

EPHESIANS

Introduction: "The Gospel Transforms Ephesus"

Acts 19:8-20; 23-27

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Welcome

Good morning! My name is David Ritchie. It is an honor to be with you all again. I am returning from three straight weeks out of the Redeemer pulpit, during which I got to go on vacation with my family, as well as serve a few other churches that we have the privilege of collaborating with in our city and region.

I am grateful our elders and this church values time for me to rest with my family. And I'm grateful that this church provides opportunities for young men to preach the word of God and grow in their preaching gift. So thank you. Thank you to our elders. Thank you to Jacob, Andrew, and Aaron for faithfully ministering the word of God in my stead.

This week we are going to be pressing pause on our study of the Gospel of Luke, which we will return to at the beginning of next year. Instead, for the majority of the fall we are going to be looking at the Paul's letter to the Ephesians. But before we do that, I wanted to do something special today. I want to look at the founding of the church in Ephesus; *we will be looking at the Ephesians themselves, before we look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians.*

So with that in mind, I would like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts 19. And when you have found your way there, please stand with me for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Scripture Reading

This week's Scripture reading is from the New Testament book of Acts, chapter 19, verses 8-20 and verses 23 through 27.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

¹¹ And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them

and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily....

²³ About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” ¹

Introduction

The big idea of the book of Acts is this: the ministry of Jesus Christ is not finished. The story of Jesus and his people continues. God has filled the body of Christ with the Spirit of Christ to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. There is good news that needs to be proclaimed. The once crucified Jesus is alive. The gospel of his resurrection and reign is moving and transforming lives and communities; beginning in Jerusalem, to the regions of Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world. And we have been invited to participate in that story.

This morning, I would invite us to look at one small piece of the story of Acts, the moment when Paul brought the gospel to the ancient city of Ephesus. Specifically, I want to show you how the gospel transformed the city of Ephesus, so that this text might provoke us to wonder how God might transform the city of Amarillo too.

Exposition

There is a lot going on that might be confusing, so we will begin by summarizing what is happening our passage.

In Acts 19, Paul is in the great city of Ephesus, where for three months he boldly preaches about the kingdom of God inside of a Jewish synagogue (8). He does this until some of the Jews rise up and kick him out of teaching in their synagogue (9a).² This has been the pattern and strategy of his ministry: talk about the Bible to the Jews, reach people, get kicked out, start a church.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ac 19:8-20; 23-27.

² “Paul’s association with the synagogue lasted for three months, which was longer than usual. It was brought to an end by the opposition of some of the Jews who were hardened against the message, refused to believe it, and spoke against it (cf. 13:45; 18:6). The strength of the opposition was such that Paul felt that he could no longer use the synagogue as a base for evangelism, and he therefore moved to neutral ground, just as he had done in Corinth.” I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 327.

So Paul takes the group of new Christian disciples, who are both Jews and Gentiles, and they essentially become the core team for the Ephesian church. They relocate to a place in town known as the Hall of Tyrannus (9b). Now the hall of Tyrannus was basically a place of higher education and learning. It was a cultural and intellectual center for the region of Asia Minor, like a modern university. As my friend Milton Jones once told me, “The hall of Tyrannus was to Ephesus was like what Texas Tech is to Lubbock.” Paul teaches daily in this setting for two full years and had a profoundly influential ministry (10a). The Bible even says that during this time “...all the residents of Asia [Asia Minor] heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (10b).

This influence in part comes from the fruitful ministry of Paul and the Ephesian church, but even more so this influence comes from the fact that the Ephesian church becomes a church-planting center. In this university-like setting, Paul is training up young leaders like Epaphras who eventually leaves and plants the Colossian church (cf. Col. 1:6). In fact, many scholars believe that the seven churches listed in the book of Revelation were churches that were sent from the Ephesian church.³ A big part of our vision here at Redeemer is that we too want to be a church that plants churches and reaches many people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, Luke (the author of Acts) emphasizes the supernatural nature of Paul’s ministry while he is in Ephesus. The Holy Spirit is working through Paul, powerfully validating the apostle’s ministry of the gospel with displays of healing and the casting out of demons (11). Apparently, this was happening so often that people were trying to get a hold of handkerchiefs and aprons that Paul had touched so that they could bring them to heal people who were sick or deliver people who were demonically tormented (12a).⁴ Everyday he showed up to make a tent, he had to go out and get a new apron! Now it sounds crazy to me that people were doing this. But the even crazier thing was that this was working (12b)!

