

Title: Made for more, don't settle for less
Text: Acts 19.8-10
Theme: The power and priority of the gospel
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: Don't let a good thing blind you to the best thing.

This morning I have some good news and some not so good news. The good news is that I think that our recent trip to India was fruitful and that our partnership with the Eda's and the College and Seminary is not only as good as we had hoped, but likely more strategic than we had imagined. We will explain more of this in the future as we give more detailed reports. The not so good news is more personal. Upon my return on Tuesday I've been in the ER twice, the most recent trip being yesterday and would be grateful for your prayers for some answers and grace.

Speaking of strategic churches, when you do a survey of the early church, it becomes clear from the book of Acts, the letter to the Ephesians, the 2 letters to Timothy who was helping the Ephesians and the book of Revelation, that Ephesus was a very strategic church that helped spread the gospel throughout that region of the world. Can you think of a better legacy for Cornerstone? The impact of this single church was felt for generations and I have no doubt that some of us in this room could trace our spiritual genealogy back to this congregation. I believe that one of the major factors in the founding, formation and life of this congregation is the fact that she faced so much opposition and that she had to sort out and work through a variety of beliefs that resulted in a people who embraced and enjoyed a robust theology. When you read the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, Paul is reminding them of some deep stuff. This is not Hallmark Christianity. Our text this morning helps us see why this was necessarily the case.

Read text:

Our text begins with Paul on his 3rd journey of church-planting and (now) church-strengthening and he arrives back in Ephesus. The text last week described how Paul initially addressed 12 guys that he met there who did not have a complete understanding of the gospel. Now, he enters the synagogue and for 3 months he boldly reasons and persuades about the kingdom of God. Once again, we are reminded that...

I. What you really believe, really matters. (8)

Paul had briefly stopped in Ephesus toward the end of his second church-planting missions trip. He spoke in the synagogue there and was initially received well. The Jews wanted him to stay, but he needed to get back to Antioch (home base) but he promised to return. He left Priscilla and Aquila there. Meanwhile, another Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus who was a powerful communicator, but had an incomplete understanding of the gospel. He knew a lot, and what he knew was good, but he did not know all that he needed to, so while he is in Ephesus for what appears to be a short time, Priscilla and Aquila disciple him so that he understands the rest of the story. But Apollos doesn't stay that long. So, as Johnny preached last week, when Paul gets back to Ephesus, here on his third journey of church-planting and now church-strengthening the synagogue in Ephesus appears to be a theological smorgasbord. There is a little bit of everything. There is the traditional Jewish teaching, there were these men who were influenced by John the

Baptist and had an incomplete understanding of Christ and the gospel and were described as knowing only the baptism of John, then there was the influence of Apollos and, of course Priscilla and Aquila who had a better grasp on things.

Here's a graph to explain what I think is going on here in Ephesus and here is why it was so critical for Paul to take so much time to reason with the people in the synagogue because...

A. It matters what you know. - reasoning about the kingdom of God

There were Jews in the synagogue who believed in the OT scriptures. That was good, but it was not sufficient. The OT pointed to something greater and someone greater. Part of that was seen in the life and ministry of John the Baptist. The 12 guys mentioned in verses 1-7 followed John but did not know much more beyond that.

Apollos at least knew the way of the Lord and he taught accurately the things about Jesus that he knew. That was good, but he just didn't know the rest of the story. Jesus was prophesied in the OT and he came. His miracles authenticated his message. He was the Christ. He was the Messiah and he came as he said in Mark 10.45, that "*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" And he did. He laid down his life to those who wanted to take it, because it was in his death, that he offered up a perfect sacrifice in our place. He paid the debt that he did not owe so that we could receive a forgiveness that we did not deserve. You need to know this. You need to know that Jesus died on the cross in order to pay for your sins. And you need to trust in Jesus because of what he accomplished for you. Apollos learned this from Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla and Aquila had already been with Paul and they knew the gospel and they knew the implications of it and there were probably some people who were in the synagogue who had come to faith in Christ because of Priscilla and Aquila and were being to realize what this New Covenant is all about. (Lord's Table)

So now, for 3 months, Paul is in the synagogue speaking boldly (finite verb) and he did this by reasoning, that is explaining, doing Q/A's so that all of the people would know what the OT, John the Baptist and the life of Christ all pointed to. He wanted all of them to understand the gospel and how it was foundational for God's plan for the world. The fact that the synagogue had some religious people in it who believed the OT, was good, but not sufficient. The fact that 12 guys were serious about spiritual matters and took John the Baptist seriously, was good but not sufficient. They needed to know the gospel.

