Paul's Ministry at Ephesus

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Date: 14 September 2025

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Will you pray with me this morning? Father God, we are here this morning in awe of you.! Lord, I thought about it myself and I think sometimes coming to church can be just a box we check off in our week.

Something that we do because we've always done it. But Lord, I want us to remember that this is an awesome privilege. Not only to come before you this morning, the one and only Holy God.
But the one who also sent his son for us. To restore the way to a relationship with you. Lord, I'm so deeply grateful for what you've done for me.
And I know everyone here feels that way as well. And so Lord, I ask for you to remind us. To cherish this time that we have with you. To cherish our relationship with you.
And with our brothers and sisters who call you Lord as well. Lord, I ask for healing and provision for people in our congregation who are struggling. Lord, there are many health concerns and challenges.
[1:15] There are situations of loss that people have experienced in their lives. There are people who need provision of jobs and finances and things like that. Lord, there are so many needs.

And you know them, Lord. I don't even need to try to remember to write them all down and quote them back to you because you know them. And so Lord, in faith, we ask for you to provide.
We ask for you to heal. We ask for you to comfort. And all of those things that only you can do.
Lord, thank you as well for every blessing that you give us in our lives.
Again, like we sometimes take for granted the opportunity to come before you and worship you with our voices. To hear your word. To study and experience your presence together.
To experience the joy and interaction with brothers and sisters who share our faith. Lord, I think sometimes we take for granted the things that you've provided.
[2:16] Lord, even the breath in our lungs. You know, we talk about that a lot. Lord, that you even give us our life and our breath. But those are not just trait words to say, Lord. They are absolute truth.

We only live because of your grace. We can only serve you because of your grace. We can only care for one another because of your grace. And so I thank you for that.
Lord, I'd be remiss as a pastor to not recognize the fact that our world is hurting. Lord, there is so much pain and anger.
There's every opportunity for people to point fingers at one another. Every opportunity for them to say, them versus us. Lord, even in the past few weeks and months, there have been people who have lost their lives because of passionate folks on either side of the conversation who just refuse to see someone else's humanity.
Lord, I've just been thinking this morning that I think common human decency is a pretty low bar. And so, Lord, as your people, you call us to a higher standard than even that.
[3:35] So, Lord, I pray for your people in this church, in other churches around the city, around the country, around the world, Lord, to be examples in the way we live and the way we speak of and to other people, the way we show care and compassion, the way we show inclusion and empathy.

Lord, those are such critical things. And as followers of your Son, I believe that is the least that we can do. So, Lord, I pray for hearts and minds to be changed.
I pray for people to listen again around the world, for them to see each other not as enemies, but of fellow human beings.
Lord, that is the cry of my heart, that you would heal our world and that you would draw people back to you, or at the very least, to once again care for one another as though they really meant it.

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Lord, we must be an example. We must be an example of how to treat other people as Jesus would have us do. Lord, it's not hard.
[4:53] But help us to not be afraid. Help us to show care and common human decency to others that we meet in our lives. Help us to not be drawn into arguments and anger and irritation over things, but to just listen, Lord.

Help us to listen to each other. Not just here, but everywhere. Lord, you love humanity. You love human beings. And I pray that your love would be infused into people again.
And I pray all these things in the precious, powerful, and wonderful name of your Son, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
There's a sermon. Do you want another one? Sure. Everybody goes, eh, sure. That's why I came. So welcome here for this Sunday, September 14th.
My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. This morning, we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World. Maybe I don't have to say that every week because you get it.
[6:04] But believe it or not, we're starting to get closer to the end, by far, of this series than the beginning. So we've been digging into the history of the early church together to see what we can learn from people and places and the events that we read about there.

So we've got a monster passage this morning, Acts 19, 1 to 41. Acts 19, 1 to 41. So turn to that in your Bible, and I will also read it for us now.
So just a heads up, you will hear the passage from last week at the beginning of this. So don't panic. I didn't forget to update my passage for our sermon this week.
But it's important to include that in this reading. So let's hear that together. Acts 19, 1 to 41. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.
There he found some disciples and asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They answered, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. So Paul asked, Then what baptism did you receive?
[7:17] John's baptism, they replied. Paul said John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were twelve men in all.
Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way.
So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.
God did extraordinary miracles through Paul so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.
[8:17] Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.

