

Sermon Title: “**Stranger Things**”

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Acts 19:21-31

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Stranger Things (1 Peter 4:12-16)

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though somethings strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if any suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” -1 Peter 12-16

I wanted to open this message with Peter's words written to encourage believers to understand why the enemy strikes back at us so ferociously at times. For Peter's context, this letter was written around 64-65 AD. It was around this time the emperor Nero set fire to Rome.

It is strongly believed he was the source of this fire due to his vision of rebuilding Rome-*literally*. You cannot build new without clearing the landscape. When the treasured architecture, temples, wealth, and human lives tallied to a cost higher than Nero anticipated, a scape goat story was created- *Christians and Jews set fire to Rome!*

This led to a *ferocious* persecution of both Jews and Christians. From the loss of jobs, forced relocation, being beaten or thrown to the arena's to be ravaged by sword and beast- some even found their end nailed upon a cross. These words from Peter are not just words of optimism- Peter had his eyes focused on Christ, counted the cost of following him, and gave up everything for Jesus. What was everything for Peter? He was forced to watch his wife be crucified, which he cried out *Remember the Lord!* After her death he was led to his own cross in which his request was granted-*he pled that he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord, but rather should be crucified upside down.* This happened around 67-68 AD at which time Jerusalem was beginning to be sieged and destroyed by Rome.

Dear saints, this world does not owe you a thing and we need to stop living as if it does. Our enemy is as real as sin itself, and though defeated he is relentless in refusing to simply walk out of our lives, our marriages, our homes, our communities. His efforts are strengthened against us often right before the potential of Kingdom breakthrough or shortly after it, as we are going to see in our text today from Acts 19 in Ephesus.

See, *insulted for the name of Christ* means to be thrown to the teeth. It is progressive beginning with slander, taunting, chiding. Over time it builds momentum and becomes persecution- *being thrown to the lions* is a catch phrase to this word. And it is with this understanding, what we are going to read in Acts today should not be seen as something strange to us today. If it does, then our Christianity today is a *stranger thing* when compared to what it was for Jesus and these first century followers!

II. Kingdom Planning (Acts 19:21-22)

“Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” -Acts 19:21-22

Luke here shapes out a forecast on what will be the final text of his narrative- the Apostle Paul and the Gospel of Jesus Christ reaching Rome and Caesar himself. This itinerary stays true to the heart of this spiritual father as he seeks to set out and strengthen the churches that have been planted as he fulfills God's plans for his own life. In these verses, in Paul's gaze toward the direction of Rome we see our own Lord's gaze when he purposes to go to Jerusalem,

*“When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.” **-Luke 9:51-52***

In the first century, Rome was understood as the greatest and the end of the earth; there is nothing after. *All is Rome or soon to be Rome.* Like Jesus, Paul’s journey to his divine destiny would not be as a free man in this world. But, we are getting ahead of our text here today.

For now, Paul is far from making this up as he goes or riding the wave of his own talent. Timothy and Erastus were **ministering** to him which means they were serving Paul as the Disciples did Jesus- *learning from his Words and Example.* Paul sends them forward to prepare the churches in Macedonia for his arrival and subsequent shepherding checkups- *healthy, eating healthy, fighting, wolf tracks, etc.*

Talent is a one hit wonder; very rarely replicated. Paul wasn’t about telling over and over this one really great thing God did back in the day, but rather was about mentoring into and developing the gifting God has placed over His Saints- *specifically those called to serve as ministerial leaders.* For Timothy, Titus, Erastus, Silas, Luke, etc- these men gave up much to pursue their calling- learning and growing taking on assignment as Paul delegated down. They trusted his timing, because they knew his heart and that his love *as unto the Lord* for them.

Paul would later write,

*“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.” **-1 Timothy 3:1***

Paul took seriously Jesus’ words about the high cost of Discipleship and the even greater cost of being a minister (Pastor, Elder, Deacon, etc).