Then, at this point in the story, we are introduced to some characters known as the seven sons of Sceva (14). We don’t know their names, but three of them are probably named Larry, Curly, and Mo. These men claim to have power over demonic forces, but they are in fact charlatans who swindle people for money, much like many televangelists sadly continue to do today (13a).⁵ They see how influential Paul’s ministry is so they decide to add another spell to their repertoire of fake supernatural power. This spell is, of course, “...I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims” (13b). They think this phrase sounds really mystical, foreign, and cool—that is, until they meet an actual demon. The demon speaks to them (which is freaky), and tells them that he is aware of Jesus and Paul, but that he has never heard of any of them (15). Following this exchange, the demonized man proceeds to leap on these men, and, in the words of Bible, “masters” and “overpowers” them all, after which these men flee naked and wounded from the house in which they were ministering (16). This

³ “Luke tells us that everyone in Asia (the area around modern-day Turkey) “heard the word of the Lord.” It was during this time that the seven churches named in Revelation 2–3, as well as many others, came into being. By any estimate, what happened in those two years is amazing.” R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 255.

⁴ “Paul was not selling his handkerchiefs or socks or aprons to the local faithful. They were ‘borrowing’ them and applying them to the sick.” Ibid., 256.

⁵ “Either Sceva was simply a member of a high-priestly family, or he assumed the title for professional purposes in order to impress and delude the public, since a high priest (or his sons) would have close contact with the supernatural; we may compare the way in which modern quacks take such titles as ‘Doctor’ or ‘Professor.’” Marshall, 329.

was a fight, but the decision of who won did not need to go before the panel of judges. In general, if you go into a fight with your clothes on, and you leave the fight with your clothes off, you can safely say you have lost the fight. This event was humorous and odd, but it made a big impact in the city of Ephesus. People began to recognize that there was something very special and glorious about the name of Jesus: *“And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled”* (17).

This all has a very profound effect on the Ephesian church. “Believers” who had not yet repented of practicing false religion become convicted of their sin and profess it publically, even burning costly, hand-written books (18-20). This all of course adds to the notoriety of the Paul’s ministry of the Ephesian church. The end result is more people get saved and more lives are changed by the gospel. *“So the word of the Lord continued to increase mightily”* (20).

The word of the Lord increases so mightily that it begins to change the socio-economic climate of the city of Ephesus. Now, something that you need to know is that Ephesus was the international center of worship for the cult of Artemis, who was a type of earth-goddess. In fact, in the city of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis, which was listed along with the Pyramids of Egypt and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (See Image: Temple of Artemis 1). Tourists would come from all around Asia Minor to visit the temple, and as a souvenir they would buy a small silver idol of the goddess so they could worship Artemis at home. That is they *used* to buy these silver souvenirs. But then along came a man named Paul. And Paul has persuaded many people that *“...gods made with hands are not gods”* (26). He persuaded so many people that a silversmith named Demetrius notices that his livelihood is about to go belly-up and gathers other people in his industry together for a group therapy session (24-27). These guys end up causing a riot in the city of Ephesus because they are so mad (28-34). But yet again, the true God is faithful to Paul and the Ephesian Christians and they are able to continue proclaiming and displaying the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (35-41).

Simply said, the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms the city of Ephesus. The gospel is not just doctrine; it the power of salvation. It changes real people, real churches, and real cities. This is history.