Seven sons of Seva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirits answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?
Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.
Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas.
In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia.
[9:27] After I had been there, he said, I must visit Rome also. He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

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About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who had made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.
He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said, You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus, and in practically the whole province of Asia.
He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There's danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.
When he heard this, they were furious and began shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!
Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together.
[10:45] Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him messages begging him not to venture into the theater.

The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him.
He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people, but when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!
The city clerk quieted the crowd and said, Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of her image which fell from heaven?
Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You've been brought these men here, although they've neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.
[11:46] If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are procouncils. They can press charges. If there's anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.

As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there's no reason for it.
After he said this, he dismissed the assembly. And that is the word of the Lord. Our sermon this morning is titled Paul's Ministry at Ephesus.
And as you may remember from last week, I said that we're entering a period of events in Acts, which were some of the most successful times for Paul's ministry.
Paul's third missionary journey began in Antioch of Syria. And that's actually, we've talked about this over the course of the series, that's the place where he started all three of his journeys.
[12:45] That was his home base, Antioch of Syria. And with his second journey, as is similarly here, this trip began by returning to visit churches that were established on his first missionary journey.

So Paul returned to the places where churches had been established. First major stop on Paul's third journey was the city of Ephesus, where we know he had stopped on his second journey. Remember that? Where he had promised to return if it was God's will. We talked about that a bit last week. The time Paul spent in Ephesus on his third journey proved to be the longest of any that Luke wrote about.
And it lasted approximately three years from 52 to 55 AD. So Paul was there in Ephesus for quite a time. So let's look a little bit at Paul's ministry as Luke recorded it in Acts.
So first of all, we talked about last week the conversion of those 12 disciples. We're reminded in that passage this morning, as I mentioned we tagged last week's on to the beginning.
[13:52] So Paul met 12 disciples who needed to be baptized again, if you remember that. And after that, they received the Spirit. Scripture tells us they spoke in tongues and prophesied, so they showed gifting from the Spirit.

And that all came after Paul blessed them. Paul laid hands on them. So then, of course, Paul taught where? Synagogue. So he took that usual approach that we see often in his ministry of teaching

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and debating at the local synagogue whenever that opportunity presented itself.
And we recognize that when we've studied Acts 17, Acts 18, those two chapters, we see that common approach that Paul took there as well. So we read here that Paul spoke in the synagogue passionately and boldly about Jesus and about the gospel.
And he did that for approximately, it tells us, three months. It's a long time. So this was longer than he had taught when he was in the synagogues of other communities, like Pisidian Antioch or Iconium or Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth.
He had been to synagogues and taught in those places as well. So it's interesting then that we note in our passage this morning that as had happened in other places, Paul faced opposition when he taught in the synagogues, right?
[15:18] He faced opposition and he stopped teaching at the synagogue. But we hear right away that he went from the synagogue to a place called the lecture hall of Tyrannus and that he took the disciples with him.

So we can assume that by the disciples, it was the 12 that he met when we talked about them last week. And then he taught there for two years, Scripture tells us.
So as I say, we can safely assume that that was the 12 disciples formerly of John that he met. So I wanted, I don't know about you, but I wanted to learn more about this place.
First of all, it has an interesting name, Tyrannus, right? So the lecture hall of Tyrannus, I wanted to know more about it. So I did a little bit of research. One of the commentaries I read said this, that the two-year period Paul spent teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus was instrumental in establishing a strong Christian presence in Asia Minor.
It's a pretty key event. And the hall, this place, became a center for learning and discipleship. And it contributed to the spread of Christianity into the greater world beyond Ephesus.
[16:34] So it's interesting. Again, Paul looks for strategic opportunities. And I believe, you know, the Spirit would have led him in his choices. So this strategic use of a public venue underscores the importance of being adaptable and resourceful in ministry, right?