*“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.’ **So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.** ‘Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” **-Luke 14:27-35***

After these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit. These two words *finished* and *purposed* go hand in hand. **Finished** implies Paul was fulfilling God’s plans for Ephesus in the time he was there. Remember, each **miracle** was God throwing a javelin through Paul’s hands into the hearts of those being saved, healed, delivered, and transformed. Paul was sensitive to

the Spirit's leading into Ephesus, all that he did while in Ephesus, and when the Spirit was starting to give transition orders. In all of this, **purposed** is Paul's determination to obey the Holy Spirit. When God was done working through Paul in Ephesus, He will lead him onward. Not a moment sooner or later.

Yet as the Holy Spirit is doing all of this Kingdom planning through Paul and His team, the spirit of evil and the kingdom of darkness are in motion with plans of their own.

III. The Upside Down (Acts 19:23-29)

“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Adia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.’” -Acts 19:23-26

Turning to Jesus and following Him will never be an isolated thing. One cannot follow Jesus and not be transformed. Further, one cannot follow Jesus and be transformed and not affect the call to transform in the world around them. Following Jesus is not a religion, it is becoming a part of His Kingdom that comes into this world through each of us. It touches us personally as children, spouses, parents, grandparents. It touches us collectively as a community- affecting our views of the world, society, politics, etc. *There is nothing that is left untouched by Jesus when we walk with our hand in His!*

As God's Kingdom invades this world, the enemies strongholds are crumbling like Jericho. The Gospel had interrupted the Ephesian economy by affecting their crafting of idols. God's Word conflicted with their way of life. This is no small deal and we need to remember our message is offensive to this world.

Let us think on this for a moment. In his book, *World Upside Down*, C. Kavin Rowe notes,

“There are priests and crowds in Lystra, religious salesmen and colony magistrates in Philippi, philosophers and political authorities in Athens, magicians and craftsmen in Ephesus. Taken together these figures demolish the possibility of holding that...the Christian mission was in its essence culturally innocuous. To the contrary, in their social, political, and economic breadth, such persons exhibit the far-reaching and profoundly troubling effects of Christianity for pagan culture.”

Which, if you are a fan of the Netflix show, ***Stranger Things***, you will note that the story bases itself on the reality that we all know and the alternative reality that coexists referred to as ***the Upside Down***. Life is normal until one tries to invade the other. (Note: *Not an endorsement of the leadership of Cornerstone Chapel nor the greater voice of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*)

We as believers must understand that to truly follow Jesus is to embrace the Bible as God's Word affirming that it is the standard of right and wrong, with the above all call to be Holy before a Holy God. In and of ourselves we cannot; and that is why the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus goes outward from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world of all generations!

In our context, *Demetrius* is not about to stand by and take this sitting down. Greed motivates his actions but *let us not demonize him too quickly*. He most likely had a wife, children- maybe family that he had to care for and this is how he provided food, shelter, and well-being. In fact, he may have even been generous to help others in need with the income he gathered from his trade. I add the hypothetical here because if we are honest, many of us struggle to hold on to Jesus when following Him hits our income and forces us to live on lower means than what we could enjoy if we would compromise here or there. *(Share story of surprise Sunday school teacher)*

Again, this Gospel affect is not limited to Ephesus for everywhere Paul and his team go, there is the fruit of God's Kingdom transforming communities resulting in social, political, and economic change.

“Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.” -Acts 19:27

Disrepute means censorship to the point that they are muted. *Wait Pastor are you talking about Facebook?! No! Maybe? What?! What I want us to note is the progression of this frustration. It begins with one slandering the message of Paul, then grows into more now sharing in this frustration leading this into a much bigger issue- the goddess worship of Artemis and the loss of the central identity they hold near and dear as their religion! And it is here, as the enemy sees his strongholds crumble all around him he gathers his forces to strengthen his stand against the Kingdom of Light.*

We must remember, dear saints, that though our enemy is defeated, he is full of wrath and does not simply let go of what he holds.

