

**Acts 19: 8-20; “The Word Growing & Prevailing”, Sermon # 69 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 6<sup>th</sup>, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In these verses we see the faithfulness of the apostle Paul, and the great things which were done through his preaching and his teaching. And also, the miracles which he performed. He did all these things by the power of the Holy Spirit working with him. The Holy Spirit’s working, in connection with Paul’s faithfulness in his ministry, was so great that it says in verse 20, “The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed”. It is this statement that I want to build off of, in this message. This phrase means that the truth of the word concerning Christ’s greatness and power grew mightily in people’s minds. The truth of the word preached and the power of God which accompanied it, was so great that Paul was winning many people over to faith in Christ.

Let me give you 3 reasons why the word of the Lord grew and prevailed. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – It grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul boldness. 2<sup>nd</sup> – The word of the Lord grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul wisdom in dealing with opposition to the gospel. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – The word of the Lord grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul the ability to perform great miracles. As I preach to you, I want you to think about the idea that the power of the Holy Spirit can be seen in us as well, so that many people in this community can be affected by the truth of the gospel, and be saved. The Lord can bring them out of the kingdom of darkness and into His marvelous light.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The Word of the Lord grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul boldness.**

Verse 8 says – “And Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” I think that it is very important that we learn to admire the gracious and powerful work of the Holy Spirit; not only in Paul’s day, but all through this Church age. Although this whole Church age is called by the apostle Paul, “this present evil age” in Galatians 1: 4, it does not mean that evil will necessarily always predominate over all of the nations of the earth. It only means that there will always be evil in people’s hearts by nature, and that those people who refuse the gospel shall remain evil people. It does not mean that Christ’s gospel and His kingdom cannot conquer greatly among the nations, which I believe that the Bible clearly teaches in a number of places.

As we look at these verses, this is what we see happening here at Ephesus and in the whole of that region of the world. The word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. As we think about what happened at Ephesus, however, we should be able to recognize the fact that Christians everywhere are in the midst of a great spiritual battle. The battle is for truth and righteousness to prevail in hearts and in our society. In this battle, every Christian is called to be faithful to the truth. Every generation of Christians is called to be righteous and holy, so that they will glorify God with their time here upon the earth. The results that will come from our being faithful to Christ, holding fast to the truth, and living out that truth, these results will be established by God in accordance with His eternal purposes, and our faithfulness to Him.

One generation may see greater God glorifying results than another, depending upon how faithful each Christian is in their particular generation. But still, the Holy Spirit will be sovereignly at work, in powerful ways, in each and every generation, no matter how great the opposition is. Here we see Paul going into the synagogue and speaking boldly for three months. He was reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. He was (επαρρησιαζετο, epa-re-see-adzeto), “speaking boldly to them”. He spoke with freedom and confidence about the kingdom of God. He was reasoning with them. (διαλεγομενος, dialeg-o-menos in the Greek.) He had a dialogue with them. He put questions to them and received their answers. They also could ask questions of him, and he would give them answers.

He was also reasoning with them in his preaching to them. He was telling them how Christ was their Messiah; descended from David. He was reasoning with them about the fact that He was

the fulfillment the promises given to Abraham; that He was their promised Seed. He was showing them and reasoning with them, about how the Lord Jesus was the Prophet mentioned by Moses in Deuteronomy 18. He showed them from the Scriptures how the Christ must needs suffer as He did, offering Himself as a sacrifice for all the sins of those who would believe in Him. He reasoned with them, telling them that Christ Jesus was their great High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

He declared to them the glorious truth of Christ's resurrection; how death could not keep Him down, and that because He had completed redemption He had ascended to the Father's right hand. He reasoned with them about how He fulfilled the law, and how in His death He broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, making them into one New Man in the Church. He showed them that Christ had brought in a New and Living Way, through His fulfillment of the law, so that the Old Covenant was now fulfilled and completely set aside.

This is what it means in verse 8, when it says that he spoke boldly concerning the things of the kingdom of God. Kingdom and Covenant always go together in the Bible. In Old Testament times, the Kingdom of God, those whom God was ruling over as His personal subjects, the nation that He chose, was Israel alone. But now that Christ had come and fulfilled the all the prophecies concerning Messiah, and brought in the New Covenant, God would not only rule over the Jews, but also over those Gentiles whom He would bring into covenant with Himself. He reasoned with them over all these things.

