

In our passage last time we learned about some spiritual aspects of Paul's ministry during his two and a half year stay in Ephesus. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Paul healed the sick and cast out demons. God's extended His healing power by allowing cloths that touched Paul's skin to become agents of healing.

When some Jewish thought they ride Paul's coattails in trying to cast out demons by invoking the names of Jesus and Paul, they were overpowered by a demon, and had to flee naked, and bleeding. This event became known throughout the region and the fear associated with this demonic episode led people to trust in Jesus, and accept the gospel, which Paul preached. Those who practiced the magic arts burned their secret books, and many of the people turned to faith in Jesus Christ.

In tonight's passage we learn of an event that became the effective end of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, but Paul had already determined in his heart that it was time to move on. We will also see how that God sometimes uses extreme opposition or hardship in order to advance his purposes. Let's see this together as we read, Acts 19:21-41.

Before the riots occurred in Ephesus, Paul already resolved in his heart that he must go to Rome. This statement marks the end of Paul's third missionary journey. As we will read, he traveled back to Jerusalem, and then to Rome, even though through unforeseen circumstances and opposition. This is a transitional statement that sets the tone for the rest of the book of Acts, with a central theme of extending Paul's ministry of the gospel to Rome.

This verse reminds us that we must be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. God reveals Himself and His will through His word, and the ministry of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit give direction to our lives, and when we obediently follow the Spirit, we walk in the center of God's will. Paul did not know how he would get to Rome, nor did he realize the hardship he had to endure, but God gave him the direction he needed.

When the Lord told me to go to New Orleans to prepare yourself, at the age of 41, I had no idea about where I would be today. I did not foresee the challenges, the hardships, or the victories. All I knew was that God's call set the direction of my life. I wanted to walk in the center of God's will, but I had to trust Him with the details of how he would work out the circumstances.

God gave Paul the vision to go to Rome, but he had to finish his work in Asia first. Ephesus was his home base, but Paul traveled and ministered throughout the region. He sent Timothy, who we last saw in Corinth, and a disciple named Erastus, ahead of him to prepare the churches to receive Paul when come. We learn from Paul's letters to these churches that a part of the reason for his visits was to take up a collection from the gentile churches to bring aid to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

While Paul was out of town, visiting the other churches in the region, opposition arose against him in Ephesus. By this time in our study of Acts, we are used to seeing opposition from the Jews, but here, as was the case only in Philippi, we see the opposition coming from gentiles. In both cities, the opposition was over the loss of money. In Philippi, Paul cast a demon out of a woman that caused her owners to loose a source of income. Here the opposition came because the people of Ephesus turned in mass to faith in Jesus Christ, so that they no longer purchased idols for worship. The craftsmen who produced these idols lost a lot of their income, and they meant to do something about it.

Money is not evil, but the bible says that the love of money is the root of all evil. When you think about the biblical stands that we take as Christians, we can often follow a money trail behind the opposition we have to face. There is big money behind the abortion industry. Liquor sales would not be an issue if people were not turning a big profit from its sale. There is a financial motivation behind every godless law or directive that comes from government. If Christian values posed no threat to the flow of money, and the power associated with it, we would face much less opposition because of our beliefs.

If you live in the city of Milton, you will find a referendum on November's ballot to legalize Sunday sales of alcohol. Certain members of the city council are counting on Christians not to vote, so that they can push this through without opposition. However the people vote in this election, the results are not binding upon the council. They have already determined that alcohol will not be sold on Sundays, but some want to force their agenda to make money on Sundays from the sale of liquor, and be able to say, it's not me, it's the people's will. There is nothing good that will come from Sunday liquor sales, but its big money for certain people. I encourage everyone who lives within the city limits to vote no on this item.

All of the legal residents of Florida, and I fear many illegal residents as well, will once again find a proposed constitutional amendment to allow the use of medical marijuana. While this has already been defeated on previous ballot, we must deal with it again, and we will be faced with it every time there is a ballot, until those pushing this agenda get their way, same as it was with the sale of liquor in Santa Rosa County. We already see that in other states this was a ploy to open the door to legal recreational use of marijuana. There is big money in the sale of marijuana. When you oppose this practice by casting a no vote, those who already use marijuana as a recreational drug will criticize you as well as those who stand to make money if it were to pass. The use of mind-altering drugs is detrimental to the individual as well as to our culture. I will take my stand by voting no on this issue.

In Ephesus, the opposition to Christianity came because religion was big business. Apparently a meteorite fell from the sky that had a particular shape, similar to a woman's body. This gave birth to the worship of what the Ephesians believed to be the goddess of fertility. The Ephesians built a temple of worship to honor their goddess. Soon craftsmen began to fashion idols in her image, and made a lot of money doing so. The people believed that by worshipping Artemis, they would have abundant crops and success in business. It was all about the money.

