

The Glorious Ministry of the Word Acts 19:8-10

At the beginning of this chapter we find Paul back in Ephesus which begins one of his most productive places of ministry. We saw the response of these twelve disciples of John the Baptist last time we were together, and how they were brought to not only new life in Christ but into the body of Christ. Paul was never a person who looked back, but kept looking forward to things that needed to be done, areas that needed more gospel work, and he laboured tirelessly making known the truths of the gospel of Christ. And his ministry was always centred on the glorious truths of Christ that none other than Christ had made known to him. We have those same words in what we call the Scriptures — the Word of God.

And in this passage of Scripture we see none other than the work of God through his Word. Listen to what Isaiah says about God's Word and that word that is preached and taught in Isaiah 55:10-11 **"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."** Notice that God's word will not return empty of void but it will accomplish that which it was meant to accomplish. It is like the rain and the snow melting on the mountains that comes down in the valley to water the land to give fruitfulness and blessing to the people of God. But here is the thing — it will never return empty. God's word will always produce what it was meant to produce. God uses the preaching and teaching and proclaiming of his Word in a powerful way. There is no escaping his influence.

The question might be if God's word is this powerful, then why do so few respond to the message of Christ? There are two things we can say about that question. One is: if God's word produces what it was ordain to produce, then we have to know that sometimes the hardness of people's heart is what it was meant to produce. They are culpable and responsible but at the same time God is sovereign even over the wilful disobedience of individuals and uses that hardness for his glory. The second thing is if we think about the deadness of the human heart, and the hardness of the human disposition, and the love affair so many have with sin, it should amaze us at how many respond. Even ourselves. It should be astonishing to think that we are here participating in worship to Christ, seeking to learn of him, and even zealous in wanting to know him. Just like the rain and snow descended from the mountains and did not return void but produced life in the valley, so God's Word — his Gospel of His Son produced life in us, and continues to produce that life and fruitfulness in our lives.

Now therefore, all of us should be learners and hearers of gospel truth, constantly seeking to feed and know our Lord more and more through his Word. And all of us should seek to be witnesses and testimonies of Christ. We should seek to not only to live for him but speak of him. It should be natural to speak of him to our children, spouse, friends, believers and unbelievers alike. The gospel in one way or another should be coming from our mouths. And this passage is so instructional for us

because we see both sides or results of the speaking of the truths of Scripture. We see the hard-heartedness and reject of the Scriptures. And that is often what gets our attention. It might even seem like the gospel is losing in our Christ rejecting world. There are so many that mock, scorn, ridicule the message. But here is the glory. God has chosen to use the preaching of the gospel for his purposes. We live and function and speak for him, but our confidence is not primarily in ourselves but in our sovereign God who uses his Word as he ordains. And this is the glory — God uses the preaching and testifying of Christ in ways that are past finding out. More is done through his people making known Christ than what we will ever see in our lifetime.

And this morning, are you discouraged that people are not responding to the message of Christ — maybe loved ones, friends, family members, or whoever? Are frustrated at your lack of fruitfulness in what is being accomplished even though you are trying to be a faithful witness of Christ? I want us to look at this passage and truly see the glorious work of Christ through the proclaiming of His truth. Only his Word spoken in love can change the heart. Don't settle for imitations and alternatives. May God give us light to keep on keeping on as his lights in this dark world and let us not grow weary of speaking his word. I want us to see two things.

1. We need to know there will be opposition to making known Christ. Vv. 8-9.

The gospel message to sinners has so much hope and light. It can take those in the throws of sin and nature's night and truly transform them. Now our problem is we can see the glory and good and potential in a person's life, and how God is worthy of being glorified through that person's life. But there is so much hatred of the Gospel and of the Jesus we love. And we shouldn't be surprised. We live in a world that is terribly broken. And that brokenness is not just around us but in us. There is evidence every day of our lives. There is never a day that goes by where the suffering of this world doesn't impact you. Why should we think it is so different in our living for Christ and seeking to make him known? Why do we think our gospel testimony should not suffer under the fall? We know these truths that we live in a fallen world among fallen people that have a natural hatred and aversion to Jesus Christ, yet in our frustration with family members, and colleagues, and friends I wonder if we truly believe that?

When you look at the ministry of Paul, he was highly successful, but still more people rejected his gospel than accepted it. Jesus Christ the greatest preacher only had a hundred and twenty in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. And yet in verse 8 Paul had such a passion making known none other than Jesus Christ even the face of such rejection. And the reason why is that Paul had such a love and trust in the sovereign work of his Saviour. He knew that all he was — was a messenger of a glorious message but God could use that living Word in the way that he had chosen. His confidence was not in self but God, but that did not deter him but gave him a greater boldness and zeal to make known Christ. So look at verse 8 again, **“And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.”** As Paul came back to Ephesus, the opportunity to go in synagogue as a trained rabbi to preach and teacher was still open to him.

