

Sermon Title: ***“Jesus and His Mighty Warriors”***

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Acts 19:1-10

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. The Road to Ephesus (Acts 19:1)

“It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.” -Acts 18:23-24

Last time we were together in Acts we saw Paul begin his Third Missionary Journey. Luke, the author, had drawn our attention to Apollos where we saw the difference between *talent and gifting* as he was helped to understand the Gospel more clearly and sent to strengthen the church in Corinth. The Gospel has reached well beyond Jerusalem and Judea, having now becoming firmly rooted in the soil of Europe. Yet as the Kingdom of God continues to come into this

world *one heart at a time*, the enemy is not far behind and will be seeking to thwart through suffering and persecution, as well as twisting and perverting the message of Jesus.

Church by church throughout Galatia and Phrygia experienced a visit by this Apostle who loved them as a spiritual father. **Strengthening** means to confirm and build into more; *make stronger or firmer*. Paul isn't just asking them for their stats- numbers, financials, list of wins- he is inspecting them as a shepherd does their flock for infections, wounds, unhealthy watering or food sources, and the evidence of wolves roaming about. He is teaching them God's Word, going deeper with them in the Spirit as a good father does a child that is no longer on milk but ready for the meat of maturity.

This road of strengthening the believers would lead him to Ephesus where he had left Priscilla and Aquilla to minister. It was the Apostle's hope to return there again,

“I will return to you again if God wills.” -Acts 18:21

Before we get too much into this passage, I want to pull back a bit and look at what Luke is building up to with his narrative. We have seen the Gospel go head-to-head with the greatest thinkers and philosophies in Athens, and we will soon see the Gospel step into the arena of politics as Paul will journey to Rome. Between these two major events we have Paul's time here in Ephesus where we see the Gospel of the Kingdom stand against the spiritual powers of darkness.

Ephesus was a city of idolatry; an arena for all sorts of spiritism, witchcraft/sorcery, fortune telling- *if the Kingdom of darkness had a doorway to enter this world it was through Ephesus*. This city has a rich history reaching back before the time of Rome and has anchored itself as the hosting city for worshiping the divine nature of Caesar himself! The temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, resided there drawing crowds in the thousands to participate in worship. The ritual was simple enough, come and appeal to Artemis for favor and provide substantial gifting to secure your guaranteed answer. *Wait Pastor, that sounds like my prayer life!*

Paul described his time here as follows,

“If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” -1 Corinthians 15:32

Now, Paul didn't *actually* wrestle and fight wild beasts (although soon Rome would find it entertaining to see Christians battle such beasts). This was a *Jewish apocalyptic description* for the intense struggles against the spiritual forces at work behind the scenes in the Spiritual Realm. Wild, predatorial animals were often used symbolically for evil spirits- an example being Satan portrayed as a roaring lion walking about seeking to devour. Paul would write,

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full

armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” -Ephesians 6:12-13

Paul was writing these words to the Ephesian believers from his experience there with them in Ephesus. *What in the world, or spiritual world, is Paul talking about?!*

II. Lion Chasers (2 Samuel 23:20-21)

*“When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so. **The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.**” -Deuteronomy 18:9-15*

As God was leading the Nation of Israel into the Land of Promise, He warned them to resist the appeal of things we as believers have become far too tolerant of and comfortable making room for in our heart and lives. God promised Israel that He would be the source of their needs satisfied- specifically a voice to lead and guide- *a voice with power and authority!*

Note that God does not say the sorcery, witchcraft, omens, etc are not real. God commands Israel to have no part in them- to stay away. God is not in it, and it will only lead them away from Him. What is going on with these practices?

Their source is the devil and his demonic resource- their fruit will always be theft, destruction, and death. (See [John 10:10](#))

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” -2 Corinthians 4:3-4

But praise be to our King Jesus, who has taken the battle to the source and brought victory!

“Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth...and there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of

*our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.” **-Revelation 12:3-4, 7-11***

The narrative John provides here sees the transition of the principalities and powers in heavenly places- one is on its way out as another is on its way in. Paul brings a little more clarity to this again in his letter to the Ephesian church on the front lines of this epic spiritual battlefield,

*“Which He brought about in Christ (power and authority), when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” **-Ephesians 1:20-23***

As Satan is cast out and those, he leads follow with him, Christ is raised in triumph with those He leads following!

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” **-Ephesians 2:4-7***

And it is in this divine transition we engage the spiritual forces of darkness, and the Kingdom of God comes into this world- a friction that is only overcome by He who is in us!

*“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” **-1 John 4:4***

And here we come to understand our true enemy and the battle we are up against. The Spirit of Christ is in us- and it is not one of fear. We are called to engage the enemy and allow God to work sovereignly in us and through us for the Glory of His Son and the expansion of His Kingdom! There is no better illustration of what Jesus is doing right now in the Bible than that of David and his mighty warriors!

*“Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds, killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab. **He also went down and killed a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day.** He killed an Egyptian, an impressive man. Now the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but he went down to him with a club and snatched the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear.” **-2 Samuel 23:20-21***

Benaiah’s name has a dualistic meaning- *Jehovah has built* or *Yahweh has built up*. In other words, what God started He is faithful to mature it to completion! Does this sound familiar? Paul went back and strengthened believers to see their faith mature and lead them to finish the race strong! Like Benaiah, Paul went after the spiritual lions. Why? Because lions may be

discouraged from attacking in the moment, but they will return again and again. The only way to stop a lion from pursuing its food source is to hunt it down and kill it. *Benaiah* was a lion killer. Paul was a lion killer. Saints, we need to take up the armor of God and stand against the spiritual lions of darkness all around us! We need to stop backing down, cowering, or hiding and contracting the job out- rather we need to bind and loosen in the power Jesus' presence within us through His Spirit brings, and the authority that Jesus' Name alone has at the right hand of the Father!

This is why Paul returns to Ephesus and how he is able to be used of God to bring forth His Kingdom with such stride that even Paul's handkerchief could heal from disease and see demons cast out! David had his mighty warriors, Jesus leads His Saints to the Heavenly Armory to be fitted as His Kingdom Warriors to see His Kingdom come, His Will being done.

As Benaiah was devoted to David and rewarded with the charge of 30 warriors, Paul was devoted to Jesus and entrusted in identifying, training & equipping, and empowering Kingdom Warriors for the Glory of Jesus and His Kingdom!

III. Training Warriors (Acts 19:8-10)

a. Learning (19:2-4)

“He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ And they said to him, ‘No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ And they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’”

-Acts 19:2-4

As Paul enters Ephesus the Spirit leads him to see a group of disciples. This term is a general term in the Greek; not specific to disciples of Jesus or John but students in general. They were most likely hanging around the synagogue drawn to the message of the Gospel that was circulating there. *One of the reasons Priscilla and Aquilla may have pulled Apollos aside when he was there was due to the slow progress the Gospel was making. There were some questions that you could not ask publicly yet.*

What I want to not is what Paul asks them- *have you received the Holy Spirit when you believed?* Paul most likely recognized that they were disciples of John the Baptist, since like Apollos, many of John's followers continued without the full story well into the second century.

They knew the Old Testament pointed toward a Messiah, and they were baptized at the call to repent by John, yet they did not know about the death, burial, and resurrection and consequent ascension and pouring out of the Spirit of Jesus, or *the Holy Spirit*.

