's Jewish community. When Peter was snared again by those voices he ceased eating with Gentiles. It took Paul's bold words, the "wounds of a friend," to restore Peter to Jesus' way. (Prov. 27:6, Gal. 2:11) May we always thank God for our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Jesus triumphed over the "principalities and powers," freeing us from fruitless norms and practices. (Col. 2:15–23) When many in Ephesus came into Jesus' kingdom they brought out their books of magic and publicly burned them—books valued at 50,000 drachma (millions of dollars in today's currency). (Acts 19:19) Their new way of life greatly upset the economic order of the day, leading the idol makers to riot. (Acts 19:27) Their obedience is our example. As Paul taught the greedy Roman governor Felix about "...righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come," (Acts 24:25) so we ought to humbly bear witness, in word and deed, to Jesus' reign to a corrupt world.

« Overturning cherished assumptions triggers resistance, but we will have help. »

Overturning cherished assumptions triggers resistance, but we will have help. Jesus warned His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:18) The world that hates us is the same world for which God spared not His own Son. Jesus sends us as the Father sent him (John 20:21). For this task Jesus said it was better that He should go, for if He went He would send the Spirit and "...when He comes, [the Spirit] will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment..." (John 16:8) And the body of Christ, "the temple of the Holy Spirit," will actively participate in this work. (1 Cor. 6:19) As we make disciples we must prayerfully, wisely and corporately help them to discern where norms and institutions diverge from God's good intentions. Then, in the power of the Spirit, in word as well as deed, we will turn the world upside down. 

BY **KYLE JOHNSON**

Kyle Johnson served for four years in India and now works with Telos Fellowship.