

Gospel impact on all people

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[0 : 00] Some things in life just have a bigger impact on us. I've been a keen follower of the cricket for many years, and let me tell you, it has impacted many parts of my life.

Not just watching or going to games, but financial decisions. Will I buy merchandise? I teach my kids the love of the game.

And then there's the emotional rollercoaster of the highs of the wins and the joy, and then the depressing lows of the losses.

Some decisions just have bigger impacts on our life. Decisions to get married, decisions to have kids, decisions where we live, who will be our friends, what career, what should I study?

These things impact what we love, what we do with our time, and what we do with our money. But none of these compare to the impact on our lives of following Jesus.

[1 : 05] At least, nothing compares to what the impact of following Jesus should have on our lives. Following Jesus should impact the things that I love.

It should shape what I spend my money on. It should wake me up to think about how I think about the world. It should impact my ethics. Following Jesus should impact all of my life.

But I wonder if we can resist or fight God's influence. Today, we are continuing in the series, For All People.

Throughout this series, in the book of Acts, the second half of the book of Acts, we've seen how God is for all people. He is for the slave and the free, the male and the female. He's for the Jew and the Gentile.

God is for people all across the world, for all different types of people. And today, we see not just that God is for all people, but God is for all of their life.

[2 : 06] God wants to impact all of our lives. And the challenge for us today will be to see how God needs to continue to impact our lives.

How God will continue to shape our lives so that we are more like him every day. Let me pray as we look at Acts 19. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love for us, us who are far from you. And we ask that as we look at your word today, that you would help shape all of our lives. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen. Today, we're in Acts 19.

Please have your Bibles open. You can be using the St. Paul's app with the three points in there today. The three points today that we will... Firstly, we're going to see that the Gospel impacts our belief.

Before, we see that the Gospel impacts our control. And then finally, that the Gospel impacts our worship. Have the app open. Take some notes. Write them down. Have your Bibles open.

[3 : 13] And so we meet Paul in Ephesus. And Paul meets some disciples. But on closer inspection, it's not clear whose disciples they are.

They had been baptised in the baptism of John, but they haven't heard of the Holy Spirit. They haven't heard of Jesus. I think it's likely that these are people who have been discipled by Apollos. John had been baptising people in the expectation of Jesus' coming. But for some reason, these men haven't heard about him. They only have a partial faith.

They've only gotten part of the story. They've heard and loved the first part of the story from John, that there would be someone that would come, who would save them, who would deal with their sin.

But they didn't have the sequel. They didn't yet have the better part of the story. They hadn't heard about Jesus yet. And so Paul clarifies this good news.

[4 : 18] Have a look with me. Acts chapter 19, verse 4. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptised 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. Paul carefully and lovingly corrected these disciples.

He taught them about Jesus. The Holy Spirit has come upon them, and God has used Paul to correct their belief about God, so that they would know him better.

So that they would know Jesus, who reveals God. And God works through their lives. For all Christians, he gives the Holy Spirit, and we see the outworking of the Holy Spirit in their life.

This is a wonderful promise. A promise that, for Christians, God is with us. If you're not a Christian, if you're still unsure, this is a wonderful promise.

[5 : 22] That God will give you his Holy Spirit. That he promises to be with you every single day. For Christians today, we have the whole story.

We're not like these disciples. We know the whole story. We know of Jesus. But I wonder if we can also be like these disciples, where we need to continue to learn and get to know our God better. Imagine thinking that we could fully understand God now. What a puny, tiny God he'd have to be for me to get my head around him. God is massive.

He is way too amazing. His love is beyond us. His justice is always right. But he is a God who continues to reveal who he is.

We get to know him better as we continue to follow him. So just like these disciples had an opportunity to hear the gospel and got to know God fully, we continue to get to know God as we follow him and read his word.

[6 : 30] For me personally, I've gotten to know God more and more as I've gone through life and as I've read his word. As I've been sinned against and worked hard not to hold a grudge, I've learned how hard it is to forgive other people and how amazing my God is that he would forgive me.

As a father, I learned the hard way about my own lack of patience and how amazing God's patience is for us, his little children.

My own anger at lockdown rule breakers has reminded me of God's love for us, his enemies. The joy of relationship with God is that we get to know him more and more each day as we continue to hear from him and talk to him and journey through life following him.

So let me encourage you. Keep letting the gospel impact your belief about God because we never arrive fully knowing him until we arrive with him.

