

Date: September 26, 2021  
 Series: *The Cure Goes Viral*  
 Title: *Exciting Times*  
 Text: Acts 19:8-41  
 Preacher: Mark Adams

What is the current name of our church newsletter?

RIGHT! *"THE GRACE CONNECTION."*

How many of you get it electronically? How many get a paper copy in the mail? Cool. Just as long as you all get it---and read it!

Some of you may not realize the current newsletter title is at least the THIRD title of Redland's newsletters.

What was it called before *Grace Connection*?

RIGHT! *THE SOWER.*

Well, when I came on staff in 1990 it was called: *EXCITING TIMES*. And back then the newsletter wasn't sent out electronically, because the Al Gore had not yet invented the Internet. We snail-mailed it to over 1,000 homes.

And we didn't print the newsletter in house either. It was taken to a printer and professionally done EVERY WEEK. That weekly publication deal in itself made times in the office "exciting" because we had to have our articles in every Monday---no grace period. This was to give a precious church member from yesteryear name Naomi Linn time to proof the draft with her faithful red pencil, and time for us to make corrections and get the draft to and from the printer.

Once we got it back from the printer, we had a special crew of volunteers called *"The Lick and Stick Gang"* who came in every Thursday to put the adhesive labels on, sort the newsletters into zip codes and put them in special boxes and then take them to the mass-mailing part of the Post Office on Shady Grove Road. Exciting times!

But there were more exciting things going on back then. These were the days when Redland had two complete Sunday Schools---one at 9:30 and one at 11:00am. At each hour we had a worship service as well, so you either went to Sunday School at 9:30am and then worship at 11:00am or vice versa. My "worship job" back then was to say the closing prayer, so I'd do the opening in the first Youth Sunday School, hang around a while, and then slip into the first worship service in time hear the sermon. Then I'd repeat that again at 11:00am. I got very complete sermon notes in those days. We also had another full service every Sunday night---so, exciting times.

And, I don't want to give you the idea that those were *"the good old days."* I mean they WERE good---but things have always been and still are---EXCITING around here.

I mean, last spring at the height of the pandemic---just like the '90's---we saw God at work in EXCITING ways.

- He brought us people with the exact skills needed to get us online when the lockdown came. We never missed a service. EXCITING!
- Our church app was launched that spring. EXCITING!
- Our food pantry ministry started during the pandemic and God has used it to help feed Derwood. Families who lost their income during the lockdown were able to keep food on the table. EXCITING!
- We have had additions and baptisms during the last 18 months and giving was such that first year that we didn't need to use the PPE loan from the government. EXCITING!

And, as the pandemic hopefully comes to an end, exciting things continue to happen.

- Kevin said he had 40 youth in FUEL last Sunday.

- Bill has our handbell groups up and ringing again.
- The Waves of Grace Youth Choir is practicing.
- And wasn't it exciting to see our Sanctuary Choir walk into the choir loft with their robes on last week for the first time in 18 months! I confess I teared up as I heard them sing.
- The Tuesday Ladies Bible Studies just started their fall term and had a total of 75 women register to zoom in and not just from our area---but from all over the US and world.
- Worship attendance is up---especially if you include those who live-stream our services from their homes which includes about 40% of our membership. SO EXCITING. I mean, those TV cameras weren't here 18 months ago---but now they are here, and we have a complete production studio upstairs.
- Sunday School---which we now call "Grace Groups"---is back with four on-campus hybrid classes (not counting Youth and Children) each using owl-cams so people can come here or join in from their homes.

Even the word, "OwlCam" is exciting to me, but that may be due to my watching too much *PJ MASK* shows with my grands. My point is God is still at work here---so times are still exciting!

I mention this because our next portion of the book of Acts tells of a time in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church when things were VERY exciting indeed. Take your Bibles and turn to Acts 19. Paul is still where we left him last week, in Ephesus. Our text is long, verses 8-41 and as I said it is full of exciting things---so I'm not going to read it all at once. I mean, I don't want to OVER-excite you. So, take your Bibles and open them to Acts 19 and follow along as we look at this text in sections.

And to help us fully appreciate the exciting times we are reading about, we need to understand that, of all the cities in the Roman empire, Ephesus would have been one of the most difficult places to start a church.

Why?

Well, first of all it was a large, proud Roman city with a port that was located near the intersection of two mountain passes. And this brought in a lot of trade and income. Like Corinth all roads in the area led to and through Ephesus. The wealth of this city was reflected in the fact that it was pretty much built of marble. Marble paved the streets, lined the foundations of the buildings, channeled rainwater to the sea---even the public toilets were made of polished marble. No worries about splinters!

All kidding aside, Ephesus was a city where people worshiped wealth and all the things it could buy. The "god" that Jesus called "Mammon" was revered here. But that's not all the Ephesians worshipped. There were temples and shrines to as many as 50 different gods and goddesses.