And let me note three things about the ministry of Paul in the synagogue. One is that he spoke boldly. I love his zeal, don't you, and find it so challenging. There was no

fishing around to see what kind of response there might be, but a bold and open speaking of the truths of Christ. There is an openness even though the Word of God will offend many, and not just unbelievers but also believers. And to know this and preach boldly and enthusiastically is a gift of God's grace to the preacher. It is not being haughty or arrogant but there is an authority that this is not just my opinion but this is the Word of God. Paul would even write later to this church to pray for him in Ephesians 6:19, **"and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel."** We should be thankful when we hear the Word preached boldly. This is not natural. This is the work of God in the preachers heart to give the conviction that this is God's Word. And also, how often are we praying to God to give us boldness and love to speak the truths of Christ?

The second thing here is we see he also spoke **"reasoning and persuading."** I love this. "Reasoning" has the meaning of dialogue or even debating behind it. But the meaning here is that our faith is a reasonable faith. We many times use the word "belief" in a very weak or uncertain way. We believe. We take a blind leap in the dark and leave our minds behind. Some would even say that our minds are enemies. But we have a reasonable faith. The evidence that we are sinners is so overwhelming. It is easy for every person to see they do wrong and cannot help but do wrong. It is easy to see there should be a punishment for wilful wrongdoing. Christ took that sin and wrong on himself. And the evidence for his resurrection is overwhelming. Folks, we have a reasonable faith that no other philosophy could ever raise its head against because in one way or another they are all unreasonable against the reasonableness of the Scriptures. And therefore, the whole goal is not just to have a religious talk but to persuade others. We want them to see the truths of Christ.

Thirdly, we see the subject that really is a major subject of Paul's preaching and that is **"the kingdom of God."** There is a kingdom that is promised to Israel. Where their king will reign and rule, and God will call people from every other tribe and kindred. The emphasis of this preaching is that Jesus is the King of that kingdom. He has purchased the right for sinners to come into that kingdom through his sacrificial death and his resurrection. He will come back and establish his rule. So the emphasis would be the need to trust in the king for full and free salvation in Christ.

Now that's a great ministry! What an impassioned message full of truth, light, and hope because the central person is Christ. You think people in a hopeless world would be running to hear this message. But look at the response in verse 9, **"But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus."** This message of hope and reason and truth was utterly rejection and even opposed. Notice through the hearing of the gospel over and over, they became something. They became stubborn. The word that is used here can also translated as hardened. Through the three months of hearing Paul preach and teach and dialogue with various individuals some became hardened against that very message of light and grace and freedom. Does this describe some of the people we know who have heard over and over? Think of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, **"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the**

other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?" The preaching of Christ to his people is the aroma of Christ — to some there is nothing more beautiful to take in. It gives life, vitality, and freshness. To others it is death to death. They just come to resent that message and that Jesus even more.

And that leads to **"continued in unbelief."** In others words, there is a process of knowing the will of God and refusing to bow to his truth and grace, which is high handed sin and disobedience to him. But the sin of rejection of Christ is never stagnant but continues to grow. It continues in a direction. And you can see it right here in our passage. Luke records, **"speaking evil of the Way before the congregation."** The Way was what early believers were called and what the church was called. And they were called this by their detractors. This is what made their rejection that much more sinful. Those who had tasted the grace of Christ followed him, loved him. There was a "way" they walked and live as they sought to follow Christ, and there was an attitude of joy and gratitude that characterized them. Listen to Psalm 16:11, **"You make known to me the path of life; (so because of making known the path and following that path — this is the outcome) in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."**

It is amazing because that further validation of the power of the message is what causes others to hate Christianity even more. Let me ask you this question: can you recognize that world of unbelief that Paul encountered? We think so often that the rejection and hatred of Christ is something unique to our day and age, or the hardness of the heart of those in our lives is different. But it isn't. For all those who love Christ and seek to make much of him will suffer opposition. All who desire to live godly will be persecuted in some way and somehow. And here is what Paul knew — if this was the end of the story, that people only harden their hearts, then God is still was worthy of being praise and glorified and testified about. God had given him a calling just like everyone of us, and therefore he was zealous to make known Christ regardless of the results. But here is the thing, that was not the end of the story.