“For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” -Revelation 12:12

“When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.” -Acts 19:29-30

As we saw with Peter's use of the phrase, *insulted for the name of Christ*, the crowd's momentum has grown in both number and rage resulting in *Gaius and Aristarchus* being drug

out and *thrown to the lions*. If an exorcism gone wrong can turn so many people away from the trade that made so many rich, imagine (in their minds) what the persecution of Christians can do to reclaim and restore what was lost to the Gospel.

I cannot emphasize enough what Luke is showing us here in this event- *if we are truly **Learning** from Jesus, truly **Living** like Jesus, and truly **Leading** others to Jesus- everything is impacted by this*. Every heart that enters the Kingdom of God through Christ bears the power and authority of Jesus' Name by His indwelling Spirit and affects the world around them. This was the effect of the message of Jesus to the world around Him, the effect of the same message through the Apostles and early church to the world around them- and this must be the effect of the same message to the world around us unless:

- 1) *The enemy has given up and simply let go and retreated*
- 2) *The message has changed (we changed it to be safer in this world)*

I leave this determination to you and the Spirit who resides within you to find resolution and answer to.

IV. Entrusted to Train Up (Acts 19:30-31)

“And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into -the theater.” -Acts 19:30-31

There are many challenges to being a parent. For me, some of the harder moments are recognizing that as my children grow up there are some situations, they must face themselves. My paternal instinct is to always see them as my precious babies; and ready to step in and save the day by any means necessary. Yet, if I do this at the expense of their own maturing into adulthood, they will never learn to know and trust the Lord to be to them what He is to me. They will always be expecting me to step in and save them, looking to me instead of Jesus.

Now, don't get me wrong- my children can always count on me. I'm not perfect, but they know my love for them is of such a caliber that as long as I have breath, I am here for them. But they are not mine; they are entrusted to me. They are the Lords. He has not called me as a father or Lacie as a mother to raise adult babies; He has called us to raise His children to become **His Mighty Kingdom Warriors**.

Understand what this was to Paul, the spiritual father to these men and others as they suffer for Jesus. He is prevented from interfering. There are many underlining reasons; but I want to hit mute on that for this message (more next week as we conclude chapter 19). Right now, stand in Paul's shoes as a father held back from running in to stand and defend those he loves as his spiritual children.

They were the arms and appeals of men; but greater the physical expression of God's will for Gaius and Aristarchus, as well as the impact of what may happen having on the other believers in Ephesus and greater Asia.

It is not about you, Paul. These are my sons and daughters. It is about Jesus and His Kingdom. It is not about you, Damian. These are my sons and daughters. It is about Jesus and His Kingdom.

And it is here we come full circle to Peter's words, do not count this as a strange thing. Following Jesus has a cost because it is real, it is powerful, and it is eternal. The enemy strikes back because he is defeated, his strongholds are crumbling, and those he kept blinded in his grip are not bearing the eternal light of God's Glory.

As Peter urged his wife as he watched unable to do a thing to change her suffering, *remember the Lord!* Remember His Word, His Promises, His Glory- this day you will be with Him and never know pain, suffering, sorrow, or death again. Only life- eternal, blissful, joyful life with Him! His words to she whom he loved as his own flesh- was this their hopes and dreams when they said 'I do' at the altar amidst family and friends? Was this the life they daydreamed about as children?

They gave up everything to gain everything in Jesus.

This message is a reminder, a challenge, an encouragement to all of us to recognize this reality- the message of the Gospel is powerful because it is Truth! It is offensive because it is Truth!

Jesus is the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*.

If we believe this, if we walk with our hand in His, everything is changing.

His Kingdom is Coming.

His Kingdom is Here.

Do not think it a *strange thing* when the enemy pushes back.

Think it a *stranger thing* when our message and life have no push back at all.