And its most popular "god" was Artemis. In fact, they had a temple built to her that was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It had 127 marbled pillars sixty-feet-high, many of them inlaid with gold and rare gems. The temple itself was 425 feet long and 200 feet wide and it housed a gigantic carved image of Artemis that supposedly fell from the stars. People came from all over the Roman empire to see this amazing temple---especially during an annual month-long festival that was held---a grand celebration for Artemis. It was sort of like Mardi-gras. During this month all work ceased and there were athletic games dedicated to Artemis in a huge amphitheater---and it was huge! It seated 25,000 spectators.

Worship of this "goddess" brought in so much money that Artemis' temple became a huge bank---probably the first of its kind. Ephesus was also a place where you would have found lots people practicing the dark arts. Think of it as a cesspool of the occult. As Paul put it in a letter he later wrote to this church: ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world---and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*** (Ephesians 6:12)

R. Kent Hughes writes, *"Ephesus was the waterhole for every kind of magician, witch, clairvoyant, and criminal. Con artists, murderers, warlocks and quacks all found the climate of Ephesus unusually agreeable."*

I can't help but think of Tolkien's, *The Lord of the Rings*. I mean, Ephesus sounds like Sauron's fortress in MORDOR. But like Frodo and Sam, none of this dissuaded Paul. He knew God had called him there. He knew he had a job to do and that God would be with him empowering and guiding him---so he set to work. Any guesses as to where he started sharing the Gospel? RIGHT---the SYNAGOGUE!

Things went well there at first, no doubt thanks to the labors of Priscilla and Aquilla and Apollos, not to mention those 12 men who came to Christ. But after three months---as had happened in so many other synagogues---Paul began to face opposition. Look at verse 9: ***"Some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way."***

But Paul didn't give up. Remember, he was a Christian who knew the importance of PERSEVERANCE when it comes to sharing the Cure. So, he left the synagogue and moved his teaching to a lecture hall where he rented space that became his headquarters for the next two years. He taught there every day---six days a week---from 11am until 4pm.

The owner of the hall was a local philosopher named TYRANNUS, a word that means "tyrant." I'm thinking it was a nickname given to him by his students because he gave too much homework or something! I'd be interested in hearing if any of you teens have any nicknames for teachers---or pastors?

Now, I want you to be sure to understand Paul's schedule. The workday in Ephesus began at 7AM and broke at 11---to allow people to go home and rest in the hottest part of the day---then at 4PM everyone went back to work until about 9:30PM. So, Paul rose with the sun, made tents and sails and awnings for four hours every morning; then he went to the lecture hall and taught from 11am until 4pm and then went back to working on tents, etc. for another five-and-a-half hours.

Whew!

Now, why would he work? Why make tents? Well, in spite of the offering he received from churches like the one in Philippi, he needed the money to eat and pay for his housing---plus, he wanted everyone to know that, unlike the "priests" of Artemis he was not in the Cure-sharing business for the money. This is what he was getting at in Acts 20:34 when he said, ***"You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs."***

Paul kept up this killer schedule six days a week fifty-two weeks a year for two years---spending more time in Ephesus than in any other gentile city. I did the math and this means he logged 3,120 hours of lecture, that is the equivalent of 130 days of preaching continuously for 24-hours a day. It has to be a Guinness world record---one that I have absolutely NO desire to try and beat!

Okay, what exciting things happened as a result of these two years of sharing the Cure?

### 1.) **God did MIRACLES**

Look at verses 11-12: ***"God did extraordinary miracles through Paul---so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them."*** Some of these miracles were direct---coming through the hands of Paul---and others were indirect, coming through articles of Paul's clothing---handkerchiefs and aprons. But don't get the wrong idea. Paul wasn't selling his handkerchiefs like many false teachers do these days.

R. Kent Hughes shares, *"I once received a colored brochure that featured pictures of an 'evangelist' designed to show what a versatile man of God he was---praying by a waterfall, praying with his hands placed on a pile of letters, holding a baby (he loved children), shaking the hand of a poor man (he loved poor people). But what really got my attention was the offer of a specially-blessed handkerchief that had been dipped in the Jordan River and that if prayerfully applied---would bring healing---at a cost of only \$15."*

That's not what Paul was doing; in fact, he wasn't giving out these handkerchiefs. People were taking them from him, without Paul's knowledge. And the word "handkerchiefs" isn't accurate---these were cloths that Paul used to wipe away sweat while working, so we're talking sweat rags.

When I do my treadmill runs, I constantly have to mop my brow and I use old towels that I have torn into strips. Sometimes I go through three or four in one workout. I may not be a very good runner---but I'm a VERY good sweater---Olympic level. Well, no one comes and gets MY sweat rags, in fact if Sue sees them on the floor she avoids them for good reason.