2. We need to know God is still working through his Word. Vv. 9-10.

Now let me ask you, do you recognize this world that we have just seen in the text? Do you recognize the bounty of God's blessing that has been poured out? It is so easy to see the opposition of the previous verses and not see the bounty of Paul's ministry through Asia and in our world today. We met with Shane and Adam, from One Mile Mission, as deacons and pastors of Emmanuel before they talked with the congregation, and one of the things that startled us was how unevangelized the whole area of Newfoundland. One percent of the population of St. Johns' would consider themselves evangelical, and many of them would be health and wealth proponents which is a false gospel. But consider all the churches in Essex county alone that this morning are preaching Jesus Christ? They are making known Christ. They have truly trusted in him as Lord and Saviour. And then think of our province and how many good and solid churches exist. Don't get discouraged. It should overwhelm us that Jesus is still building his church, and even though we are in the minority, God is still doing more than we can ever comprehend through his Word being preached.

Look at the last part of verse 9, and the response of Paul to this escalating opposition in the synagogue among the unbelieving Jews, **“he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.”** Notice Paul withdrew from them. It might be that the synagogues leaders forbade him to speak any longer. It could be that he was heckled and interrupted every time he preached and taught. But the opposition made it impossible to carry on the gospel mandate. So he withdrew from the synagogue. And we mentioned this in the past, so often those reject think the gospel will be there for us in the future. But if you stubbornly reject his grace and harden your heart, he is under no obligation to make it available to you in the future. Listen to the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:7, **“again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’”** Today is the day to come to him. Don’t be like the crowd in the synagogue.

But in the midst of opposition I want us to see that little phrase that is easy to miss, **“and took the disciples with him.”** Who were these disciples? Certainly Priscilla and Aquila, and also the twelve disciples of John who came to Christ, but also others who heard and responded. And here is the thing we often miss in the face of opposition and suffering — God is truly working. His Word is having such a positive effect on many around. Individuals are still coming to faith, others are still persevering and growing to love Christ. Through all that opposition Christ was still calling sinners to himself. God works through his Word in ways that we might not even see, but know he is doing more than we ask or think.

And here is the other thing, because longevity in ministry is such a great and rare thing. So often we give up in the face of strife and opposition. You might just leave the church or go to another church or whatever. Many pastors will come to the conclusion because of opposition that God must be calling them some other place. But this is the address we live in. This is the fallen world and we can’t escape it. And because we often run we miss the great and glorious things that God has chosen to accomplish. Paul here goes and sets up shop at the hall of Tyrannus. This might be the name of a philosopher. Paul would have probably rented this hall when it was not being used. Worked at tent making during the day and then reasoned that Christ is Lord and Saviour in the evening. Paul didn’t leave the city but persevered in making known Christ, and discipling those who came.

And look at the outcome in verse 10, **“This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”** He stayed a total of three years in Ephesus, one of the longest stays of any place. You can think of the time he poured into making known Christ and training believers and church planters. All those truths that were shared by Paul in his epistles were instructed into the people here. The church was being built and Paul no doubt still had opposition but was relatively unhindered in making know Christ.

What a blessing, because the impact of this ministry was not just in the city of Ephesus. But the name of Jesus continued to impact the whole region of Asia through what was going on Ephesus. Paul had ministered in cities located in huge geographical areas like Cilicia and Syria and Galatia and Achaia and Macedonia, but nothing like this is said of those areas. The whole population was hearing that message. Paul would

write to the Corinthians and say in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, **“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”** It was probably during this time that the churches of Colossae and Hierapolis, and maybe even the seven churches of Asia Minor that we read about in Revelation 2-3 were founded either by Paul or individuals going out from this church. “All the residents” does not mean everyone came to Christ but it does mean that everyone was hearing the message, and God’s word was bringing many to Christ. The glorious gospel was changing lives!

And here is the thing, many of you are young in the faith and many of you are older. Some of you were here when I got here. I took a number of the men individually out for coffee or a meal when I first arrived. And there was two characteristics about all those meeting. One is there was discouragement. The church had gone through a trying time. The other was even though others left they were committed to staying and seeking to glorify Christ. And here we are decades later and they have had the glory of seeing the bounty of God through the ministry of God’s people sharing the word, preaching and teaching. It again, has not always been easy but they have seen individuals come to Christ. Many of you trace your spiritual lineage through Christ in this church. The Word of Christ has touch so many. But here is the thing, you would have never been partnered with that and seen the glory of Christ through the word preached and taught if you would have packed your bags and left.

Here is what we learn. There is pain and sorrow and suffering in our pilgrim path. It is not a mistake but part and parcel of the plan of God. The other thing we learn is that God, our Lord Jesus, is truly doing more than we can ask or think. God uses his people who are committed and truly love him and truly are following for the long haul through thick and thin. He will use the ministry of the word in ways beyond our ability to ever comprehend. Keep enduring. Keep your heart with all diligence. Don’t grow weary. Keep speaking and preaching and living for him. His Word will not come back void. It will produce what he intended, and more than we ever thought!