It matters what you know because you cannot believe what you do not know. Do you know what the gospel is? Do you know that you were made by God and that as Creator, God is the Ultimate Authority and Law-giver? Do you know that you and I, have sinned against God by breaking his laws because in each of our hearts, we want to be God? We want life to go our way. We want to be worshipped. We want to be in charge. We are rebels. Do you know that in breaking God's law that we deserve death? We deserve the wrath of God. But no sinner can withstand that. But God is not only our Just and Righteous Creator, he is also Merciful. God sent his own Son, Jesus to come to this earth and live the life that we could not live and did not live. Jesus lived in perfect and happy submission to his Father. He did this in our place. He did this for us. He did this so

that he could offer in his death the all-sufficient payment of his infinitely perfect life in our place. This is the heart of the story. That is why God prepared the world for the life and death of his Son for hundreds and hundreds of years through the story of Israel. The OT Scriptures pointed forward to Christ and he has come. He lived. He died. He rose again because the offering up of his life was sufficient to pay for the sins of every single person who would ever believe in him. Do you know this?

But knowing the facts of the gospel is so that you will be convinced that it is true so that you will trust in Christ. Do you trust in Christ? This is why Paul not only explained, he persuaded. He rightfully wanted all of these people to actually trust in Christ.

B. It matters what you are convinced of. - *persuading* about the kingdom of God

One must be persuaded or convinced that this indeed is true. It matters what you understand because genuine faith comes from a genuine knowledge of and a personal trust in the facts of the gospel. The facts of the gospel lead to the implications of the gospel. Being persuaded that the gospel is true means that you will put your faith in Christ and not in what you do. Being persuaded about the gospel means that you will become part of the church. Attending church does not make you a believer, but being a believer will lead you to being part of a church. Here is what I am so desirous for you to see. A deficient view of the gospel will lead to a deficient view of the church and the Christian life. I believe that the fundamental reason why people simply do not treasure the church the way Jesus does is because they do not grasp the gospel as they should.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus is to plant a church. Therefore, his speaking in the synagogue is more than a series of evangelistic and apologetic lectures. He was boldly declaring the gospel so that people would come to faith in Christ and so that these people would then form a gospel community in Ephesus as an outpost or an embassy of the New Covenant people of God. When you come to faith in Jesus, life changes for you. And your willingness to accept that change (what I have been calling the implications of the gospel) will reveal over time whether or not you really understand and are convinced of the gospel. But, sadly many people are unwilling to believe the gospel because the implications of the gospel lead to changes they are unwilling to make. Like the crowds who witnessed the miracles of Christ and were fascinated with his teaching, but who in the end rejected him because they only wanted some of the benefits of the gospel, the same thing happens here in Ephesus.

II. Don't let a good thing become a bad thing. (9a)

During those 3 months, there was a growing hostility toward Paul and the gospel ministry that at that time was called "the Way." Back in 18.20 the people in the synagogue wanted Paul to stay because they were interested in what he was saying, but now, as the implications of the gospel became known, some of them started digging in their heels and refused to believe and started maligning Paul and the other believers and things were getting ugly. Luke uses three terms to help us grasp just how deep the hostility against the gospel

Do you see what was happening? Being a Jew is a wonderful privilege. The Jews had the Law, the history, the tabernacle, the land, the Temple, the line of David, the prophets, the holy days and the sacrificial system. This was all good because it was designed to prepare them to receive Christ. Christ fulfilled the law, it was no longer necessary. Christ fulfilled the sacrificial system, it was no longer necessary. The death of Christ ripped open the curtain that hid the Holy of Holies because God was now able to dwell in and amongst his people, the temple was no longer necessary.

