

PAUL'S DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY IN EPHESUS

Acts 19:1-41

Key Verses: 19:9c-10

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.

Acts 19 is about Paul's ministry in Ephesus. Unlike in other cities, his ministry was focused on discipleship training. He raised 12 disciples through daily intensive Bible studies in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. God blessed the ministry. The word of God spread to the entire province of Asia. Encouraged by the work, Paul widened his mission vision to the world. He said, "I must visit Rome also." May God help us to learn the importance of discipleship ministry and renew our world mission vision!

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME ON THEM (1-7)

Look at verse 1. *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples.* Paul began his third missionary journey by going through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples (18:23). He took the road through the interior, traveling more than 500 miles, mostly on foot, and finally arrived at Ephesus, a harbor city on the western coast of Asia Minor (today's Turkey). It was home to the great temple of Artemis, the fertility goddess. This temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, with 127 marble columns, each one 60-feet high and 4-feet wide in diameter. It took 120 years to complete. The festival of Artemis involved wild orgies. Around this temple were many tradesmen and prostitutes who made their living from the temple-related business.

Arriving in the city, what did Paul do? First, he found some disciples. Then he asked them a question that he never had asked before: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Was Paul a Pentecostal, like those who claim today that if you don't speak in tongues, you are not a believer? No. Paul did not belong to any denomination. So why did he ask the question? To find a clue, let us see how they responded. They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Paul asked further, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. From their dialogue, we can see that Paul detected something was not quite right about their faith. Sometimes we meet a person who claims to be a Christian but who does not really know Christ. They may go to church and do some religious things, but they have no personal relationship with Jesus. I think Paul had such concern for them. And their answers confirmed that he was right.

How did he help them? Look at verse 4. *Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."* It is important for us to see that Paul did not ask the questions to criticize them. He wanted to help them to know Jesus and believe in him as their personal Savior. These men called themselves disciples. They had repented their sins and were baptized with water. But they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to

Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5). These men were not yet born of the Spirit. In other words, they had no personal relationship with Jesus. They looked religious, but they did not really know Jesus personally. This was serious. Why? Because it was Jesus who died on the cross. It was Jesus who rose from the death to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Only Jesus can save us. No matter how religious a person may be, they cannot be a true Christian unless they have a personal relationship with Christ.

Look at verses 5-7. *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 about twelve men in all.* As they accepted Jesus in their hearts, God confirmed their faith by anointing them with the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. This reminds us of what happened at Pentecost. While 120 believers were praying together in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came upon them in power. They began to witness Jesus Christ boldly in foreign languages that they had never learned (Ac 2:1-11). The Holy Spirit is God himself. He is the third person in Trinity. Before going back to God the Father in heaven, Jesus promised to send us the Holy Spirit. He said, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn 14:26).

So, how can we receive the Holy Spirit? First of all, the Holy Spirit dwells in us from the very moment we accept Jesus into our life. The Holy Spirit never leaves us (Jn 14:15). But he is a gentle Spirit. We have to be sensitive to know his presence in us, and walk with him daily. In addition, God fills us with the Holy Spirit to equip us to do his work as he did at Pentecost. This filling of the Holy Spirit is not permanent like the indwelling of the Spirit. We have to ask God for this so that we can do his work. We should know that God really wants to give us the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminded us that human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children. Then he said, “How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Lk 11:13) Let us ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit!

II. PAUL’S DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING IN EPHEBUS (8-10)

Look at verse 8. *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.* Paul began his preaching in the synagogue, as was his custom. The twelve disciples he had baptized followed him. Paul spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. Why did he preach the kingdom of God? Actually, the main theme of the Bible is the kingdom of God. Jesus’ preaching was mainly about the kingdom of God. Paul did the same. The last verse of Acts (28:31) tells us that, in Rome, Paul proclaimed kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is the kingdom of God so important? Young people may not be interested in the kingdom of God as their focus is here and now. We should know that the kingdom of God is more than location. Yes, it is a real place and we will be there with Jesus one day. More importantly, the kingdom of God is about our identity. God sent Jesus to this world to be our King. When we accept Jesus as Lord and King, we become members of his eternal kingdom. He rules in our

lives with peace, joy and the love of God. We are not in heaven yet, but we have a citizenship in the kingdom of God. If you are an American citizen, you belong to America, no matter where you live in the world. When we are saved by the blood of Jesus, we are God's children with all the rights and responsibilities. That's why Paul preached the kingdom of God to his fellow Jews, hoping they would join him in heaven.

How did the Jews respond to his teaching of the kingdom of God? Verse 9 says that some of them became obstinate. They were stubborn. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. They did not want to turn from the world to the kingdom of God. They wanted to focus on only here and now. Not only that, they became abusive. So what did Paul do? He left them. He left the synagogue. But he had a plan. Let us read our key verses (9c-10) together: *"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."* Paul rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus. There he studied the Bible with the disciples, everyday for two years. From a businessman's point of view, this seems ineffective compared with mass evangelism. Why spend so much time to raise up only a few disciples? But the result was quite surprising.

Everyday Paul had intensive Bible study with the disciples who were eager to learn from him. He encouraged them to ask any questions. Beginning with the book of Genesis, they examined how the redemptive plan of God unfolded according to his purpose. They delved into the laws and the prophets. They were overjoyed when they found the messages about Jesus hidden in the Scriptures. They praised God for unlocking the mystery of the gospel through their Bible teacher and shepherd Paul. After each study, they would mediate on what they learned, writing down how the word of God applied to their own lives, just as we write our scripture-based testimonies.