What great things Paul set before them in truth, because he was declaring to them the very word of God. He knew that he had to be very bold and definite about what Christ had accomplished by His life, death, and resurrection. He knew that he had to be bold, not simply with a human boldness, but he had to be bold with a boldness that the Holy Spirit would own and honor as he spoke. It says that he spoke boldly for three months. And, he was persuading some of the people in the synagogue to believe in Jesus Christ; to believe in the glory of Christ's Person, and the glory of the kingdom that He came to bring.

Let's think together for a few minutes about what it means to be bold with a holy boldness. When Paul spoke with boldness, it wasn't simply his asserting things to be true because he personally thought them to be true. Rather, he was boldly proclaiming the truth because it was according to the Scriptures, and as he proclaimed it, he wanted to demonstrate the power of the Spirit in relation to the truth of the word. A Christian can be bold and yet not be entirely correct in their doctrine. And this will not help the cause of Christ if this is the case.

You will recall Apollos in Acts 18: 26? It says there that he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And when Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. This means, my beloved brethren, that just because Apollos was bold there at the synagogue in Ephesus, didn't mean that he didn't still need help from those who more doctrinally discerning. He needed to be directed into a better knowledge of the truth. A preacher who wants to be bold with a holy boldness needs to be Biblically correct in the things that he speaks.

In Proverbs 28: 1 it says – "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." In other words, the righteous person who is preaching and sharing the gospel wants to boldly proclaim the truth, but He wants to do it in such a way that people will see, that the truth that he is speaking comes from God, and not simply from his own strong self-assertions. He wants the people who are listening to him to come to know that they are not dealing with him alone, when he shares the truth, but they are dealing with the Lion of the tribe of Judah. They are dealing with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, God's Son; the One who is the Savior of the world and Lord of all.

Boldness is something which Paul knew that he needed to pray about. Indeed, he asked prayer from others in the church of Ephesus in this regard. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, he told them this in Ephesians 6: 18 – "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the

Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.” He is saying here that He knew that He needed the Lord to give to him the help that he needed to be able to explain the truth about Christ’s grace; to make known the mystery of the gospel. In this way wanted prayer for himself to be lifted up; so that he needed to be bold, as he ought.

He meant that he knew that Lord alone could give him the moral courage that he needed to speak up. Yes, boldness was very much needed. But he also knew that he needed to guard his heart and mind from rashness in speaking. He knew that he very much needed to clearly and powerfully be directed by the Holy Spirit in how he could be bold in regard to these blessed truth that would bring salvation; how he should speak them in the best and most powerful way. Let me ask you whether you pray in this way? We know that this is what we are called to do. But we cannot do it in the flesh. Let us therefore ask, that we might be bold, and that our joy may be full when we share the word.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – The word of the Lord grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul wisdom in dealing with opposition to the gospel.**

Verses 9 and 10 – “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.” “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” I think that it will be good for us to understand that as long as the world stands, there will always be people who will not believe in Christ. There will always be people who will be hardened sitting under the preaching of the most persuasive preacher. The evidence for this statement is found here in these verses which I just read to you.

This word “hardened” which is used here, the word “εσκλερυοντο” (esklerunonto)” in the Greek, means that they became stubborn in relation to the things that Paul was preaching. The New American Standard translation says that “some were becoming hardened”. They did not want to receive the truth concerning Christ and His being their Messiah. They did not want to believe that they needed to be saved. They did not want to let go of the law as being what they thought that they had to keep, in order to be saved. Paul calls their persisting in their unbelief in verse 19, disobedience.

The gospel is something that must be obeyed. Because God has commanded that all men everywhere repent of their sins and obey the truth of the gospel. It is, that Christ is the only Savior of sinners. You cannot save yourself even by the best of your good works, or your perseverance in them. Their disobedience consisted of their rejecting the truth of God’s word, spoken to them by Paul, and then their going on to speak evil of the Way before the other people there in the synagogue. To speak evil of the Way is to speak evil of God’s way of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus Himself said – “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” “No man comes to the Father except by Me.” The Way then is faith in Jesus, and following Jesus by learning to keep His word. The Bible, Old Testament and New Together, give us the Way of Life. And all the moral commandments that we find in the Bible, we keep in relation to our faith in Him. It will be good for us to remember what Paul tells us in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 2, verses 14-17 – “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”

This is how God always leads us in triumph. It is because Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us by faith. We are clothed in His perfect righteousness, and all of our righteousness is seen by God as covered by His better and perfect righteousness. And then as we walk with him on the path of righteousness, we have great joy knowing that we are being led in triumph. Some people will not like the fragrance of Christ and they will harden their hearts towards us. Others will smell the same smell of the gospel, and they will like it. They will receive it and they will find life in Jesus' name. Therefore, Paul says, we do not need to peddle the word of God. We simply have to be sincere, and speak to people remembering that we speak in the sight of Christ.