It's pretty hard to be an effective minister for God if you are limited to your approach, your location, all of those kinds of things.
Because we see that Paul was flexible and adaptable. He left the synagogue and taught in this other key public place. He used the available situation, the available resources, to further the mission of the church, to further God's mission.
So when that opportunity to reach people through the synagogue, a key place, right? When that ended, when he faced the persecution there, he continued to be faithful.
He continued to be open and didn't say, well, I can't preach there. Forget it. He said, I mean, we don't hear it in Scripture, but you can hear Paul praying and saying, okay, Lord, this was my plan.
[17:49] What do I do next? What do you want me to do now? So he continued to be faithful on his mission to share the gospel. Now, perhaps, as we read this passage, you were reminded of some things in there.

Ever since I first heard this passage, I assume when I was little, I don't know, maybe a strange child, but this little section really stuck out to me. So there's Acts 19, 11 to 16 is quirky, but it's really, also really engaging.
So let's dig in here a little bit because there's some notable details that we read about here. We read about handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul and conveyed power to heal and drive out spirits.
I don't know if you're a good cook in the kitchen or a bad cook. I have worn aprons. I have never heard of a God-empowered, miraculous apron, but this seems to have been the case here, right? But it's made clear to us here that God did these miracles through Paul, right? It wasn't somehow Paul's power that caused these miracles.
[19:05] So we need to be careful and be reminded that God works through his people. We also learn that in this section that seven men, and we learn that they were the sons of a Jewish chief priest, observed these miracles, right?

Saw the miracles of the miraculous apron and the handkerchiefs. They saw these things and they tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus themselves to drive out demons.
Did you notice that in this passage? They say, in the name of Jesus that Paul talked about. Like, what? Are you serious? So they try to essentially co-opt the authority of Christ through Paul to be

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used for their own purposes.
So to me, this is a little bit like somebody watching a YouTube video. of an accomplished martial artist breaking a brick with their hand. And there's a video on YouTube of your pastor breaking a brick with his hand in his past life, so I can show it to you if you want to see it one time.
Anyway, so it's like doing that, right? Watching an accomplished martial artist and saying, oh, it looks easy enough. YouTube video, I got it. I'll figure this out. So the Jewish people would have absolutely believed that demon possession was real, right?
[20:30] They would not have messed around with this. They would have believed that demon possession was a very dangerous situation. And yet these men went into this battle. It is a battle.

Don't make no mistake. Essentially saying, in the name of this guy named Jesus, who Paul talks about, because I heard him say his name one time, and Paul seemed pretty confident when he talked about him.
I command you to come out. Whoa. Good luck. So this story and how the demons respond to these men has always stayed with me.
Especially when this presence says, Jesus we know. Paul we know. But basically, who the heck are you? Right?
So they recognize the authority of Christ. They recognize the authority of Paul as given to him by Christ. But they also say, yeah, bring it on, because you got nothing.
[21:31] They enter this battle hopelessly unprepared. Hopelessly underestimating their enemy. Without the proper faith or focus to stand under the protection and authority that they try to claim for themselves.

Do you see that? Trying to claim the authority of Christ when your method or your motives or your motivation or your doctrine or whatever is not of Christ.
That is dangerous stuff. So then we go on to read that these men were overpowered by a possessed man. He beat them and he chased them away.
Now we notice in there that they ended up naked. So I don't know how that happened. If he beat them so badly, knocked them right out of their shorts, who knows. But there's such a wonderful contrast here.
Paul's faith made him an example of how the gospel and a relationship with Christ could and would change lives. And then these other men, by contrast, showed how seeking to misappropriate power, misappropriate influence for personal gain, usually does not end well, does it?
[22:52] We read that people witnessed these two examples and many came to believe in Jesus as a result. And then of the people who believed and turned from their past lives, we read that some even experienced a personal significant financial cost because some of these people were studying sorcery.

And so they had these scrolls that were valuable. So they burned these scrolls as a sign of moving away from their past life and dedicating their life to Christ.
And friends, it was that example that furthered the message of the gospel even more as we read in the passage. So I've talked about this before, but like ripples in a pool, the gospel changes lives.
There was a riot at Ephesus, we read in our passage from this morning. Toward the end of his time in Ephesus, as Paul began to make plans to leave, we learn that as a disturbance, this passage tells us, broke out about the way, it says.
So let's pause here for a moment. What did Luke mean when he writes the way? Maybe you know. Maybe you've heard those words before, but just in case you haven't, again, I did some digging.
[24:25] So I had my own understanding of what that meant. The way is mentioned several times in the book of Acts in connection with the early followers of Jesus.