At this point Paul builds into them, not as an inquirer but a teacher. Paul notes their learning material, John's teachings, and connects the dots leading them to see who John was preparing everyone for- *Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (See -> [John 1:29](#))

When we look to those we do life with, praying for and witnessing into, do we see kingdom potential in them as Paul did these disciples?

b. Living (19:5-7)

“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. They were in all about twelve men.” -Acts 19:5-7

Anyone who desires to follow Jesus must have a heart willing to learn. Many, like Apollos, possess a talent and desire, but the discipline to learn and apply is a constant rhythm needed in our lives as believers. As Paul leads them to see that Jesus is who John was pointing to, they come to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The laying on of hands here is the symbolic expression of both connection and power/authority. Jesus was asked to lay His hands upon those needing healing and His followers would do the same. The authority to loosen the Kingdom is given to those in Christ, and upon this laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Note: *The Holy Spirit does not conform to any pattern for how and when He comes in Acts. Sometimes before baptism, upon baptism, or after baptism. We are reminded that as God, the Spirit is sovereign, free, and unhindered.*

What is incredible with this event, and that there were twelve men, is that it mirrors Pentecost happening in Ephesus- *and if in Ephesus, why not Northern New Jersey too?!*

Speaking in tongues and prophesying...I will have another message focusing on this coming very soon! But understand when the Spirit comes upon people it is known! *Again, more coming soon!*

Now, having learned and believed the fuller Gospel of Jesus at Paul's leading, these Disciples are now spirit filled Kingdom Warriors for Jesus Christ and together, with Paul are going into the city of Ephesus living out their faith, championing the Kingdom of God!

c. Leading (19:8-10)

“And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” -Acts 19:8-10

The Kingdom of God is used here by Luke- as in this stage of the narrative the Gospel is well into Gentile culture and is being believed by both Jews and Gentiles. The Kingdom of God is a universal title embracing all who will respond to the invitation of Jesus. This is a way to step away from the *click* or *in crowd* mentality the synagogue or Temple would have implied.

While the ESV uses the term *stubborn*, I've chosen to go with the NASB for the Greek implies that there were those who sat and listened yet were hardened and disobedient. **Hardened** means *allowed or to make hard* implying a progression that leads into **disobedience**, or *not allowing oneself to be persuaded*. Remember, not everyone who comes to church is a Christian. Not everyone who is baptized is a Believer.

“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” **-2 Corinthians 2:15-16**

Withdrew from them in the Greek means to *take a stand, standoff, either causing a removal or withdrawal*. Every witness for Jesus eventually comes to a place to where we need to stand upon the truth of who He is and what His Word teaches, or we compromise and fall back. If your family and friends were asked about your faith, specifically if you believed that Jesus was the only way to have eternal life, would they confirm that was your testimony? Do they see the leading value God's Word has in your life? *(Share KS story if time)*

As a result Paul doesn't leave town, *he doesn't allow them to push him out*, (remember last time he was in this area he was weak and suffering, but now renewed in the Spirit) but rather leaves the Synagogue with the Disciples or Kingdom Warriors for Christ and gathers publicly in the school of Tyrannus. In this public hall of lectures, Paul preaches and teaches- training and equipping during the following two years. As a result of the Kingdom of God being both declared and demonstrated in the power and authority Jesus' Name alone brings, the Gospel is reaching out into the greater Asia region!

In Conclusion for Application

This message focuses on the Spirit leading Paul to strengthen the believers that were established along the route to Ephesus. While many begin the journey with Jesus, we have an enemy seeking to stop us from finishing the journey with Jesus. Like Paul, we need to be soberly in the word, in prayer, and giving our **Yes!** to Jesus as the Spirit fills and leads us for His Glory.

We are suited out in the Lord's armor to go after the lions of the kingdom of darkness that seek to devour the harvest of faith in Christ. Like David and His mighty warriors, Jesus has called us to fill such ranks of these mighty warriors. Let us recognize where our true battle is at and keep our hand in His as we live for Him.

See the Kingdom potential in those around us.

Invest in ministering to those around us.

Chase out the lions

Learn from Jesus by being in His Word, ***Live*** like Jesus as you are filled with His Spirit to proclaim and demonstrate with power and authority the Kingdom of God, and ***Lead*** others to ***Jesus***.