Paul was given great wisdom in relation to continuing on, ministering in the synagogue. He realized that he had given the people there sufficient time to consider the truth about Christ that he was preaching to them. It would not be profitable for the young converts to be so close to those who were more and more opposed to the gospel, and to himself personally. And so, it says that when they began speaking evil the Way before the multitude, openly and publicly reviling the things that Paul had declared to them, he thought it wise to depart from them, and withdraw the disciples. He took them to safe place, the school of Tyrannus. And for the next two years he continued teaching all who would come to him.

How gracious the Lord was to provide this place of safe refuge him and the new disciples, there in the school of Tyrannus. He gave Paul this wisdom, this prudence, this discernment, concerning what he should do. Later, Paul would write in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2: 23 – “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.” “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

You and I need to be people who pray, not only for boldness in our witness, but also for wisdom in how to handle opposition from religious people. In James chapter 1, verse 5, James tells us that if any of us lacks wisdom, we should ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to them. We need very much to believe that when opposition comes, that the Lord will be there to guide us into how we should respond to those who are opposed to the gospel and to Christ. This is how the word grows and prevails, when we are wise with the wisdom that is first pure, then peaceable, then gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, and full of good fruits. (James 3: 17)

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – The word of the Lord grew and prevailed because the Lord gave Paul the ability to perform great miracles.**

Verses 11 and 12 say – “Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out them.” “Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” “Also, there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest, who did so. “And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’” “Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

“This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.” “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.” “Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.” “And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.” “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.” It is amazing, is it not, that so little a space is given here to the particulars of the miracles that were done by Paul.

I think that what we need to conclude is, that the ministry of Paul's preaching was being attested to, as being from Christ Himself. It is not ultimately Paul, or any minister, that we should

be impressed with. It is the Christ who by His Spirit was working through Paul, who we should be impressed with. Let no one boast in men. But we can boast in the Lord all day long, and do no harm to anyone, but only good. The greatness of the power to heal or to save must be seen to come from God Himself. These miracles that Paul did were meant to be seen by the people of that day as signs that it was God who was with Paul, and they should believe in what he was preaching to them.

Some people in that day thought that what Paul was doing only was a matter of technique. They thought that if they called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, over those who had evil spirits, and said – We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches, they thought that they would cast the demon out. How wrong they were! The evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are you? Why should I recognize you? You have no power over me, but you do not know the Lord Jesus, and you do not have His Spirit so that I will have to listen to your commands! The man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and prevailed against them, it says. They ended up fleeing out of the house naked and wounded.

This incident became known to all the Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus, and it says, great fear fell on them all. And so, in this way, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. The name of the Lord Jesus was made to seem of much greater significance because people could understand a very important principle of truth. You must have Christ’s power to be able to cast out demons. As the apostle Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. These 7 sons of Sceva were really proud men, thinking that they could call the name of the Lord upon this man who was demon possessed. Like an incantation; like words said as a magic spell or charm. But without Christ and His Spirit, they could do nothing. The same is true of us. We must not take it upon ourselves to think that we can do battle with the forces of darkness without the Spirit empowering us to do so. Ephesians 6: 10 says – Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His mighty power.

Some people are proud enough to think that they will be able to overcome the devil by their own shrewdness and the ceremonies they perform and the words that they say, using Jesus’ name as some kind of mantra. But it will take more than that to dislodge the Devil from people’s lives and defeat his schemes. It will take the power of Christ. This is why Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4: 18-21 – “Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.” “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who puffed up but the power.” “For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.” What do you want?” “Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

You see, Paul had the authority given to him by God to be able to perform signs and miracles. He had the power as an apostle to actually deliver a sinful Christian man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. In closing this message, I want to remind you that the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through His people is very great. Greater is He who is in you, than He who is in the world. If you will be faithful to Christ, do not give any ground to the Devil in the books that you read or the things that you watch on the internet, or on television and the movies. If you will put these things away, you will come to find that you will have greater power in your personal ministry for Christ.

We may all come to see the revival for which we long. The word of God will be growing and prevailing because the people who will hear about what Christ has done for us, and have seen His power demonstrated in us, as being greater than the Devil’s, they will come confessing their own sins, and telling their deeds. And even as those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in Paul’s day, perhaps we will see the same in our day. Let us understand that the Holy Spirit is the One who can bring these great things to pass in our day as well, when the word of the Lord prevails because of the working of His Spirit, and your faithfulness.