Let's say that you want to go on a trip to Europe, so you get on-line and you start looking at videos of places in Europe you could visit. Every day you look advertisements for castles, river boat cruises, mountain excursions and train rides. You love what you see. But instead of actually going on the trip yourself, you spend all of your time just looking at the advertisements of the trip. In fact, when someone tries to persuade you to actually leave your home and go on a trip with them to Europe, you accuse of them of being your enemy because they are trying to take you away from looking at all of the videos that you have become so accustomed to. The videos are good, but they are no substitute for being there. The OT was good, but it is not a substitute for Christ. And now some of the Jews were not only refusing to let go of their wrong view of the OT, but they were now accusing Paul and those who believed as being the enemy and were now doing this before the assembly. What had been a good thing was now bad.

Some of you were raised in a religious home and tradition. Learning about the existence of God, his authority and the facts of Jesus were useful, but perhaps you were never taught the gospel. Your childhood religion was not sufficient, but if you trust in Christ and identify yourself in baptism as having come to faith in him, you will make it clear that you are moving on from what you were taught. It was not sufficient and in some ways, was not right. This is hard to do. You have family members who will not understand. Is Christ worthy of the conflict that you will encounter if you follow him?

Paul and the other believers withdrew from the synagogue. This was heart-breaking for Paul. In Romans 9.1-5 Paul talks about the "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart for his fellow Jews. He so desperately wants them to embrace Christ that he is willing to be cut off from Christ, if it would bring them to faith in Christ. But, what was the issue? What was it that created such a hostile response? When you read Ephesians 1-3, it is very obvious. The implications of the gospel are, we are called to be one people, Jew and Gentile. And this is where some of the Jews drew the line. They drew lines where Jesus put doors. It is not easy, nor automatic to be unified and whole with people who are different than us, and come from a variety of backgrounds, but when we do, then the power of the gospel to take us from sin and stick us together is really displayed. This was not good news to some of the Jews, and they were not going to change. That is tragic. But, this is not the end of the story. God is not done with Ephesus. In fact,

III. God loves to overrule bad things for good purposes. (9b-10)

Paul and the others now leave and Paul is welcomed in the hall of Tyrannus. This hall was a more public venue where it seems that Paul had a daily audience because it was customary for people to stop working during the hottest part of the day and either take naps or gather in halls

like this for conversations. So, Paul is now welcomed and has an opportunity to expand his audience from being primarily Jewish to being Jews and Gentiles.

Don't miss the contrast. Paul had 3 months in the synagogue and he has 2 years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The result is huge! We will look more closely at that next week, but the Lord leverages this so that the entire city hears about Christ. In the end, getting kicked out of the synagogue advances the gospel exponentially. The gospel not only gets a foothold in Ephesus but people from all of the major cities traveling through Ephesus were now exposed to the gospel and Paul's church-planting efforts now bear fruit in the entire region that was called Asia, which is a reference to modern day Turkey. These two years are probably the most fruitful and exciting years of ministry for Paul. Teammates like Aquila and Priscilla, Timothy, Epaphras, Philemon, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus, Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus partner with him to see the gospel go out throughout the region. In these two years churches were started in Colossae, Hierapolis, Laodicea as well as most likely, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia and perhaps even more. Back in Acts 16.6, Paul had planned to go into this region but the Spirit did not allow him too. Now, we see that God had a plan that probably dwarfed what Paul could have imagined. Now, the entire region is exposed to the gospel through the witness of these local churches being established in all of these cities. The rejection of the Jews resulted in the broadcasting of the gospel to the Gentiles, the advancement of the church and a preview of the Kingdom. God loves to overrule bad things for good purposes.

I wish that the story of the church was only good news, but Luke tells us the rest of the story of the early days in Ephesus as well as in the book of Acts. And this is our story: accepting Christ is the greatest thing that you can do, but it often results in being rejected by family and friends. The good news of Christ really is good news, but the implications of following Jesus mean that you do not rule your own life. It means that you really follow Christ. All of this really helps us understand how critical the church is. Some people lose their family and friends when they follow Christ. This is where we come in. We are to be that family because, in Christ, we are - forever.