YUK!

But in faith, people came and took Paul's. And the aprons were what he wore when making tents, etc. Eventually after being ripped by nails and stuff they would be worthless and Paul would discard them. Now understand, these garments had no power in and of themselves---neither did Paul. No, these sweat rags and work aprons were symbols that God chose to use in order to reward the people's faith---they were conduits for God's power. They were like Moses' rod. That piece of wood that he used to part the Red Sea had no power in and of itself---it was symbol that God used.

In any case, during these two years---MIRACLES became commonplace. Even sweat rags and ruined aprons were vehicles of God's healing. Is that exciting or what?!

Let's stop and remember that miracles are an integral part of our faith as Christians. In his book, *Protestant Evidences*, Bernard Ramm writes,

*"Biblical miracles are part of the means of establishing Christianity [as the one true faith.] Israel was brought into existence by a series of miracles, the law was given surrounded by supernatural wonders---and many of the prophets were identified as God's spokesmen by their power to perform miracles. Jesus came not only preaching but performing miracles and the apostles from time to time worked wonders. It was the miracle authenticating the religion at every point."*

And remember---exciting Biblical miracles like we read about here---they are done for a specific purpose. God did them to bring Himself glory. As the late Paul Little put it,  
*"Biblical miracles, in contrast to miracle stories in pagan literature and those of other religions, were never capricious or fantastic. They were not scattered helter-skelter through the record without rhyme or reason. There was always clear order and purpose to them."*

And he's right. Remember what the Miracle Worker Himself said in John 10:25? Jesus said: ***"The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me."***

In other words, Biblical miracles---miracles that are of God---always have the purpose of pointing to Him. God is glorified, not the miracle worker. They help convict people of their need for God's saving power. They are never performed for entertainment or for personal prestige or to gain money or power. They always point to Jesus.

I'm reminded of the movie, *The End of the Spear*, a film that tells the true story of four missionaries who were speared to death by the native Aucas of Ecuador. As the missionaries lay dying, the Aucas looked up and saw angels welcoming the slain missionaries into Heaven. That miracle done in the middle of nowhere served its purpose because it helped push these Aucas and later their entire tribe toward faith in Jesus Christ. That's what happened with Paul in Ephesus, God did exciting miracles that brought more and more people to faith in Jesus.

Here's another exciting thing that happened.

## 2.) **God gave the DEVIL a WHIPPING.**

As we just read, when people took Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons and touched people with them, not only were they healed, in many cases ***"evil spirits left them."***

When word spread about this, some Jews decided to cash in on it by starting their own “deliverance” ministry. Look at verse 13 and following:

***“Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.’ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.”***

Now, it wasn’t unusual for Jewish priests to attempt to cast out demons but it WAS unusual for them to do it in the name of Jesus and they threw in Paul’s name for good measure. They had apparently done this scam at other towns but then they came to Ephesus---MORDOR---where evil didn’t play games. And the response of the demon in that poor man was very...EXCITING! Look at verses 15 and 16:

***“One day the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know[about], and Paul I know about, but who are you?’ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.”***

Let me underscore the fact that, as Christians, we do not need fear Satan---but we must remember, he is not someone to be messed with.

The late Ray Stedman once shared about leading an outreach Bible study in his home in Palo Alto, California. He said that in his group were a number of people who had been involved with witchcraft. He says that after one session a young girl pulled him aside and asked if they could talk. She said,  
*“I’ve been having some strange experiences. They started about a year and a half ago when I was a schoolteacher in Alaska. Another girl and I roomed together. During those long winter evenings, when there was nothing to do, we whiled away the time by amusing ourselves with a Ouija board. We were getting various answers and messages by doing this and we thought of it as nothing but a game. But soon I began to be aware of very strange thoughts in my mind when I’d go to bed at night. I would seem to think of certain words and strange things to say. At first, I could put them out of my mind and go to sleep. But gradually they became more and more insistent until I finally found that I couldn’t sleep unless I’d pay attention to them and think about them. Then these inner voices began to suggest that I take a pencil and write these things down. At first, I tried to resist, but they became more and more insistent---and I found that I couldn’t go to sleep until I’d write down what they told me. It was always filthy, obscene words. Then I talked with my roommate and found that she was going through the same experience. Shortly after that we came down here to California. Now I can’t go to sleep until I write out, sometimes for hours at a time---all the filthy things which these voices insist that I say.”*

Stedman shared The CURE with this poor girl and told her about the power of our Lord, that one purpose of Jesus’ coming was to ***“destroy the works of the devil.”*** (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:8) From then on, with Jesus IN her, she had no problem. Ouija boards, horoscopes---we should steer clear of that evil stuff. There’s a song lyric from an old youth musical that goes like this, *“The devil is alive and well and he can make life seem like Hell.”* That’s so true---as this young woman---and these seven sons of Sceva learned.

