

Acts 19:1-41 (PM)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 June 2023

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

- [0 : 00] So, this is our last week in our survey of the book of Acts, chapter 19. And you heard it read, it is, like, it's fascinating, right?
- It is fascinating. A series of little, quite odd stories. Let me give you a really big picture first, really big picture first. Paul and some of his mates turn up to this new city, Ephesus, and what we get here is we get to see what happens when the gospel comes to a place.
- What happens to a people and a community when the gospel, like, crashes the party? And we'll see a number of things. We'll read about lives that are changed, but also riots.
- We'll hear about new life and also some chaos. And it seems like the writer Paul is trying to communicate to us, is trying to tell us that when the gospel hits a major city, it's messy.
- It gets messy. It's a wonderful message, I think. It's a great way for us to end Acts, and it's a great help to us as we consider what it is for us to be Christians publicly in a big pluralist city like ours.
- [1 : 15] So, let's get into it. And what I'm going to do is I'm just going to walk through the story, and then at the end I'll try and tidy it up a little bit. So, first story. Paul arrives in Ephesus, and he meets some people who are following God as best as they know, and he asks them about the Holy Spirit.
- Holy Spirit! And they say, not sure what you're talking about. So, he digs deeper, and he says, have you been baptized? And they say, yeah, totally baptized by John the Baptist.
- And at this point, Paul tells them that John was all about preparing them for the Messiah. And the Messiah has actually come. Jesus has arrived. They're really into it. Paul lays hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit, and they have their own little kind of mini Pentecost event.
- Brilliant. Fantastic. So, the only thing I want to point out about this story is this. You could look at the story, and you could say, okay, so it seems like what it's saying here is that you become a Christian, and then later you get the Holy Spirit.
- Is that what it's saying? That's kind of what I believed as a young Christian. It's actually not true. That's misinterpreting the story. You get the Holy Spirit at the point that you actually trust Jesus, because that's the work of the Holy Spirit.
- [2 : 25] So, these guys that Paul talked to, they weren't Christians with no Holy Spirit. They weren't Christians at all. They received the Holy Spirit because they accepted Jesus.
- So, the Holy Spirit in your life is not like a two-step thing. It comes all at once, but let me just nuance that before moving on. Whilst we don't believe that there is this two-step thing, that there's this later extra Holy Spirit baptism, we do grow in our ability to respond to the Spirit.
- So, as we're sanctified, which means as we grow in our faith, our capacity to hear and receive from God grows.
- And it's an amazing thing, isn't it? Just to think about that. The triune God is like living in the middle of your life, enters your life at the point that you come to faith, which might be very, very early for some of you.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. Comes and enters into your life. And it's not like power, like in the sense of voltage or amperage or anything like that, you sort of try and get more of.

[3 : 42] No, no, it's a relationship that you grow in. Okay, so that's the first little story there, the first little encounter. These disciples of John, they come to faith.

Jesus tells them about Jesus. Wonderful. But Jesus, Paul's message is not always well received in the city. If you have a Bible open at verses 8 and 9, Paul, what he liked to do when he visited a place is he'd go to the synagogue.

So he goes to the synagogue. He's talking and he's talking and he's talking. He's teaching, teaching, teaching. After a few months, he says, look, they're just totally stubborn. They're not interested. They start to say evil things about Jesus.

So Paul leaves. But he stays in the city because he wants to speak to the Gentiles. So somehow he gets connected to this guy called Tyrannus, who's probably some kind of teacher or philosopher who owns, he's got some kind of space, like a school or something of philosophy.

And he lets Paul use it. So Paul spends every day like teaching and lecturing, and he does that for two years. So it says that everyone has a chance to hear him. Earlier copies of this book of Acts says that Paul was there from 11 in the morning to 4 p.m. in the afternoon, which was the hottest part of the day.

[4 : 53] And this is a strategy. This is the time of the day in the Middle East when everyone else rested because it was too hot to work. So Paul figures at the time when everyone's taking a rest, when they're not working, this is prime space for me, prime real estate.

So I'm going to go to this place and I'm going to teach. I'm going to tell people about Jesus. Because this man, he wanted people to know Jesus. And despite the stubbornness and despite the work required, Paul just cracks on.

I love it. Second story. Next one, verses 11 to 12. God does some very unusual miracles through Paul. It says that people were taking, there's a few different ways to look at it, but it seems like people were taking Paul's like hankies, like his sweat rags and it's like his aprons because he was a tent maker.

And folks are taking them and they're getting healed just by touching it. It's like, what? It's so strange, isn't it? I mean, what do we do with this?

Well, I think it reminds us how gracious God is, how gracious our God is. These people in Ephesus were really, they were odd.

[6 : 10] They were odd people. They were really into magic. If you've ever played any kind of online fantasy game like Dungeons and Dragons or something like that, and you go to these marketplaces where they sell scrolls and spells and magical amulets, is that the word?

