

“The Gospel Will Work Powerfully”

Acts 19:1-20

Have you ever bought something, brought it home, taken it out of the box, put it together and went to use it and ... it didn't work. Tried it again, pulled it apart, put it back together ... and it still didn't work. 'What a piece of garbage!' you think and you're just about to put it back in the box and take it back where you bought it – when you hear a voice and the voice says 'Did you read the instructions?' [The voice strangely sounds a lot like your wife 😏]. And so after getting rid of the French, German, Japanese, Spanish translations and find the English translation, you read it and go 'Okay!' And put it together again and behold, it works!!

Isn't it amazing when we read the instructions the product actually works like its designed to work. It's like the people who made it knew what they were talking about! If human beings can build something and tells us that it will work if we follow the instructions, how much more will the gospel work when we believe what God says and follow His instructions.

Rom. 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

1 Thes. 1:4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God says the gospel works. The gospel makes disciples, who then continue to follow the instructions to make more disciples. I think we sometimes think it doesn't work because i) no one seems to respond to it when we share it; 2) the world is increasing in anger towards it and us. So therefore, I hardly ever share it because it doesn't look like its working.

I can see how we can all feel that way at times. But the truth is, the gospel works and you and I are living proof it does. And as we've been working our way through Acts we see it working over and over. Today we're in Acts 19 and God has willed as Paul prayed in Acts 18 that he would return to Ephesus. And there's some very odd things going on here but when we read the text we'll discover it's simply the gospel at work. Does the gospel still work? Absolutely [Pray]

We have a brief mention about Apollos in v.1 because we just learned about him last week but also because we see Apollos wasn't the only who lacked the proper information from God to fully understand the gospel. So Paul comes to Ephesus and he finds some 'disciples'. But the word is used loosely here of different disciples. Whose disciples are these? Who were they following? John the Baptist. These Jewish men not meeting in a synagogue so Paul assumed they were believers. In Luke's brief account he says Paul asked them 'Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?' which to me, is a strange question to ask. I think Paul asked that because in talking with them he noticed something wasn't quite right. He assumed they were believers but realized they were followers of John the Baptist and were unaware of the Spirit and that Jesus had already come. But what we do see is that the gospel works

In People Who are Searching for God **(19:1-7)**

To be a follower of John the Baptist meant you rejected the legalism that the Pharisees offered and you were looking for the Messiah. So they listened to John's message of repentance and were looking for the one who is to come after John. But they never heard He came or died or rose or left and sent His Spirit. These men were definitely searching for God, rejecting Pharisaic unbiblical teaching and genuinely searching for the Messiah. When Paul figures out what's lacking he explains to them that John's ministry pointed to the Messiah who came, and His Name is Jesus. So they need to believe Jesus is the Messiah. So the gospel works in those searching for God

Who discover Him through Jesus (vv.1-5)

Jesus said in John 14:6

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Anyone who's religion includes God but not Jesus as His eternal Son and the only sacrifice that pays the price for our sins, does not actually know God. A God without Jesus is not the true God. These men believed in the God of the Old Testament and their forefathers who has a Son who is the Messiah but they were unaware that Jesus was Him.

"When they heard this they were baptized."

Baptism indicated their faith in Jesus and desire to follow Him. This is the biblical pattern. If you had some kind of Christening/sprinkling even immersing prior to your salvation, that is not baptism. Even these men recognized their prior baptism under John's ministry did not indicate they had faith in Jesus. Now they had professed faith in Jesus as Saviour they were immersed, identifying themselves with Him resulting in

Their lives being changed by the Spirit's indwelling (vv.6-7)

This was an unusual occurrence in the ministry of the gospel and not surprisingly we see when God needs to confirm a new work of the Spirit in the hearts of a different group of people, the coming of the Spirit is affirmed by sign gifts – tongues and prophesying. We saw that at Pentecost initially, then in Ch. 8 when the gospel went to the first non-Jews – the Samaritans, and then again in Ch. 10 when the gospel first reached Gentiles and now here when the gospel reaches a group of people who had never heard of Jesus.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians he has to explain in Ch. 14 that tongues are known languages that people are miraculously given the ability to speak or interpret. Without wanting to spend any time on tongues here look at 14:22 where Paul wants to remind the Corinthians who the gift of tongues is to help.

²² *Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.*

Each time in Acts when tongues occurred it happened when a new/different group of unbelievers or people who had yet been reached for Jesus were miraculously able to speak once they accepted Christ. And they understood what was being said.

Ephesus is an interesting place and it makes sense that God would allow tongues to be spoken here (although Paul never mentions tongues to the Ephesians in his letter) because Ephesus had a lot of mysterious, magic, occultist practice. So they were no strangers to the unusual.

While these men weren't in the synagogue, Paul, as was his usual practice, goes into the synagogue and explains to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. He speaks boldly for 3 months, having numerous discussions about the kingdom of God and seeking to persuade them to believe that Jesus is the Messiah who has already come and that His kingdom exists now even though it is not a political and physical reality at the moment. But not everyone liked what they heard

But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

We mentioned this before but we see it again here and we need to be reminded that a negative response means the gospel is working. The gospel shows it is working also ...

