



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Acts 18:23-28, Acts 19

The Third Missionary Journey of Paul [AD Spring 53 - May 57]

Ephesus

Paul launched out on his third missionary journey, which began in the spring of AD 53, ending in May 57. He revisited the churches he had planted on his first journey, but eventually settled in Ephesus where he spent nearly 3 years. Ephesus was one of the most important cities of the Greco-Roman world—prosperous, powerful and the center of the worship of Artemis (Diana). The confrontation there was between Satanic evil and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Apollos in Ephesus, 18:23-28

Apollos was from the important city of Alexandria. He was "fervent in the Spirit," meaning he was gifted in the ability to preach effectively. Apollos taught about Jesus accurately but he only knew of John's baptism. Apollos was caught in the transition so common in Acts between the two covenants and he needed to be brought up to date. Priscilla and Aquila performed this function as they taught him about "the Way." Apollos then desired to minister in Greece, where he effectively served the Lord, especially in Corinth. This brief portrait helps us understand why Paul spoke of him as a valuable colleague in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Paul in Ephesus, 19:1-41

In this critically important city, Paul confronted the Greco-Roman world head on. His ministry there began with him bringing some believers from John the Baptist into a full knowledge of the Spirit and then baptizing them. Paul's work was confirmed by their speaking in tongues and giving prophecy (vv. 1-7). This incident reinforces the prophetic fulfillment that the Baptist was to "prepare the way" for Jesus. The baptism that counts is the one based on the name of Jesus, who was of course vitally connected to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Paul then began his ministry in the synagogue, preaching the kingdom of God over a three-month period. He met with strong rejection and moved to the hall of Tyrannus to make his case for Jesus as the Messiah. He remained in Ephesus for two years (vv. 8-11). During his ministry there, several important developments resulted:

- The sons of Sceva, itinerant Jewish exorcists, tried to invoke Jesus' name in their exorcisms, only to be rebuked by an evil spirit and attacked. This entire situation made a deep impression on the city of Ephesus (vv. 12-17). The report of this event circulated among both Jews and Greeks in Ephesus. The result was reverent fear and a magnifying of the name of the Lord Jesus as the source of that power. There was now an awareness of the power tied to this new faith. Theologically, the power of Satan was checked by the power of Jesus!

- Because of this experience with the exorcists, many who came to faith burned their books on the magic arts (vv. 18-20). The impact of faith in Jesus on personal lifestyle choices is an unmistakable mark of transformation.
- As Paul began to make plans to move on to Jerusalem and then eventually to Rome (vv. 21-22), many of the people in Ephesus became concerned about the economic impact of “the Way” and the affront to Artemis (the Romans called her Diana), the goddess of the city. Demetrius, who made silver shrines to Artemis, declared that the tradesmen would lose their livelihood if Paul’s preaching and its effects continued. His declarations stirred up the crowd, causing them to praise Artemis enthusiastically in public gatherings. Their persistence and near vigilante spirit caused the civic leader of Ephesus to insist that they bring their complaints to the Ephesian courts, lest Rome react forcefully to the disorder (vv. 23-41). This section powerfully demonstrates how the transformation of individual people produces the transformation of culture. Personal lifestyle changes challenge society’s structures and traditions.

Paul Speaks to the Ephesian Elders, 20:17-38

Paul left Ephesus after the uproar had ceased and traveled through Macedonia, stopping in Greece, where he spent time, especially in Corinth. (Paul also probably ministered in Illyricum at this time). In this unit we see the heart of Paul as a pastor. He sought to instruct his people as he departed. One of Paul’s highest priorities was that his people would be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he was gone. The Pauline legacy was not a monument to himself but that he would leave behind Christians who were a monument to God in their faithfulness. Paul was also committed to team ministry—to share the burden and accomplish far more as a group than as one individual.

Paul’s goal was to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, which was less than five weeks away. He did not want to stop in Ephesus and risk being delayed. He therefore summoned the Ephesian elders to Miletus, 30 miles south of Ephesus. What Paul said to the Ephesian elders, he could have said to any of the churches he had planted or disciplined. He explained how to carry on now that they would minister without him. Paul was concerned with more than evangelism; he wanted healthy churches. His speech centered on God’s plan for the church and the sense of community He desired. They needed to rely on God, His plan, the provision of the Spirit and the presence of Jesus. No matter how difficult things get, they can rely on God. His farewell address had several important parts:

- Paul reviewed his faithfulness in ministry at Ephesus and the likelihood that they would not see him again (vv. 22-25).
- Amazingly, he declared his innocence of any guilt, having carried out his responsibilities faithfully before God (vv. 26-27).
- He commanded the elders to care for the flock because of the dangers that lurked from fierce wolves emerging from within the church community (vv. 29-30). Therefore, they must be on the alert (v. 31).
- Finally, he commended them to God’s grace, declaring that he had not taken advantage of them but had followed the Lord’s teaching to give and not receive (vv. 32-35).

They bid Paul farewell with prayers and tears as he boarded the ship for Jerusalem. Paul the pastor had passed the torch to the elders of Ephesus, who were to be diligent in faithfulness and truth.

Questions:

- For both Apollos and some of the believers in Ephesus, they were familiar with the baptism of John, not of the Spirit. What does this tell you about the widespread influence of John the Baptist? Also, what does it tell you about John's ministry "to prepare the way" for the Messiah?
- In Ephesus, we see the profound impact the Gospel had on people. It transformed them—and then they transformed the culture. What lessons should we learn from this truth for the 21st century?
- As Paul gets ready to leave for Jerusalem, he meets with the Ephesian elders. Paul's goal was to leave a healthy church behind. From his address, what are the elements of a healthy church? What was his most important warning to these leaders?
- If you were to write a farewell address to your children, what would you say? How would you challenge them?
- Dr. Eckman said that Paul's legacy was not a monument for himself, but to leave the Ephesian church healthy and committed to faithfulness to God and to His truth. How does that impact your thinking about the ministry of Steadfast Bible Fellowship Church?

Dr. Jim Eckman