

# Saved by Grace

Week Commencing 05 June 2023

Notes for next week's sermon on Acts 19 – Paul in Ephesus

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## DAY 1: Read Acts 19:1-10

Paul had briefly visited Ephesus in transit at the end of ch 18, and had promised (18:20), to return, 'if it is God's will'. The beginning of Chapter 19 finds Paul back in Ephesus, where he will stay for some time.

On arrival Paul finds some disciples who had not even heard there is a Holy Spirit, let alone received him.

They cannot mean they had never heard of the Spirit at all, for he is referred to many times in the Old Testament, and John the Baptist that the Messiah will baptise people with the Spirit. They must mean that, although they had heard of John's prophecy, they had not heard whether it had been fulfilled. They were ignorant of Pentecost. In answer to Paul's second question, they explained they had received John's baptism (only). That was a baptism of repentance. They did not know that the new age had been ushered in by Jesus, nor that those who believe in him and are baptised into him receive the distinctive blessing of the new age – the indwelling Holy Spirit. Once they understood all this, they put their trust in Jesus and were baptised into Christ. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. In other words, they experience a mini-Pentecost. Better, Pentecost caught up with them. Better still, they were caught up into it, as its promised blessings became theirs.

As we saw in Paul's pattern in Corinth in last week's chapter, he first heads for the synagogue. He spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively. As we've seen before, opposition arose from the Jews and as a result, once again, Paul finds somewhere else to meet so he can continue his teaching ministry. Such was the extraordinary nature of this ministry, that in two years, Luke can say "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Extraordinary!

I wonder whether there might be somewhere in your town, which may prove a better place to hold meetings where you can teach the Word of God and reach people who might never enter a church building?

## DAY 2: Read Acts 19:11-20

In Corinth, Christ encouraged Paul and endorsed his mission through a night vision. Do you recall? He urged him not to be afraid and that he was with him and had many people in that city. Here in Ephesus, the Lord assures Paul through signs and wonders. Extraordinary things happened – people being cured and healed and released from demons even through articles of clothing which had come in contact with Paul! Some commentators want to dismiss these events as legendary. However, please note, Luke describes these events, not merely as miracles, but definitively as demonstrations of divine power. He does not regard them as typical! Nor are they magic. He sets them apart from the magical practices which Ephesian believers were soon to renounce. Some Jews who tried their hand at driving out evil Spirits, but who obviously weren't Christians, suffered for their attempts (v16).

However, this incident, caused fear and the reputation associated with Jesus only increased. So much so, that many publicly rejected their sorcery and burnt their scrolls, the total value of which was around \$15M! These Ephesian letters were written charms, amulets and talismans, and the willingness of these young believers to throw them on a bonfire, instead of receiving their monetary value by selling them, only goes to show the genuineness of their conversion and the power of its impact. Their example led to more conversions for we read *in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

We may not see such dramatic impact of the life-transforming Gospel in central and western NSW at this moment. But I recall reading in my late teens, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, where in New York City, the gospel had such a powerful effect that notorious gangs were turning up a police stations and turning in their weapons! Please Lord – may we see dramatic and powerful conversions in this our time and place!

### **DAY 3: Read Acts 19:21-31**

Although we read in v21 that Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, he did not in fact set off immediately. Rather, he sends off two helpers to Macedonia to prepare for the trip, while he stayed in Asia – indeed in Ephesus itself – a little longer. Paul spells out the reason in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 but let me just share with you vv8-9: - *I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup>because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.* Note the reasons? A door for effective work AND opposition. Because of the vision in Ephesus, and the power of the signs and wonders assuring God was at work, the opposition held no fear for Paul. It only made him more determined to stay and share Jesus. Opposition was better than apathy!

Luke proceeds then to spell out one particular nasty instance of opposition. As we saw a few weeks back, the sticking point is money. Paul's truth telling threatened the silversmiths' business model. If people turn from false, man-made, human-crafted gods to the one true God, their business in creating gods, dries up! It must have been wild scene. The infuriated craftsmen went running into the street before they start shouting for Diana. The street was probably the Arcadian Way, the main thoroughfare of Ephesus, eleven metres wide, marble-paved and colonnaded, leading from the harbour to the theatre. The theatre was nearly 150 metres in diameter and could hold 25,000 people! They dragged Gaius and Aristarchus there and though Paul was keen to speak there, colleagues and friends talked him down.

Note that it is economics driving this riot! The truth (about God) would not be good for business. Therefore we must oppose it at any cost! In our world today, truth also doesn't matter when it comes to money. Greed drives the gambling industry and the truth about how gambling destroys families is irrelevant. Greed drives the gun lobby in the USA and the truth about the uniqueness and tragedy of gun violence in the USA counts for nothing. I wonder if greed in your life or mine, prevents us from seeing certain realities in our lives. Does greed impact on family relationships or cause us to twist the truth to protect sources of income? Greed is often an idol to which we Christians are blind – especially when it comes to ourselves!

### **DAY 4: Read Acts 19:32-41**

Absolute confusion reigns! Note Luke's telling comment (surely true of riots we see today): many people did not even know why they were there. A chant ensues for two hours! As one commentator puts it (Henchel quoted by Stott), "in the final analysis, the only thing heathenism can do against Paul is to shout itself hoarse".

In the end it is the city clerk who calms things down. He points out (1) that the whole world knows that Ephesus is the guardian of Artemis' temple and image and therefore the religion is not in danger. (2) The men arrested were not guilty of either sacrilege or blasphemy but are innocent. (3) If anyone has a private grievance, they should bring it to the authorities in the appropriate manner. And (4) the citizens of Ephesus were in danger of being charged with rioting for which there was no justification. Each of these arguments was clear and together they had an impact. When the town clerk dismissed the assembly, they went home in a very chastened mood.

Luke wanted to recount this incident to show that Rome had no case against Christianity in general or Paul in particular. In Corinth, the proconsul Gallio had refused even to hear the Jews' charge. In Ephesus, the town clerk implied that the opposition was purely emotional and that the Christians, being innocent, had nothing to fear from duly constituted legal processes. So there is freedom for the gospel to continue its glorious course!

As we close this week's notes, it is good to reflect on Paul's strategy. In both Corinth and Ephesus, once the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul chose a private house and then rented a lecture hall to continue his teaching. Yes, we will share the gospel in our churches today, but we must also go to the non-church people and share the gospel in many other places! Note also that Paul both reasoned and argued in an effort to persuade. As a result, Demetrius was able to complain that Paul had convinced large numbers of people (19:26). He was seeking to convince in order to convert. He did not proclaim his message in a 'take it or leave it' fashion! We need today, to be bold, persuasive and clear.

Finally we can note that in both Corinth and Ephesus, Paul stayed for extended periods – perhaps 3 years in Corinth and 3 in Ephesus. His teaching was comprehensive and thorough. Today's evangelism can often be 'fly in and fly out' or hit and miss. And it tends to be more inviting people to church (which is great!), but we also need to go and meet people where they are in the secular world! May the Lord help us to reflect on all this, so that we may more effectively and powerfully, *SHARE JESUS FOR LIFE.*