That's our first point this morning, fairly short point to start us off. God impacts our belief in God. We continue to get to know him. But it also impacts our desire to have control.

[7 : 52] That's our second point today. The gospel impacts our control. Paul stayed in Ephesus. He was there preaching for two years and he moved from the synagogue to a lecture hall.

And Luke expresses the impact of Paul's preaching by saying in verse 10 that all of the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia had heard the word of the Lord.

God worked through Paul to show that God is the one who is in control. Everybody is hearing about it and God does wonderful miracles through Paul to prove it.

Verse 11. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

This is a wonderful picture of both the gospel going out through Paul's preaching but also God's power working to show that God is really in control.

[8 : 55] And Luke sets up a contrast. You've got Paul on the one hand who is preaching, who knows God, who's doing these amazing miracles and another group of people who are trying to imitate him.

Luke tells us a story of the seven sons of Sceva who were exorcists. They were ghostbusters. In first century Asia, exorcism could be a lucrative business.

And the Jews in the ancient world were pretty famous for being able to cast out demons. And there were seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva and they were in the business of exorcism.

And they wanted to get in on this new technique of healing and doing miracles that Paul had. You know, it's like they've just been to a conference and they've heard everybody saying that a new way to do business was to use the name of Jesus.

And so, verse 13, they try out this new technique they've heard. They would say, in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.

[10:02] It's almost like knowing a friend of a friend and saying you actually know them. Except this grasping for power and control leaves them in trouble.

I love, I don't love too much about the evil spirits, but I really appreciate the response from this evil spirit to these men who are trying to have control. Have a look at verse 15. Jesus I know. And Paul I know about. But who are you? And then the man with the evil spirit beats them. And the seven sons of Sceva run out naked.

Their actions show how foolish it is to try and name check Jesus for money and power and control. Instead of submitting their lives to him, following him.

Many of us can do the same thing. Instead of following Jesus, instead of submitting to him, maybe we just name check him. You know, on the census the other week, we just ticked Christian.

[11:03] And instead of actually submitting to Jesus as the Lord over our lives, we try and hold on to power and control. These men are ultimately shamed in front of everybody else.

Stripped naked and humiliated. Let's not be shamed before God on the final day if we just give him lip service. If we just say we know him without actually ever getting to know Jesus.

This situation with the seven sons of Sceva enhances the reputation of Jesus. When the people in Ephesus hear about it, they are afraid of Jesus and hold him in high honour.

They realise, wow, there is something special about Jesus that we haven't seen from anyone else. And these people realise they can't hedge their bets.

They can't try and hold on to power and control and follow Jesus. They can't have it both ways. And so we get this wonderful picture of radical discipleship in verse 19.

[12:09] Have a look. Verse 19. A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas.

The result of the story of Jesus' power and control is that people leave their backup plans behind. 50,000 drachmas is a lot of money.

That's 50,000 days labour. This is an incredible amount of money. Many people at this time would have had magic scrolls.

It was a way to practice magic and sorcery and witchcraft. This was how you could have power and control in the first century. This was how you could have some power and control over death, disease and the devil.

And at this point in the church it's full of syncretism. Mixing of religions. Mixing Christianity and witchcraft. They hadn't yet fully converted to Christianity.

[13:19] They're not wholly trusting in Jesus. They're still holding on to their scrolls, to their magic spells, to their control. But when they realise how empty and meaningless these words on parchment are, they don't even sell them, they burn them.

It's a picture of true radical discipleship. People getting rid of their backup plan. Their attempts at control over death, disease and the devil and instead trusting fully in Jesus.

In verse 20, in this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. People chose radical discipleship. They gave up their backup plans, their control and trusted in Jesus.

And it spread the gospel. This week, I was reading about some Chinese war history. And in the later years of the Qing dynasty, there was a general called Xiang Yu.

He was second in command to a leader called Song Yi. And they and their armies had been repeatedly defeated by the Qing armies and been forced to retreat.

[14:34] And so they retreated to try and wait out their enemy. And eventually, their army was tired and lethargic, waiting for the enemy to be weakened.

But Xiang Yu, the second in command, realized waiting wasn't going to work. They had to do something radical. They were going to run out of food. The men were going to be weak.

So Xiang Yu, the second in command, took charge. He killed his commander, Song Yi. He took control of the armies and marched across the Yellow River to fight the enemy troops.