Paul's discipleship ministry in the lecture hall of Tyrannus went on daily for two years. During that time, the disciples could really learn Paul's gospel message and spirit. This rigorous training laid the foundation for the gospel ministry in Ephesus and the surrounding region. We can imagine it was not easy for them to spend many hours each day in the same lecture hall for two years. It required personal sacrifice and self-denial. Paul also needed patient endurance to take care of them. Perhaps some of his coworkers questioned his mission strategy and advised him to travel to new cities as he had done before. But Paul was focused on the discipleship ministry. I believe that Paul remembered how Jesus was focused on discipleship ministry while on earth. Jesus could have helped millions of people with his miraculous healing ministry. But he called 12 ordinary men and spent three years with them to raise them to be men of faith.

Our ministry is also focused on personal 1:1 Bible study and discipleship training. It is slow and time-consuming to raise even one disciple. Why not focus on mass evangelism? But we remember how God spent 25 years to raise one man named Abraham to be a source of blessing. We pray that each of us focus on personal Bible study and discipleship so that our Bible students may do the same. Do you know how many disciples would be raised if each of us raise one disciple and each of the disciples raise one disciple, and so on?

What was the result of Paul's discipleship ministry in the lecture hall of Tyrannus? Verse 10 says: "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." The gospel spread by word of mouth. In the course of two years, all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

III. I MUST VISIT ROME ALSO (11-22)

As Paul was focused on the discipleship ministry, God used him in other ways to advance the gospel. Look at verses 11-12: *"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."* Something very interesting happened. Copycat exorcists sprang up in the city. Some Jews went around driving out evil spirits, invoking the name of the Lord Jesus. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out" (13-14). Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day, the evil spirit answered them, saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, 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 (15-16). 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 (17-18). Those who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas (that is, several million dollars). Verse 20 says, *"In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*

Seeing the work of God, Paul was sure that the church in Ephesus had been firmly established. Now it was time for him to move on. He decided to go to Jerusalem, and then to Rome. We know why he wanted to go to Jerusalem first. As he explains in Romans 15, he wanted to deliver a relief offering collected from the Gentile churches to the believers in Jerusalem who were suffering greatly because of a severe famine (Ro 15:24-27). He knew it would be a dangerous trip for him as we will see in Acts 20. But he really wanted the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to embrace the Gentile believers as their brothers and sisters in Christ. He considered this a very important mission.

Then why did he want to visit Rome? Look at verse 21. *After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."* At that time, Rome was the center of the world. All roads led to Rome. Paul wanted to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to Rome so that all peoples of the world might hear the good news of salvation. Paul was a servant of God. He deeply understood the broken heart of God toward the people who were perishing in their sins. Paul did not want to visit Rome as a tourist. It was not his vain ambition to go to a big city. It was his passion for the gospel of Jesus that made him say, "I must visit Rome also."

From a human point of view, his vision to conquer Rome with the gospel seemed preposterous, more like a daydream. In fact, he ended up going to Rome as a prisoner in chains. But God did not ignore his mission vision. God used him to begin a great Christian movement in Rome by studying the Bible with the prison guards there. One of our prayer topics has been to send missionaries to all nations of the world, including Islamic and Communist countries. It sounds like a daydream, given our situation as a small ministry with limited resources. But we believe God will not ignore this prayer because it is his will. May God help us to devote ourselves to 1:1 Bible study and discipleship ministry as we continue to pray for world campus mission!

IV. GOD PROTECTS HIS SERVANTS (23-41)

God's ministry was growing in Ephesus, along with Paul's passion for world mission. The devil did not sit back. He attacked God's work through a silversmith named Demetrius. The success of Paul's ministry hit hard on his bank account. The sales of his silver idols plummeted, as people turned away from idol worship. So he organized a huge protest by gathering his fellow craftsmen and others. Appealing to their emotions, he said, "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." When they heard this, the crowd became furious. They shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The whole city was in an uproar. They seized two traveling companions of Paul from Macedonia and rushed into the theater together. Most of the people were in confusion and did not even know why they were there. They still shouted in unison for about two hours.

The author Luke encourages us to see the "money motive" behind the chaotic events. People become wild when their pocketbook is hit. It was a dangerous situation for Paul. He could be seriously harmed by the unruly mob. But he was not frightened. He wanted to address the crowd. Concerned with his safety, many coworkers begged him not to do so. Paul was a true shepherd. He cared more about the believers than himself.

How did God intervene in this situation? He used the city clerk to calm down the crowd. He reminded them the facts. The Christians had not done anything bad. They did not rob their temples. Neither they blasphemed their goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen had a valid case, they should press charges in the courts rather than through a chaotic assembly. As it was, they were in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman officials. With these words, he dismissed the assembly. God protected Paul and the gospel ministry using the wise clerk and the Roman law.

In conclusion, let us remember three points from today's passage. First, God wants us to be a genuine believer who has personal relationship with him through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Second, God's ministry grows when we devote ourselves to personal Bible study and discipleship ministry. Third, God wants us to know his broken heart toward all sinners of the world who are dying in sin. May God help us to participate in world mission by sharing the good news of Jesus with one person at a time!