When enlightened by the gospel, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, believers no longer placed any importance on false gods and idol worship. When the church grew in sufficient numbers, the income produced by idol worship began to suffer. Those who stood to lose the most, stirred up the people to riot against Paul and the gospel he proclaimed.

Today, if we take a stand upon the word of God, we stand opposed to the ways of the world. This brings about a natural and unavoidable conflict, and it is our responsibility before God to shine the light of truth into the darkness of what goes on in the world. If we do not take biblical stands, the darkness will overcome us, but even a little light exposes what lies in the darkness.

If the polls are any indication, Hillary Clinton will be the next president of the United States. If you are ok with that, then there is no need for you to vote. Stay at home, and trust that she will make our country, and the world, a better place. In my eyes, Donald Trump is not the best candidate for president either, so we have to look at the issues, and what our country might look like under the leadership of our next president. We have to look at our core values and

define in our minds what is right and what is wrong, what is best, and what is needed, then make a choice and stand by that choice.

Some believe that the whole election process is rigged. Certainly that is something the Trump camp has said often in recent days. There is plenty of evidence of that being true, and there is little that we can do about it, except to cast our vote. If we do not vote, we have no voice, and no right to complain if our situation grows worse.

The opponents to the gospel in Ephesus stirred up the crowd until they were ready to riot. The bible says that most of them didn't even know why they were there. We see this irrational mob mentality in the news headlines today. If a cop has to shoot a black man in the line of duty, we expect a riot to ensue. People from outside the community come and stir up the citizens. There is no trust in the judicial system, nor any desire to give the officer the benefit of the doubt. There is no respect for the law, so the only course of action is total lawlessness. It used to be that riots occurred when a white police officer shot a black criminal, but now, even if the officer was black, there is a riot because of a total lack of respect for authority and a total rejection of the laws of society.

Paul was passionate about the gospel, and he wanted to insert himself into the situation. He wanted to speak to the crowd, and defend the gospel. Others, however, saw the dangers this situation posed to Paul. They encourage him to stay out of it, and kept him from becoming a casualty among the mob.

This calls for wisdom and discernment. If God is to use us, we have to be willing to take our stand, no matter what. On the other hand, we must not fall to the devil's schemes to destroy us. There are times when it is God's will that we steer clear of the danger, and there are times when He desires for us to stand in the face of danger. We are able to know what to do by the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and through the council of Holy Spirit filled people.

As we consider the events on that day in Ephesus, I don't believe that there would have been a better outcome if Paul had addressed the crowd. As it was, God used the town clerk to reason with the people, and defuse the situation. If Paul had appeared before the crowd, he probably would have inflamed their anger, and made things worse.

God had His hand on Paul, and protected him, because the Lord had other plans for Paul that included his eventual ministry in Rome. We find encouragement in this principle because all of us face uncertainty about what to do, and when to do it, from time to time. If our hearts are pure, if our only desire is to walk in the center of His will, if we have learned the discipline of trusting the leadership of the Holy Spirit, God goes before us. He protects us, and provides for us. So long as we remain obedient, and moldable in His hands, we can trust Him with whatever circumstances, or opposition we might have to face. If we take our stand, we will be protected until God completes His will for our lives. Then, when we have finished the course God sets before us, we can hear the Lord say, well done my good and faithful servant, come and enjoy your eternal rest and rewards. This will be the case regardless of who becomes the next president.

The life of a Christian, is a life of opposition from the Lord, but the spiritual gifts that come with a close relationship with Jesus Christ, outweighs anything the world can throw at us. We enjoy love, joy, peace, happiness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, no matter what our circumstances. The Lord gives us new meaning and purpose. He remains with us, and faithful to us, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we have the assurance of the forgiveness of our sin, and eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's gospel is the gospel we proclaim today. We are all sinners by nature and by choice. Our sin separates us from God, but God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Jesus took our sins in His flesh. He sacrificed Himself so that through faith in Him we might be forgiven and have eternal life.

The bible says that if we confess and repent of our sins, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. If we receive Jesus into our hearts as Savior and Lord, He seals us with His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us God's direction for our lives, and is a deposit and a guarantee of eternal life. If there are any here who have not found salvation through faith in Jesus, tonight can be your night. If the Holy Spirit is reaching out to you, calling you to salvation, surrender your life to Jesus and you will be saved. Then, come and speak with one of the pastors so that we can answer your questions and help you to begin your walk with the Lord.