What is most amazing is that he ordered his troops to sink their ships, to break their cooking pots, and to only take three days worth of food with them.

His message was really clear. We will win or we will die trying. There is no going back. Although his troops were outnumbered 10 to 1, Xiang Yu's army crushed the Qing troops.

[15:37] Xiang Yu gained much fame for his efforts and there is a phrase in Chinese that came from it. The phrase is Polful Chen Zhou, which literally means break your pots, sink your ships.

There is no turning back. Polful Chen Zhou. That's what the seven sons of Sceva didn't have. They didn't have total commitment to Jesus.

Jesus was just a magic word to them. And this is what the people in the Ephesus church realise.

There can be no backup plan to Jesus.

Jesus is the only plan. Yet I wonder, is it still possible that we hold on to our backup plans? Our control, particularly over death, disease, and the devil.

In this season of COVID, are you holding on to other backup plans and not trusting God fully? Now, some of us might mix Christianity with superstition.

[16:44] Mixing Christianity with superstitious practices and modern-day witchcraft, like Ouija boards, tarot cards, astrology, horoscopes, fortune tellers, most of these are fake.

But when we trust in them to give us some control, to give us some idea of where we are to go in the future, we are making an idol to worship and we are not trusting in God fully.

Now, it might not be, for most of us, magic scrolls and sorcery or even modern-day witchcraft. But we have many other issues, many other ways of trying to hold on to control in the world around us. It might be trying to have a certain amount of money, a certain amount of money in my life and then I'll be okay, then I'll be safe. If I've got a certain amount of money, it doesn't matter if I get sick, I'll be able to live on that.

The Ephesian church tried to mix their Christianity with other things and they ended up burning them because they realized that those other things didn't compare at all to Jesus.

[17:55] Following God without a backup plan is what true discipleship looks like. Without another option. It's that phrase, powerful change to burn the other options to fully follow Jesus.

That is what the gospel calls us to do. It impacts all of our life and not just the church we tune into on Sunday, not just what we tick on the census.

Has God been speaking to you about a certain aspect of your life? Where is he putting his finger on you and saying don't trust this? Don't trust in your money.

Give your control over to me. Don't trust in your selfishness. Don't trust in that everything will be in fine. Don't trust that you've got this. Don't trust in your pride.

Trust in me. We've seen today that the gospel is not just something we tick on a census but it impacts all of our lives. from what we believe about God to what we try and control.

[19:01] Finally, today, our third point, we'll see God's impact on our worship and specifically money. The gospel has spread so much through Ephesus that Luke notes in verse 23 that there was a disturbance about the way.

There was a disturbance for Christians. There was a silversmith by the name of Demetrius and he was greatly angered at the progress of Christianity and the disruption that Christians brought to him. He was a silversmith and silver was what fueled the Gentile economy and it was heavily used in idol making. Demetrius made shrines and idols of Artemis also known as Aphrodite the goddess of love. Artemis had a temple in Ephesus and this was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This was the biggest building that existed at the time.

So you can imagine how this city would have had pride in this temple and in this God. It's like when people come to Sydney, back in those years when people could be tourists, people come to Sydney and it's like have you visited the Opera House?

[20:18] Have you seen the Harbour Bridge? People going to Ephesus, they would be asked, have you seen our great temple to Artemis? The gospel spreads in this city.

The gospel which says idols are nothing. These gods are not real. This gospel was critical of the pagan culture.

Demetrius would have been losing business, losing silver hand over fist and he would have felt the loss of prestige for himself and his city and for the God that he worshipped.

The gospel invades every aspect of life and it's impacting business for these tradies. It's impacting their economy. It's changing what people are spending their money on and their time on and the gospel confronts both the sinfulness in our hearts, the gospel also confronts the sin of the city and when it does it causes friction.

Have a look with me at verse 25 of chapter 19 and see how the gospel is impacting Demetrius. Demetrius is speaking here and he read 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 what a wonderful

report about the gospel going out.

[21 : 50] He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is 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.

Demetrius he's worried about his income he's worried about the large amount of people becoming Christians he's worried about society changing around him.

Much like for Christians today who see society changing around them and go it's not like how it was when I grew up. That's Demetrius. He's seeing people become Christians and he's going it's not how it should be.

It's not like the old days. He's worried about people in his trade are going to continue to make money to make gods. He's worried about the God he worships.