I may be optimistic, but I think like this young girl who went to Stedman and received The CURE---I think these seven guys were part of the people we read about in verses 17ff where it says, that everyone who heard about this was: ***“... seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”***

Do you see what happened? People in this pagan city became convicted of their sin---imagine the impact when the residents saw this huge bonfire where a fortune in cultic goods went up in flames. And a drachma was a day’s wage, so that fire represented more than 136 years of continuous labor with no days off. Even at minimum wage, it was worth over six million dollars.

I wonder what we would burn today? I love books but I vote we burn FACEBOOK.

This all leads to a third exciting thing that happened in Ephesus.

### 3.) **God destroyed a PAGAN ECONOMY.**

Think of it. The Occult Book industry in that demonic town was wiped out---as were other sinful industries. Profits from prostitution and gambling began to dry up. And all that happened with no election being held to put a Christian in office. No laws were passed. There was no Supreme Court ruling.

I'm not saying I don't love it when I know our governmental leaders are Christ-followers or that I don't rejoice when laws are passed that respect the teachings of the Bible. I'm just saying that all this exciting change happened, simply because Paul shared the Gospel---The CURE. People heard about the redeeming love of God, repented of their sins and invited Jesus into their hearts and lives. They changed and culture changed. Ephesus went from looking like Sauron's fortress in MORDOR---to Minis Tirith.

This underscores the fact that the most exciting thing in the world---the most powerful, world-impacting miracle---is conversion. I mean, when we hear the word "miracle" we tend to think of things like parting the Red Sea or healing a blind man, or hankies being used to cure people and cast out demons. But THOSE miracles, as amazing as they are, are nothing compared to the miracle that occurs every time an individual puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ and has their sins forgiven---so that they stand pure and blameless in the eyes of our Holy God.

Let me put it this way. All other miracles are temporary. Those healed get sick again. Risen Lazarus still died again eventually. Unless those people possessed by demons put their faith in Jesus they would likely be possessed again. But conversion is for keeps because accepting God's gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus gives us abundant life that never ends. As Calvin Miller puts it, *"Heaven is the finest and most final of all Christian miracles. In that eternal place there is no pain or sorrow or death because the old order of things has passed away."*

Plus, when people make Jesus Lord---they are prompted to live their lives in ways that please Him---and when they do that the world itself is changed one Cure at a time.

In verses 23-27 Luke shares how another part of the pagan economy in Ephesus dried up. He says that not too long after the bonfire:

***"...there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: 'You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.'"***

Now understand, this Demetrius guy didn't REALLY care about Artemis. He didn't think of her as a god. I mean, how could a "god" ***"...who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world"*** be threatened by anything? How could a "god" ***"be robbed of her divine majesty"*** by a mere mortal like Paul?

In fact, this Demetrius' "god" wasn't Artemis---it was money. He was a "mammon worshipper." And as 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:10 says, ***"The love of money---or mammon---is the root of all kinds of evil."***

Demetrius saw his profits fading so he did an evil thing. He started---not a religious riot---but an economic panic. He led the people to shout, ***"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"*** But what he really meant was, ***"Great is the income of the tourists!"*** Thousands of money-loving Ephesians joined him and his fellow artisans shouting as they rushed to the

amphitheater, quickly filling up each of the 25, 000 seats. Angry gangs looked for Paul but couldn't find him. I'm thinking he was grabbing a nap somewhere---which is what I would be doing after all that preaching---anyway, they found two of Paul's travelling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. They dragged them to the amphitheater.

Paul wanted to go speak in their defense but his friends would not let him. This angry crowd chanted "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**" for two hours, but Luke tells us, "**They did not know for what reason they had come together.**" (verse 32) I'm reminded of the way Benjamin Franklin described a mob. He said, "*A mob is a monster with heads enough but no brains.*" This brainless group threatened and yelled and no one could calm them down until they got tired and hoarse enough such that a lowly public servant, the town clerk was able to help them see reason. Look at verses 35-40 where he says:

***"Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess."***

He went on to say that if Demetrius and his friends had a grievance, they could take Paul to court but that they should disperse because if they rioted---they would all be guilty of a crime. The people heard that and left---probably thinking they had won a great victory for Artemis.

But the fact is, Ephesus is gone---the "goddess silversmith business" went bankrupt hundreds of years ago; Artemis' temple lies in ruins---but the church is still here. In fact, all that God did in Ephesus---not only destroyed a pagan business---it led to many more churches being started.

In verse 10, Luke tells us that everyone in Asia heard the Word of the Lord. And they did, I mean, this was when the seven churches named in Revelation 2 and 3---as well as many others---came into being.

By any estimate, what God did in Ephesus during those two years---is not just EXCITING---It's AMAZING.

Let's pray.