Application

Now as if you are Christian, I would believe the historical reliability of this passage. That is, you believe that this really happened. The question is in your heart of hearts, do you believe God can still work this dramatically in your life, in your church, or in your city. But I think our causes us to ask the question, *“what if?” What if God moved like this in our city?*

Perhaps we are tempted to set the bar too low. Perhaps we are satisfied with a safe, comfortable, manageable, tame, sub-biblical Christianity. Perhaps we are called to pray bigger prayers and dream bigger dreams for the city to which we have been sent.

Now, I do not think that this passage gives us a play for play manual of how to seek true transformation in Amarillo, Texas. However, I think our text is helpful to us in offering at least three signposts that point us in the right direction. These three signposts are three types of transformations that the gospel calls us to pursue. They are three necessary transformations that must take place if the gospel is going to change a city: **1.) Personal Transformation, 2.) Corporate Transformation, and 3.) Cultural Transformation.**

1. Personal Transformation.

Notice the contrast between Paul and the sons of Sceva. Paul walks closely in relationship with Jesus. The sons of Sceva only know about Jesus. Paul serves Jesus. The sons of Sceva want Jesus to serve them. Paul walks in the true power of God. The sons of Sceva fake the power of God. Now, before the sons of Sceva are beat up and stripped naked by the demonized man, to most people Paul and the sons of Sceva looked the same. They were both Jews, they both claimed to have answers, they both claimed to hold spiritual authority. But when true suffering and evil came, Paul was shown to be a man who truly walked in the power of God, and the sons of Sceva were exposed as frauds. Simply, Paul had experienced personal transformation by encountering the living God, and the sons of Sceva had not. At the end of the day, it all begins with personal transformation.

If you are Christian, it begins with you. Are you really walking with the living God? Does the evidence of your life show that you know and serve God? Do you let him confront you, challenge you, and change you? Or are you just trying really hard to be nice and hoping no one can tell the difference? True personal transformation is hardly ever an exciting process. We may have big moments when we feel the presence and power of God in our lives, but by in large most of our spiritual growth happens in the unimpressive moments when we are simply serving God faithfully and he is molding our character. This happens by pursuing God's word in study, pursuing God's presence in prayer, pursuing God's people in the church.

You cannot fake the power of God. We as a church can never expect to lead reach people in our city to a place that we have never been. But the good news is God really can change you. If you're in a place and you are stuck and hopeless, God is a God of transforming power! He is the great Redeemer!

I am not saying we should be a perfect people. But we should be a progressing people; a people who are show evidence of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power in our lives, who transforms us from one degree of glory to another. As the great hymn writer John Newton once said, "*I am not who I ought to be. I am not who I want to be. I am not who I will be. But I am not who I was. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.*" This is power of the gospel working in us personally.

2. Corporate Transformation.

As the Ephesian believers see the reality of God's power move, they begin to take their own holiness very seriously. They begin to see areas of their lives that are out of step with the gospel, and they repent. And the sins they are repenting of is pretty dark stuff, typically the stuff that you want to hide (witchcraft, worship of false gods, etc.). But the Ephesian believers not only repent, they repent *together*. They pursue what it means to follow Jesus *together*. The gospel is removing dark sins and shame, and the people God are rejoicing in the new freedom that they now have *together*. This is such a powerful picture of what it really means to be the church.

Simply said, this is why we believe in the value of community. We believe in serving with one another, learning with one another, sharing meals with one another, applying the gospel to one another, and caring for one another in our families and in the extended family of the church. As Pastor Ray Ortlund once said, "Gospel plus time plus safety equals transformation." That is the culture of corporate transformation I want to see us have here!

Some of my favorite moments in this church is experiencing and hearing about stories of our community groups walking with each other in moments of pain and tragedy. Witnessing people share deep struggles and receiving prayer for one another, both in home living rooms, as well as in our sanctuary in the midst of worship. Transforming Christian community is not just a good idea. It is crucial part of New Testament spirituality.

Your most important relationships (or lack thereof) compose one of the most important aspects of your spiritual formation. You are being formed into something. The question is: are you becoming the person you want to be? Are you pursuing and opening your life up to people who will chase Jesus with you? We cannot do this alone.

