

Scripture Reading:

Acts 19:1 “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 2 he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all. 8 And [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

"The Power of the Gospel"

Last week we considered how the Apostle Paul dealt with a group of disciples he encountered on his return to Ephesus who did not even know about the Holy Spirit. While there were several places where your pastor had to admit he did not have all the answers regarding that text, there was one lesson for all time:

- We must bring people to Jesus!
- This morning we see the power of His Gospel!

With these men saved and baptized we now return to the familiar pattern that we have seen with Paul as he brings everyone, Jew and Gentile to Jesus!

- As was his usual custom, Paul begins in the synagogue where he strives to convince the Jews that Jesus is the promised Messiah!

Luke tells us that Paul spoke boldly for three months, “reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the Kingdom!” Paul would continue to use the Old Testament Scriptures to bring God’s people to a full understanding of Jesus as the Messiah and of His Kingdom. As we have learned, Luke no longer gives us details of what Paul teaches, but we know what was shared from the sermons that are recorded by Luke:

- We can look back to Peter’s address at Pentecost and the defense of Peter & John before the Sanhedrin.
- We can review Stephen’s great sermon before his stoning.
- And Luke recorded the sermon which the Apostle Paul gave at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia on the first missionary journey...

Luke summarizes these same teachings here by telling us that Paul reasoned and persuaded concerning the things of the Kingdom.

- This reminds us that the story of Acts is how the Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus by filling the earth with His Kingdom.

Please note that Paul reasoned with them and persuaded them:

- The Gospel is reasonable, and can be presented in understandable ways to all who will listen!

Continuing another pattern that we have seen over and over here in Acts, after a time there are some Jews who are saved and some who harden their hearts and refused to believe.

- The Gospel is proclaimed and the world is divided:

Those Jews who believe demonstrate what Paul would later write in his epistle to these same Ephesians:

2:4: “4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Those who hardened their hearts demonstrated the truth that Paul revealed in his letter to the Church at Rome, where in Romans 9 he writes, “ 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

In verse nine of our text we read that these Jews spoke evil of the Way.

- Of course there is a bit of irony here knowing the Apostle Paul was traveling to Damascus to persecute those who followed The Way when he was converted!

But, I think it is important to notice how often the Church is referred to as The Way: At least six times in Acts. Remember, that the term Christian is only used three times and at least two of them in a very negative sense.

- Referring to the Church as “the way” is very rich indeed.

Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Jesus is the way of salvation, and everyone who enters the Church comes by the blood of Jesus.

- But that salvation is much more than just a ticket to heaven, it is truly a new way of life.

Jesus said, if you love me keep my commandments and told the disciples “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The salvation that we receive from Jesus IS a way of life...

- It is not something that we add to an established way of life as an improvement!

Paul persuaded some to be a part of the Kingdom of Jesus & those who hardened their hearts now attack The Way.

- The sheep hear the shepherd’s voice and the goats in the end know only their father the devil.

Paul then turns to the Gentiles: Luke tells us that Paul departed from the Jews taking with him the disciples who had been converted and sets up shop in the school of Tyrannus.

We know little about the school of Tyrannus and I think it is best to assume that it was simply a place from which Paul could teach the Gentiles as he had taught in the Synagogues.

- What we should note is that he again reasoned with them daily.

We studied the great sermon on Mars Hill at length and those same principles would have been what Paul taught to persuade these Gentiles as well.

To both the Jews and Gentiles Paul reasons with them and persuades them about a new way of life!

A Way of Life that needed to impact every aspect of their lives as we shall see in the coming weeks.

- This might seem strange today to many inside and certainly to those outside of the church!
- The world has demanded that the Christian faith be private with no real impact in the public square and we, sadly, have largely acquiesced.
- The world argues that the Bible and our faith have no place in the “world of reason,” something that should greatly offend us!

What is the biggest attack against the disciples of Jesus today by the world?

- Put simply, they accuse us of having only blind faith, so we must reject all science and reason which the humanists worship.

A classroom at our own university here in Sacramento was having a serious discussion this past week about the challenges of space and time and pondered why our world was exactly as it needed to be: An amazing fact & something good to ponder!

- However, they broke out in laughter at the mere mention of Jesus by one student.
- To them, what could Jesus have to do with a serious scientific discussion? That is just not reasonable!

The world wants us to keep all of this religion to ourselves, especially in the areas of science and government. We will sing Psalm 2 as our commissioning hymn today where we see that God not only thinks that Jesus should be very relevant in politics, but that He must be revered as the King of kings and Lord of lords. In Colossians we learn that ALL things were created by Him and for Him and in Him all things literally hold together!

