

Sermon 2: God's Providence and a Spiritual Awakening: Act 19:8-10

Text: Acts 19:8-10 "And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks..."

Summary: Acts 18-20 records the complex story of the gospel's advance into a deeply pagan city making it the center of one of the most vibrant and influential local churches in the first century.

Proposition: We must refocus on the wondrous power of the gospel.

Introduction: The visible decline of "Western Christianity."

- **Nearly every day we hear horrible stories of violence and tragedy.**
- **"Western Christianity" has significantly declined in recent years:**
 - **Pew Research 2022:** Those identifying as Christians in the US are projected to fall below 50% within the next 50 years.
 - **Pew Research UK 2025:** 46% of UK adults identify as non-religious as opposed to 43% Christian.
- **Some eye opening stats on the state of the American church:**

Lifeway

 - 70% of US churches are under 100 congregants.
 - 43% of Southern Baptist churches have fewer than 50 congregants.
 - In the next 10 years 56% of current pastors will no longer serve as pastors due to death, retirement, or ministry burnout.
- **Some eye opening stats on the beliefs of Americans:** Ligonier and Lifeway 2025
 - **Civic Engagement:** Over 70% of Americans believe one's religious belief should not influence their political decisions.
 - **The Bible:** Only about 30% believe in the inerrancy of Scripture.
 - **Salvation:** Only about 30% of Americans believe we are counted righteous before God through faith alone in Christ, not by our works.
 - **The Local church:** Only 12% have a strong conviction that they should be committed and engaged in a local church.
- **Some encouraging countertrends:** Barna this year

- Gen Z and Millennial American are more frequent church attenders than their parent or grandparent generations.
- Gen Z Americans are slightly more likely to attend church than Millennial Americans.
- The divorce rate is the lowest it has been in 50 years with Millennials being less likely to divorce than their parents' or grandparents' generations.
- **Question:** Are we living through the death of Western Christianity?
 - We don't know if Christ returns in our lifetime.
 - We don't know if things will continue to decline or counter the trend.
 - We do know the church needs a redefined missional focus.
 - Far too many "churches" and "ministers" have lost their focus on God's tools and the church's function in the world.

Part 1: The unlikely origins of this story:

- **Ephesus' unlikely center for the gospel's advance:**
 - **Decline:** Much of its commerce was shifting from traditional trade to producing and selling religious icons.
 - **Darkness: 19:23-29** "The same time there arose no small stir about that way...a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen...called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods...not only this our craft is in danger...but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth...the whole city was filled with confusion..."
 - The center of Ephesian life was its pagan temple.
 - This religious cult was well established in the region.
 - Idolatry made it a desperately dark city.
 - Those with the greatest access to truth were the first to oppose it.
 - **Delay: Acts 16:6-10** "They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they...assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not...And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into

Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them..."

- Paul was forbidden three times by the Spirit to go into Asia to preach the gospel at that time.
- Nearly three years passed before he went to Ephesus.

Part 2: The spiritual battlefield in Ephesus:

• All Christians face spiritual conflict:

- **1 Peter 5:8** "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..."
- **Ephesians 6:12** "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places..."
- **Revelation 2:13** "Thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth..."

• The conflict in Ephesus was intense and multifaceted:

- **Slander: 19:8-9** "He went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them..."
- **Demon possession:**
 - **19:11-12** "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul...and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them..."
 - **19:15-17** "The evil spirits answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus..."
- **Idolatry: 19:23-29** "There arose no small stir about that way... the whole city was filled with confusion..."
- **Greed: 19:23-29** "A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen...called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath

persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods...not only this our craft is in danger...but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth...

- **Opportunists: 19:13-14** "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so..."
- **False teachers: 1 Timothy 1:3-4** "I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus...that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying..."

Part 2: The vibrant influence of the church at Ephesus: 19:8-10

• The church's birth:

- **Paul's first interaction at Ephesus was brief: 18:19** "And he came to Ephesus, and left them [Aquila and Priscilla] there..."
- **When he returned, he began working with confused disciples of Apollos: 19:1-3** "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost..."
- **For the next three months he preached the gospel in their synagogue: 19:8** "Spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God..."
- **That phase of ministry was disrupted by religious scoffers: 19:9** "When divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them..."
- **Their response did not intimidate Paul: 19:9** "He departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus..."

• Paul's focus: 19:10 "This continued by the space of two years..."

- **He spent two solid years investing in the disciples:**
 - **2 Timothy 2:2** "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also..."

- **Acts 20:31** "Watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears..."
- **Paul's schedule was rigorous:**
 - He worked with his hands to feed himself:
 - He taught through the heat of the day in a teaching hall: 11am-4pm
 - He did this daily for over 2 years:
- **The fruit of his investment: 19:10** "This continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks..."
 - People heard the gospel directly from Paul.
 - They heard it from those whom he disciplined.
 - The Ephesian church was a church planting hub.

Part 3: The driving principles:

- **Principle 1:** God's timing is perfect.
- **Principle 2:** Preaching the gospel changes everything.
- **Principle 3:** Regeneration and a new world view visibly transform people.
- **Principle 4:** Young Christians want to tell others about Christ.
- **Principle 5:** Focused discipleship works.

Application: We must refocus on the wondrous power of the gospel.

- **Perspective:**
 - Be honest but don't despair.
 - Be confident in His power and provision.
 - Get back to the basics of vibrant Christianity.
- **Providence:**
 - Plead with God to send a revival to His church.
 - Plead with Him to draw people to Himself.
 - Plead for Him to raise up strong principled leaders.
- **Responsibility:**
 - Let's be a church where people will become spiritually grounded and well equipped to take the gospel to the nations.
 - Let's not sit on the sidelines lamenting, rather than getting to work!
 - Let's be committed to the tools He uses to build His church.
 - Let's be fully invested in His kingdom where we are.
 - Let's be motivated by eternal matters for His glory.
- **Worship:** Let's delight in the transforming power of the gospel!