3. Cultural Transformation.

The gospel so penetrated Ephesus that it literally changed the economy of the city. People began to worship Jesus instead of Artemis. The silver smiths who make idols were afraid that this great goddess would be deposed from her magnificence, so much so that they would go onto throwing a riot in Ephesus. And guess Demetrius was right? Artemis was deposed. (Look again at the Temple of Artemis 2000 years ago: [Temple of Artemis](#) 1. Now look at it today: [Temple of Artemis](#) 2. Artemis is no longer worshipped. But King Jesus is. The gospel forever changed the culture of Ephesus by replacing idol worship with worship of the true God.

We still very much have idols today. An idol is a substitute messiah. It is anything we look to give us ultimate comfort or hope or satisfaction or purpose, outside of the one true God. An idol is a good thing that our hearts try to twist into an ultimate thing. So think for a moment: what are your idols? What are our city's idols? What would it look like for the gospel to change our culture by deposing out cultural idols? What if our West Texan independence were replaced by a desperate dependence upon God? What if our quest for perceived niceness were replaced by a desire for honest, grace-molded character? What if our toughness were replaced by a love for the least and the lost? These are questions we should ask.

I'm an Amarillo boy. I was born and raised here and I have lived in Amarillo or Canyon my entire life. For the better part of my life, I couldn't wait to get away from Amarillo. I used to want to escape this city, but several years ago God began to convict me for this place. I began praying for his heart, his vision, and his wisdom for this city. I honestly believe that this could be a place that the people of God lead a true transformation in this city.

Imagine our city with no strip clubs because of lack of demand, imagine the drug market annihilated because people are satisfied in Jesus, imagine every child in danger of abortion instead being adopted because of a move of grace, imagine racial reconciliation because the church rises up to be the multi-ethnic family of God, imagine a revival among refugees who came to our city from nations where the gospel was illegal. Imagine us training and sending pastors into places of our city and region that are utterly unreached by the gospel. Imagine the artistic, political, educational, and economic structures of our city being influenced and formed by the gospel of grace! This happened before. It could happen again. This may sound ridiculous, but I think for us to dream for anything less is to believe too little. This is what I want us to want. We may not see this reality, but I think it is good and godly for us to pray for this and pursue this.

Conclusion & Prayer

Now if you notice the story of Ephesus follows the pillar of our vision here at Redeemer: Christ, Community, and Culture. The truth of Christ is lifted up, and people are changed. The community of the church is transformed and empowered by the gospel. And as a result the entire culture of the city is changed. As we dive into the book of Ephesians, you will see this pattern continue to define this church, as I hope it defines our church.

We are called to change the world because we are the body of Christ commissioned to continue the ministry of Christ. Jesus was and is a world-changer. Jesus changed the world not by power, policy, or self-promotion, but by a cross. His life, his death, his resurrection, and the promise of his return change everything! He did not come and sacrifice so much to make you a nicer person and to help you pursue the American dream. He came to make all things new!

If you are a Christian, today is a day to realize that this gospel is meant for so much more than to make you look like a nicer person. It is meant to change you, and through to change everything around you.

If you are not a Christian, today is a day that you can have real change. Jesus died and rose again, not to make you a merely better person, but to make you a new person and to invite you into his mission.

Redeemer Christian Church, let us be a people who seek to encounter the living God, that he might change us and remake us as individuals and as a church. May we be a people who live with a God-sized vision for our community. And may we be a people who partner with God to let his kingdom come and his will be done on earth, in Amarillo, Texas, as it is in heaven!

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Community Groups

- 1. *Is the power of God evident in your personal life? What are ways that you want to see God move in you, so that he might move through you in a more powerful way?***
- 2. *Who are your most formative and important relationships, and are they making you look more or less like Jesus? Have you opened your life to true, honest, biblical community?***
- 3. *Do you want Jesus to change this city, and are you willing to be a part of such a movement? Will you commit pray for such a move of God in our city?***

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