The Bible puts Jesus at the center of the very places the world, & sadly some churches, say He does not belong!

- These are the great truths which Paul used in reasonable arguments to persuade both Jew and Gentile to believe and to act upon!
- The Great Commission calls us to continue this important work in our own day: Teaching the nations to observe all that Jesus commanded.

The Apostle Paul works here at the school of Tyrannus for two years so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks!

- The power of the Gospel impacts Ephesus as we shall see in the coming weeks AND all of the surrounding region.
- We should note that all of the seven Churches that Jesus addresses letters too in His revelation given to the Apostle John are from this region!
- The Apostle Paul gave his own summary of his work here in Ephesus to their elders as he made his final journey to Jerusalem which we will study further in Chapter 20:

“ "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- The Apostle Paul was not surprised, nor discouraged when he encountered opposition to the Gospel.
- Neither should we!

The world continues to be divided as the Gospel goes forward today just as Jesus forewarned us, saying that He brings a sword rather than peace and that even families would be divided. Knowing that God is in control and works all of this together for His glory should keep us from being discouraged! Perhaps it can help to remember that you have both divine & human actions in the lives of the sheep and the goats:

- In those who repent and believe and in those who harden and attack.

We know from the passage that we read from Ephesians, that there must be divine action in those who are saved: We receive the gift of faith and without it we would by nature remain in our sinful state. None would seek after God without the Gospel where God declares that He first loved us!

This truth is why the Power of God's salvation is truly Good News!

- But there is also human action where we turn in repentance from sin, turning to Jesus for true life.

James declares under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that faith without works is dead and so this repentance & trusting is seen in the life of the sheep whether they are covenant children raised in homes where parents taught them from the womb or a person who comes to Jesus later in life!

- Both must repent and believe!

Obviously our hope and prayer for the covenant children that God has blessed us with is that they know this all the days of their lives as we come each week in covenant renewal worship remembering and experiencing what God has done for His people:

- Knowing the power of the Gospel.

Those who come to Jesus later in life must not only repent and be baptized but also live faithful lives: Knowing & demonstrating the power of the Gospel!

What I think we sometimes forget is that we also see divine and human action in those who are hardened, the goats who love death. Our text tells us that the hearts of some of the Jews became hardened: This is the natural human action that we will eventually see in any who have not been given the gift of faith. It will be less surprising to see the rebellion of some of the Gentiles here at Ephesus in a few weeks...

- But these Jews are God's covenant people who are hardening their hearts against the Gospel!

This is something that God warned His people about in Psalm 95 which we sang as our commissioning Psalm last week: The call of the Gospel goes out to even those in the covenant with God's sober warning...

- Do not harden your hearts!
- But sadly, we do see some who do harden their hearts:

Some of the Jews here in Ephesus, the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus and stoned Stephen, even one of the very disciples of Jesus!

And eventually we see divine action in the lives of those who do not receive the gift of faith:

- Paul teaches the Saints in Rome that those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness are then given over by God to a reprobate mind.

God Himself hardens the hearts of those who willfully turn against Him. Obviously, the classic example of this in the Bible is the great Pharaoh of Egypt, but we see it in many others like Esau, King Saul, Judas and now some of the Jews here in Ephesus.

- So again, we should be neither surprised nor discouraged as we see God using all of this to work out His great plan of salvation

- **Rather we should be excited as we see the Power of the Gospel transforming the world as God restores glory to His creation!**

Paul certainly understood all of this and I think it is important to notice that it does not lead to any complacency in his life.

- **We are to follow his example!**
- **We are to understand that the Holy Spirit knows where history is going and that He will fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**

AND we are, as we see in the life of Paul, to go about doing our part to accomplish this great work!

- **This involves our own repentance and obedience and it involves our calling upon others to the same!**

Most believe that the Apostle Paul wrote his letters to the church at Corinth during his time here at Ephesus. In the first chapter he reminds them of the power of the Gospel

Paul lived out these truths in his life, he called on those Saints at Corinth AND he calls on US to do the same:

I Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

- **So our conclusion today is pretty simple: The Gospel of Jesus is reasonable and powerful.**

As we learned last week we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength...

- **Leaving NOTHING out.**

We must learn to always proclaim with the Apostle Paul what he wrote to the Saints in Rome:

Romans 1:14: "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Communion Meditation: John 6:51

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." 52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."