So we can safely presume that the early followers of Christ came to refer to themselves as followers of the way, possibly because of Jesus' statement in John 14, 6, in which Jesus said, he is the way, the truth, and the life.
And you may also remember in Acts 18, verse 26, Luke says that Aquila and Priscilla explained to Apollos the way of God, it says there, more fully.
In 2 Peter 2, verse 2, Peter also refers to Christianity as the way of truth. And the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus' broken body is the new and living way for us to enter the most holy place.
So you can see that there's some context for the use of the term the way. Now, back to the disturbance and what happened. Well, we learned that a silversmith named Demetrius gathered a

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bunch of other craftspeople.
[25:45] They get riled up that their lucrative business of making valuable items for worshiping gods, particularly Artemis, is being hurt by all Paul's talk of idols and such.

So we don't know whether there was religious motivation over the worship of the goddess Artemis at play here. Or, it was purely motivated by losing income, right?
People get worked up when their livelihood is at stake. Maybe it was a bit of both. It's possible too.
So a mob grabs two of Paul's companions, men named Gaius and Aristarchus.
And Paul wanted to appear before this crowd that had grabbed them to speak with them. But the disciples, again, we can assume it was these 12 men who used to follow John, the disciples, the passage tells us, wouldn't let him.
So maybe they thought it was too dangerous. Luke doesn't say, but that's a fair assumption. And as we read about this account, it seemed like total pandemonium. Some people, we read, didn't even know what the fuss was about.
[26:52] I maybe said this before over the years, but have you ever driven through a national park and seen a bunch of people stop by the side of the road? And so you stopped by the side of the road.

This happened to Michelle once, actually. So she pulled over and was standing next to somebody and she said, so what are we looking for? What are we looking at?
And he looked back at her and said, I don't know. Human nature, am I right? So we stop and look at car accidents. When we see a cop flying by, we want to know where they're going.
When we see a fire engine, where's the fire, right? So we are creatures of habit where we look for the excitement and the energy and follow the trail sometimes. So some people, we read, were there and didn't know what it was all about.
seemed like a big gathering of people. I should join in, I guess. So the riot was barely controlled by the city clerk. So we can assume here that this was, happened at a government building.
[27:58] And the city clerk, now I don't know if you noticed this, but I certainly did, how often crowds bring people to political leaders or other officials and say, we don't like what they're saying or doing.

you do something about it. It seems like almost 100% of the time they said, not our problem. Right?
They could have grabbed these people and done whatever they wanted and the crowd would have loved it.
But it seems God at work, cooler heads prevailed sometimes. So we read, though, that the riot was barely under control.
people. And so, though, again, the clerk exonerates these men from Paul of all their charges. He dismisses the crowd. He says, we have courts, we have judges, bring up your charges, go for it, but I'm not doing anything.
Paul, then we read that Paul left Ephesus soon after this. And he had a plan to go on to Macedonia and that's what he did. Tune in next week.
[29:09] So Luke's account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus definitely points to it being a success. We've explored some of the more exciting and occasionally unusual events that happened during Paul's ministry in Ephesus this morning.

But it was due to what happened here that the gospel spread throughout Asia, we read. And this is the region around modern-day Turkey. Paul's three years in Ephesus were very productive.
His influence spread even further through emissaries that he sent to visit and minister to established churches. He sent letters like 1st and 2nd Corinthians and Galatians.
Scholars suggest that those letters were written, those books as we now recognize them, were written during his time in Ephesus. Reflecting on Paul's ministry at Ephesus, we can recognize many things including Paul's emphasis on the importance of scriptural baptism.
The power of the gospel to change lives. Paul was not afraid. We can also recognize the resistance of many people who heard Paul's message of the gospel, but who ultimately valued personal gain and tradition over God's will.
[30:31] This account in Acts that we've looked at this morning serves as a testament to the power of persistent and strategic ministry in the face of opposition.

It highlights the transformative potential of the gospel when it's shared in diverse and dynamic settings. may these events and the way God used them for his purpose give us the courage to

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follow his leading in our own lives.
No matter what we may perceive the obstacles or the challenges to be. And no matter what the personal cost or potential loss might be as well.
Amen.

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