In the Lives of Those Threatened by It **(19:8-10)**

“Became obstinate” literally reads ‘were becoming hardened and disobedient’ by something someone was telling them. That was the gospel. The more they heard it, the angrier they got because they were refusing to bend on what they believed. They refused to allow the truth to penetrate their mind and heart. To agree to the gospel means you must disagree that what you currently believe about God, heaven, salvation Jesus is wrong or at least incomplete or informed. Those of us who came to faith later in life wrestled with this because when you're challenged by the truth, you have to admit not only that you are wrong but those who taught you what you believe are wrong and those who taught them; parents, clergy, whole denominations are misled and following the wrong way. So you either step out in faith and believe God and truth or you become hardened to it and attack it. You

Malign Jesus in order to discredit the gospel (vv.8-9)

When the gospel angers people because of their stubborn refusal to admit its true then their only defense is to attack it, its author and its followers. So Satan can use unbelieving religious scholars to make us think Jesus wasn't real, or only human or didn't say all the things He said and question the Bible. Jesus' followers aren't perfect and we do many things that discredit our witness so haters of the gospel exploit that. Science make far reaching claims about our world and its lack of need for God that most people just assume are correct because they have letters before their name and wear a white shop coat and use 14 letter words that none of us understand. And sometimes we feel intimidated by that.

But remember, the gospel has the power to convict people of sin and those who refuse to confess their sin, retaliate against the gospel, God, Jesus or us. That's a sign the gospel is working. The apostle would heartily agree because he wrote in 2 Tim. 3:1

3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Why? Because they reject the gospel and its divine authors. But here's a strange truth that happens when people attack the Word and Jesus and push it away.

God uses their rejection to reach others (v.10)

You don't want it here? Fine, God says, I'll take it somewhere else. Paul was able to stay there for two years spreading the gospel but also, God spread the gospel through the Ephesians from Ephesus. Why did Paul always go to large cities? Because people travelled there for business, entertainment, tourism and family. Ephesus was one of the largest cities in its day. It was accessible by land and sea. A lot of trade went through there. Big cities were the media centers of the day. That's where you heard the latest news. Observant Jews observed the commands to go to Jerusalem three times a year on specific holydays and come back. Pentecost was one of those. Surely there were some from Ephesus who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost in Acts 2. "All who lived in Asia" might not mean every individual but every geographical district had some kind of gospel witness.

The gospel was working. And in the next section we see the power of the gospel

Even Demolishing Satanic Strongholds **(19:11-20)**

Ephesus contained one of the seven architectural wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis or Diana. Artemis was supposed to be the daughter of Zeus, the goddess of the wilderness, animals, hunting and fertility. They built a large shrine to her in Ephesus and (as we'll see next time) it was a major source of tourist income. Ephesus was also known as a large occult center where magic and evil practices were well known.

God used this context to show His own power through Paul. While Paul performed an occasional miracle here Paul performed many miracles because God wanted to show the power of the gospel over the enemy

Through extraordinary miracles (vv.11-12)

People believed and were healed just by touching the sweat stained rags (work cloths) and apron (tent making apron) of Paul. God allowed this because people believed in the power of magic. So God can use people's superstitious practices and overpower them. The gospel is more powerful than the enemy's tactics. The word 'extraordinary' tries to explain miracles not of an ordinary kind. Not much different than the woman with the bleeding issue touching the hem of Jesus' prayer shawl or people healed just by Peter's shadow, God allowed this in that context to show the power of the gospel.

The power of the gospel over the power of Satan

Results in genuine repentance (vv.13-19)

A strange incident occurs when some non-believing Jewish religious leaders assume Jesus' name alone has magic powers. So they try to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, as Paul preaches, but he does not believe himself. The demons recognize Jesus and Paul but not these men because they have no faith. The demons do what demons do; destroy and harm through the man they empowered. So the 7 sons of Sceva who used the name of Jesus superstitiously were badly beaten.

However, what this did was scare people who hear that demons are afraid of Jesus, so many repented of their sins and accepted Christ. The sign of their repentance of their sins was getting rid of things in their house that dishonoured God. That's a whole message in itself but one worth pausing on. What do we possess, subscribe to or participate in that dishonours God? Let's get rid of it. Why not sell it? If you don't want to dishonour God, why help someone else dishonour God?

And how did this all come about?

²⁰ *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

All these things happened

Because of the power of the Word (v.20)

In Greek this literally reads, "So according to the power of God, the Word was growing and prevailing and continues to grow and prevail."

Luke could have written it in a past tense only as if it this was just a historical record. But the Bible is not just a historical record it is

living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. [Heb. 4:12-13]

The Word of God continues to work mightily and prevail over evil because no one is hidden from God's sight and if we share it, it will pierce the soul and spirit of anyone and get inside their thoughts and intentions. Do we believe that by faith? Do you live by faith? Will we share the Word of God this week? Not intending to lay a guilt trip on anyone here's what I want to encourage you to this week, more than once.

If you read the Bible most days, ask the Lord to help you see truth that needs to penetrate your own soul and challenge and encourage you. And then share that with a fellow believer, someone else who is also reading the Word of God regularly. Maybe even help each other be accountable because a number of us are reading through the same plan. Or some read the same devotional everyday. Even if you don't it doesn't matter. Read your Bible each day, praying that God would speak truth into your life and then share what you learned with another believer.

'I thought you were going to say share God's Word with unbelievers?' Oh don't worry you will if you do this because if you're not talking about the Bible with other believers that means you're not in it or you're not letting it speak to your heart. And you won't talk about it with unbelievers because you're not even talking about with God's people.

But if we take God's Word seriously and share it with each other, I will guarantee our excitement to know God more through His Word will flow out of our life and we will naturally share it with those who need Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net