Amulet? You know, right? That was like Ephesus. These big marketplaces, they sell magic stuff. I mean, it was all nonsense, but they sold it, right? I think maybe what's happening here is that God is meeting people at their level of understanding with these unusual miracles.

Because these folks, they believed that objects could transmit power. And God was meeting them at their level. But the passage does very quickly try to correct these folks from thinking that these miracles are just magic things that they can grab a hold of and use.

Because although God is so gracious to meet people where they're at, He wants to move them on. He doesn't want them to stay at that level of understanding, level of understanding, which is why I think the story, the next story about the seven sons of Sceva come in.

So big picture for a moment. So pagan worship, people would use the gods, you know, to get things they wanted from them.

[7 : 38] We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. But unlike the pagan gods, we can't manipulate God to get our way in life. We can't use God as a tool.

So there are these people here. They're hearing about these miracles and they wanted to tap into the power of Jesus, but they didn't really want Jesus. They wanted to tap into the power, but they didn't want Jesus to be like, you know, the middle of their life, guiding them and be their king.

So this thing happens and it's great because God is moving people from superstition to real faith in God. So this is where the story of the seven sons of Sceva, which is just, it sounds like a terrible, like Norwegian heavy metal band or something like that, right?

Anyway, so the seven sons of Sceva, right? So verses 13 to 16, it's a great story. It's just a total cracker of a story. So we've got these sons of this high priest and they've got this whole exorcism gig.

It's like their job. And they hear about these miracles and they think they'll, they want, they want their shtick to be super powerful. So they think they'll throw the name of Jesus whenever they're doing one of their things, like an incantation with their exorcism.

[8 : 53] So they get stuck into the next exorcism with some, some dude who's completely possessed by evil. And, and they're like, and in the name of Jesus, eh, eh, right?

Anyway, here's how it plays out. Verse 15, but the evil spirit answered them. It's so brilliant. Jesus, I know, and Paul, I recognize, but who are you? Who are you?

I don't know who you people are. It's brilliant. I love this story. And then the man who's possessed by evil beats up all the seven sons and they run away naked, which is just, just like the best story ever.

So the word, the word gets out, right? The word gets out about this. Word gets out. That this Jesus just can't be used.

This God is not a pushover. This God is not some tribal deity. That you can't mess around with this Christ. You can't fool around.

[9 : 53] You can't fool around with Christ. I remember when I was at university, I had friends who were in this punk band and they played at a university quad one day. And very secular university, very unfriendly to faith.

In fact, I remember vividly arriving there, young Christian, and there were these boards around the quad where you could write things on the boards. And a lot of it was just making fun of the Christian faith.

Anyway, so my mates get this gig. They play in the quad and they play this set as part of a lineup of other bands. And the last song they play, the chorus of the last song is them just screaming, yelling, Jesus Christ will not be mocked.

And it's just like full heart. I remember the soap. It was brilliant. They're just like, Jesus Christ will not be mocked. Jesus Christ. It was fantastic. And I tell you what, there was a lot of people there that day and the Lord was there.

And the Holy Spirit came and there was great conviction in that place. And Jesus Christ was not mocked at that moment. Everyone was very, very quiet. After this happened to the seven sons of Sceva, there was a great conviction came on the city in Ephesus.

[11 : 05] Verse 17 says this, And all this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and the Greeks, and fear, this is a good godly fear, fell upon them. And the name of Jesus Christ was extolled.

And what did that result in? Again, the story just, they flow on really nicely from one another. What did that result in? If you look at verse 19 there, Brilliant.

So it kind of sounds like, just like one of those book burning things. Like you hear about in the news. Which is not something we should sign up for.

So just a note on that. So, I mean, book burning happens at both ends of the political spectrum. Of course, poor old Harry Potter is getting it from both ends of the spectrum, I think. From the ultra-conservers, I remember reading about Harry Potter books being burned because they had sorcery.

And now Harry Potter books have been burnt because of J.K. Rowling's position on trans issues. What we have in Acts, I want to point out, is different to all of that stuff. What we have in Acts here is different.

[12 : 21] These folks are burning their own personal possessions. Scrolls of magic. And what it represented was a turning away from a way of living. An abandoning of superstition and replacing it with a trust in Jesus.

And you see the money mentioned here? That's millions and millions of dollars of things that were being burnt. And that combined with the publicness of it, rather than just kind of like them just, you know, casually kind of getting rid of their dodgy little scrolls there.

This is like a big public statement. So compared to modern book burning, it's not so much a protest against a person. It's like, and it's not like an organization is seizing books and burning them.

These are individuals turning away from superstition, making a public renunciation of what they have practiced in the past and turning to Jesus. The result again, verse 20.