Demetrius hasn't seen the Christians come in and said you Christians are fine you stay over there I'll believe what I believe you believe what you believe and we can coexist. He hasn't even just said keep it away from me good for you I don't want to hear it.

[23 : 05] Demetrius sees the massive impact of Christianity in life. He sees its impact on the economy. It probably would have been easier for him if he could transition his work to making new gods to making whoever this new God is but the God that we worship can't be made by human hands.

Paul himself he's not afraid of this pagan worldview. Instead he confronts them and he has seen the impact of the gospel.

It's easy to dismiss Demetrius' concerns because we don't live like that. I don't know anybody who makes their living carving out idols of gods.

And yet for us we often worship more intangible things. Ideas, ambition, the amount of zeros in our bank account, maybe physical things like house or beauty.

We take something good from God that he has created and we worship it as the creator. Or we can run the risk of syncretism which is what the Ephesian church was doing when they were mixing their religion where we worship multiple gods.

[24 : 27] For an hour or so on a Sunday morning we'll worship the God of the Bible but Monday to Friday I'll worship the pride and glory of myself at work or at school. I'll worship the pride of a sporting accomplishment.

Then it gets to the weekend Friday afternoon and I'm going to worship pleasure. And maybe if I meet with others socially distanced down at the park I'm going to worship my kids and my family by telling them how great I am and how great my kids are.

Demetrius could see where the gospel was impacting all of life. He did not like it. Is it possible that we can become too content and the gospel isn't radically changing our lives anymore?

Is it possible that we've gotten inoculated against the gospel and it's not impacting us? When I was younger I didn't eat a whole lot of spicy food but now I really love the stuff.

I really like two in particular. one spicy sauce is called laogama. It's a Chinese one. And this one, sriracha, I've been putting a lot of this on food recently.

[25 : 40] I really like it. And I've gotten used to it. When we have dinner and it's got a bit of a spice, Alyssa and I, we're totally fine, don't even notice it.

And then we look over at the kids and they're sweating, they're drinking litres of water, they're just, I can't eat this. I've gotten so used to it, it doesn't affect me anymore.

I've gotten comfortable with it. Until, of course, I accidentally put too much in. I remember one time I was at a movie and it was all dark and I put a little bit of wasabi or what I thought was a little bit of wasabi on my sushi, but it was a huge amount and it cleared out everything.

A spicy sauce doesn't impact me until I accidentally put too much of it in. And then I notice it. The gospel is intrusive.

The gospel is something that should impact all of our lives. And yet we can get used to it. We can get comfortable with it and complacent. If you're still not sure about who Jesus is, maybe you've heard the news about Jesus dying on the cross, rising to life so that you too can have life.

[26 : 59] Maybe you've heard this message so many times you've just gotten used to it. Take a moment and consider how amazing it is that the God of the universe would die for you because he loves you.

Pour a bit extra sauce onto the reality that God himself would die for you so that you can be impacted by the gospel today. It might be the same for those following Jesus.

The gospel has impacted so many different parts of my life but I've gotten used to it just like eating spicy food. We can't keep doing the same things expecting different results.

Do you want God to impact your life? Do you want to have a closer walk with him? Do you need help handing over control to God?

I want to encourage you to do something different. Effectively pour a bit more chili sauce on it so that you see God's impact in your life.

[28 : 07] I want to challenge you. I want to challenge you this week. I want to challenge everybody watching. I want to challenge you for the next seven days to spend five minutes reading the Bible and five minutes praying.

Challenge for the next seven days five minutes reading the Bible, five minutes praying. Let me encourage you send me a message. If we're friends on Facebook you can send me a message. If we're not yet friends on Facebook send me an email.

James. Barnett at stpauls.org.au Let me know you're doing this challenge so that we can do this together. Let's read the Bible for five minutes and pray for five minutes each day for the next seven days.

Let's do something different so that we can see God's impact on our life. We are at the start of a season celebrating what God is doing across the world in our mission month.

life. But let's first ask God to change our hearts so that we can know him and trust him and worship him more and more.

[29 : 15] Let me pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for your love for us. Thank you that your gospel has gone out and it has come to us here far from Ephesus.

But Lord we thank you for how you are impacting our lives. Father we thank you that Jesus has died and been raised so that we can know you, that we can have relationship with you forever.

Heavenly Father we ask this week over the next seven days that you would work on our hearts, that we would know you, that we would trust you and we would worship you more and more each day.

Amen.