

15.10.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

Christ the Conquering King

Bible Readings = Acts 19:8-27 and Rom. 15:14-21.

Introduction:

- (1) Last time we saw Christ had all authority given to him, to disciple the nations and to continue in the ministry God had given to him.
- (2) His death did not mark the end of his ministry, but guaranteed its continuity, securing the new covenant on the basis of the power of his indestructible life.
- (3) His authority is absolute (see all the 'alls' of last week), and it secures his people in their ministry to the nations.
- (4) They are not doing something 'for him', but in and through him, as he already is going to the nations, and subduing them by his grace.

This week, we see how all of this is worked out in the life of Paul, giving attention to his ministry in Ephesus as a case study. In this we see how Christ extends his authority over the nations by his gospel, in the power of the Spirit.

1. Rom. 15:14-21 The Offering of the Gentiles

(1) This passage links with the understanding that Paul had been given from Christ, that the gospel was the means by which the nations would be blessed.

- When Jesus met Saul (on the Damascus Road) Saul would never have imagined that Jesus was the Seed promised to Abraham, nor that the people who were (later) called Christians, were the spiritual heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, or that the New Covenant was in place, nor that the Gentiles would be included!
- Yet through his conversion and commissioning from Christ, and the revelation of Christ in him, he came to see that he was wrong on every score.

(2) He had thought that he knew how to compel obedience! But now, he saw that obedience was only the *obedience of faith*, which comes from the constraint of love.

- Thus Paul knew his apostolic task was to bring about the obedience of faith of the nations (Rom. 1:5 cf. 15:18; 16:26).
 - This is the obedience which faith is (as in Acts 6:7) and can only be faith in Christ, as proclaimed in the gospel (see, for example, the implication of 2 Thess. 1:8)
- Because (as Saul) he was not operating out of faith, all his Pharisaic obedience was, in fact, rebellion! (Titus 3:1ff. cf. Phil. 3:9).

(3) Paul also thought he knew what acceptable worship was, but now we find that the whole of his worship language and vocabulary has been transformed, so that the very nations and people he had despised now are an expression of worship to the glory of God.

- The transformation of Old Testament worship language in this (and other) passages in the New Testament is remarkable.

(4) So Paul's understanding of his mission was all encompassing. Through the preaching of the gospel, he saw nations being brought under the power of the Son of God, and receiving the gift of the Spirit, i.e. the promise to Abraham

- Compare with Gal. 3:13-14
- But note well: he was not in control of the mission. No reading of Acts will allow us to put any human being in the driving seat of the mission of the church!

- Christ already is on the move to them, and claims dominion over them. The means by which he exercises that dominion in this current age is through his word
 - § Hence the emphasis on preaching and teaching in what we call the ‘great commission’.

2. Acts 19:8-27 An Example of the Nations Being Subdued

(1) The description of the spread and influence of the gospel in the power of the Spirit takes place in a specific location.

- Ephesus = ancient city which by Roman times already had a very long history.
 - Population estimates vary, but no smaller than 250,000
 - Leading city of Asia Minor (roughly equivalent to modern day Turkey). One commentator talks of it as ‘the leading city of the richest region of the Roman empire’

§ Indeed, all the mileage markers in Asia Minor took their measurements from Ephesus.

(2) At the centre of the city was the great Artemision (i.e. temple of Artemis Ephesia)

- One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the first version of which went back to 6th century BC.
- The temple as it stood in Paul’s day had taken about 100 years to build and decorate, and it was probably the biggest roofed building in the ancient world (with a floor area of something approaching 6,500 square metres), was constructed entirely of marble, and stood until at least 262 AD.
- It was regarded as the safest public treasury and bank in the whole of Asia Minor, and the kings and princes of the world brought their riches to it.
 - Part of their offerings were for the worship of Artemis, but the rest was kept as the repository of their wealth.
 - Artefacts and coins found from as far away as India in the East and many different parts of Europe in the West.
- Artemis herself was the great Mother Goddess. The mother of all living things. The Artemision was not her dwelling place, but a shrine to her. She lived in nature, or perhaps better, was the power of nature.
 - Figurines show her as a multi-breasted mother, from whom all fruitfulness came for all living things
 - Her lineage was ancient, and had gone by many other names in the ancient world (e.g. the Phrygians knew her as Cybele; Phoenicians called her Astarte; Babylonians and Assyrians called her Ishtar; and the Cannanites called her Ashteroth (plural form of Astarte), and the Israelites were plagued by her worship, commonly referred to in relation to the Asherim (i.e. symbols of the goddess)
 - The dominance of the Artemision over Ephesus meant that it was a famed centre for occult and magical arts. These were closely tied to the enormous wealth of the city

§ Acts 19:19 50,000 pieces of silver = 50,000 days’ wages.

(3) In all this there is a terrible demonic parody of the True Temple, the Bride of Christ, the one through whom the nations were to be blessed, and the temple into which they would bring their glory (Rev. 21:22ff.)

- The centres of false worship are in fact power bases for the operations of the evil one to ensnare the nations and to rule over them.
- In the end it is all a battle for worship (e.g. 19:26-27)

(4) There is an emphasis on the preaching of the word, which makes it plain that the victory over these powers is in the gospel itself.

- Acts 19:8-10 cf. 19:20 (also compare with Act 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; cf. also 2 Thess. 3:1.)
 - The wording of Acts 19:8 ‘the kingdom of God’, should be compared to the way in which Paul speaks of his preaching/teaching work in Acts 20:20, 21, 24, 25, 27.
- Note the wording of Acts 19:18 and the difference between evangelical and legal repentance.
- But in connection with the preaching here, there were extraordinary (‘unusual’, ‘special’, ‘remarkable’) signs granted 19:11.
 - This relates to the clash of the kingdoms, and the occurrence of signs and wonders in relation to these encounters. *God* does them.
 - i.e. extraordinary signs, because of the extraordinary power base that was centred in Ephesus.
- But notice that all praise goes to the Lord (Acts 19:17)...so this is how he brings the nations to the Father (as in Phil. 2:1-11, commented upon last week).
 - So throughout Acts, the reports are of what *God* is doing (e.g. Acts 14:27; 15:4; 15:12; 21:19 cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-9)