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. The final scene here. Before Paul says he's going to go to Rome, there's pushback on the gospel progress again.

[13 : 37] This is 23 to 41. So this is the weird, this is his last really interesting story where they give a lot of space to it. See, the guy called Demetrius who made statues of Artemis, the goddess of fertility, because Ephesus was the home of this ancient god, right?

And this guy who made these little statues was just, I mean, he's making bank. He's making bank here. But people were becoming Christians, he says. So the whole fabric of the community was changing.

Like the whole, the city was changing. And it was bad for business for Demetrius and his mates. So he pulls together all his other statue making mates and he's quite clever about it.

Obviously, it is all about money. But he makes it sound like patriotism. Very clever. He talks to his mates and he goes, oh, look, you know, what about the good name of the temple and the divine majesty of Artemis?

And he gets them just really riled up. So they're just chanting, chanting. There's like, there's a legit riot. Paul, Paul's mates keep him away so he's not killed, which I think is prudent.

[14 : 52] Everything calms down when the town clerk comes out and basically says, look, look, guys. Come on, guys. Come on, guys. Come on, guys. Come on, guys. Look, Artemis is going to be okay.

These guys are okay. If you've got problems with Paul, there's like legitimate, you know, legal channels. Verse 36, he just says, just be calm. Don't do anything rash.

Because if you do do something rash, the Romans are going to come in and they're going to arrest all you rioters. And it worked. They all went home.

Story ends. What? Why include that? Why is that even there? Like no one became Christians or anything here.

It's just like drama. And this like administrator talks them down. From having a riot. Like why even include this story? Well, here's a crack at that answer.

[15 : 51] I think the point is this. I think there's irony here. The rioters are saying. Remember, the rioters are going. The Christians are ruining the social order of our city.

And the clerk says, actually. Actually. It's you guys. It's the idol makers that are a threat to the social order.

You're the ones that are causing drama here. You're the ones that are causing violence and chaos. It's their idolatry to Artemis. And money specifically.

That is at the root of all these issues here. And we see this being played out in any sort of major city in the world, right? When idols are challenged. When people base their life on something.

Money or sex or whatever it is. When those things are challenged. People can flip out. When the gospel comes.

[16 : 49] It will bring peace to some people. But it's also going to bring a lot of drama and chaos. Let me finish up here. So these stories are pictures of what happens when the gospel kind of just crashes into a city.

And if you think back over the stories. There's a pattern, isn't there? There's advance. And then there's pushback. There's great things. And then there's chaos.

So John's disciples come to faith. But then the next story. The synagogue folks are really stubborn. The Tyrannus school is a raging success. Lots of miracles.

But then the seven sons of Sceva just cause all these problems. And misunderstand the whole thing. People burn their scrolls. And then there's a riot. What's Paul trying to tell us?

I think one of the big points is this. Being in ministry. Being just a Christian. In a big secular city. And if you're public about that.

[17 : 52] It's like. It's messy, man. It's messy. If you lived in a small town. A small conservative town. Wouldn't be as messy. But you live in Vancouver.

So any advancement of the gospel. Any sharing of faith. There's going to be pushback. There's going to be drama. There's going to be fantastic stories too. But there's going to be drama. Now.

So. Given that truth. How do we stay on target? Like. How do we. How do we stay faithful. Knowing this sort of dynamic exists? Well. It would be tempting for me to stand up here and say. Work hard.

Be patient. Stay. Stay orthodox. In what you believe. But that is not. That's not. That's not enough. That's not enough. All those things are good. But it's not enough. 20 years after this little story was written.

The disciple. John. Wrote. A book. Called Revelation. It's the last book of the Bible. And. At the start of that book. In chapter 2. John writes a letter.

[18 : 53] To the church. In Ephesus. So this is the church. That Paul. Started. He started a church there. John. In Revelation. Writes a letter to them. And here's what he says.

Because I know your works. Your toil. Your patience. Your endurance. I can see how you cannot bear with those who are evil. But have tested those who call themselves apostles. And are not.

And found them to be false. I know you're enduring patiently. And bearing up for my namesake. And you haven't grown weary. But I have this against you. You have abandoned the love you had at first.

So John is saying. I see you're working really hard. You're good at recognizing idolatry. That's really good. You know good theology from bad theology. That's great. I see you're hardcore.

You're patiently enduring. But you've lost your first love. You've stopped loving Jesus. And you're just kind of doing the thing. You're just doing the Christian thing. But you've stopped loving Jesus.

[19 : 49] You've gone cold. Friends. In a big city like this. It's going to be messy. Life is going to be messy for Christians. So as you live your life in the spirit.

Walking with him. Remember folks. The key thing you've got to do. Is you've just got to keep loving Jesus. Keep loving Jesus. That's what will sustain you.

Because we have a messy walk in front of us. In this city. This great city. Amen.