

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

SEPT 2025 | ACTS 19

*So the word of
the Lord grew
mightily and
prevailed.*

Acts 19:20

WHEN THE WORD PREVAILS

In Luke's gospel account, he showed what the kingdom of God looked like in the incarnate body of Christ. As we follow the narrative of Luke in the book of Acts, we see the kingdom of God being expressed through the corporate body of Christ. After Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell Christ's believers. This entity, called the Church, began to spread through the world, pushing back the darkness that had enveloped creation after the sin of Adam and Eve. We are able to trace the movement of light from Jerusalem to Samaria, Ethiopia to Antioch, and then through Paul and his workers to the known world. The vast majority of the book of Acts is descriptive rather than prescriptive. We are able to observe

what God did in various situations and in different cultures to find encouragement and enablement in our reading.

One such occasion is described in Acts Chapter 19 when Paul went to Ephesus. He had already been in Corinth, and in these two cities there were vast amounts of spiritual darkness. The cultures were soaked with superstitions, idolatry, perversion, corruption, and fear. We can only imagine the intimidation that he faced with hundreds of thousands of people steeped in sorcery, magic, demonism, deception, and every kind of religion and ideology possible. God appeared to Paul in a vision when he was at Corinth to strengthen him to withstand the darkness:

One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people.

(Acts 18:9-10, NRSV)

Once in Ephesus, Paul's work was notably miraculous. As he simply spoke out the word of the gospel of Jesus, healings, deliverances, and other miraculous things happened. It was as if God was saying, "You simply speak when the time comes, and watch what I do." There was such an atmosphere of light that people sought to have a scarf or handkerchief that had touched Paul so they could partake of the life he exuded:

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.

(Acts 19:11-12, NRSV)

There was a Jewish clan there who were claiming to be of the lineage of High Priests. They saw the power released when Paul used the name of Jesus and decided they could use that name like they were assuming the role of the priesthood. Their mistaken assumption got them into

trouble. Evidently they had already begun a ministry of exorcism using the incantations and rituals common to Jewish exorcists. They saw just how real evil is when the demonic spirit spoke to them: "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15, NRSV). The man who had the spirit jumped on them and beat them up and stripped their clothes off. This display of power was noticed abroad, and the respect for the name of Jesus was elevated. Also some of those who heard the word of the gospel realized they were wrong in their magic, sorcery, and idolatry, and illustrated the power of transformation as they brought their books and burned them. Another miracle! The calculated cost of the books was 50,000 silver pieces, and each piece was a day's wage. This indicates major cultural and societal change taking place that was affecting economics as well as religion, psychology, and science.

As we simply observe the workings of the Spirit in partnership with Paul and his team, we are confronted with several obvious truths:

First, we see that because of who we are as beacons of light, our work matters.

God's purpose is for His people to be the light of life in the world of darkness. Paul had seen the light in Stephen's face and then on the road to Damascus. He had received that light into his own being. He became one of the beacons of that life,

and it saturated his being, flavored his attitude, and seasoned his speech so that every thing he did had eternal value. He was pushing back darkness just by being in Ephesus. The people could see it. They wanted even pieces of clothing he had touched. It wasn't the big miracles he did. In fact, he didn't do much of that. He simply spoke and refused to be silent and God did the works. God was with him, no one could touch him apart from God's permission, and God affirmed his sermons with heaven's signs.

Second, we do our work in the midst of war. But we are not just doing defensive war, trying to survive. We are the ones with the weapons that destroy every lofty ideology and conclusion that humans have entertained. Most think that it was humans that came up with the destructive ideologies that have murdered millions and destroyed nations, but those thoughts came from Hell. Demons planted those ideas in human minds, and they became systems of thought that ruled in death and destruction. We are not gullible enough to believe that we are struggling with mere ideas of the mind. We know that we are facing the spirits that promote and protect the malevolent ideologies of history and the present. But, we also know that we have weapons that can bring every thought captive to Jesus - bringing every idea into submission to the gospel. That is the only way societies change and the way the glory of God will cover all

things as the waters cover the sea. We work with the Holy Spirit to enforce the verdict of Calvary. It was there that the Serpent's head was crushed, the law's curse was canceled, sin's penalty was paid, and death was forever defeated. We proclaim the good news that now there is no condemnation to those in Christ. There is no indictment pending nor probation in force for God's children. Sins are forgiven, shame is abolished, and fear is exposed as nothing more than the threat of a bully. We are marching through a creation that has been in bondage since Adam's sin, but is awaiting the full adoption of the sons of God in full confidence that everything sin touched, the blood has cleansed.

Third, we live by the New Testament metric of success in vocation.

So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

(Acts 19:20, NRSV)

That is God's chosen way to push back the darkness that has captured the masses and affected all of creation. Only as the truth revealed in Jesus displaces the deceptions of the evil one will freedom come to the world. Darkness is deception and only truth can displace it. Truth is the word of God as defined by Jesus who is the ultimate Word of God. If we hope to enjoy the victory of Christ's resurrection, we must put all our hope in the power of the gospel of the kingdom of God as defined

in the New Testament. Unless the word of the Lord is growing and prevailing, the church is not succeeding. It doesn't matter how many attend the meetings, tune into the podcasts, watch the downloads, or fill out the surveys. The church that is healthy is one where the word of the Lord is growing mightily and prevailing in all the ideas and conclusions about life and how it is lived. Good church leaders are strategizing to get the people to hear and embrace the gospel of grace. They know that it takes time for the seed of the gospel to take root and change the story from the human's search for God to God's actions toward us. They know that 30 minutes a week to a congregation who only attends 1.5 times a month will not create a community where the word of the Lord grows and prevails. Until the major force of church strategy is to get the people saturated with the good news of the gospel, the forces of darkness will retain their rule.

But how do we determine if a church is doing this? The answer is simple and direct:

For the love of Christ urges us on. Because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

(2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NRSV)

Where the word of the Lord is growing and prevailing, people are characterized by selfless service and spiritual fruit. They are living for the glory of someone other than themselves, and they are seeking the benefit of those they serve. The word of the Lord does not produce selfish people with personal agendas. The light that shines in darkness is the light of love that emanates from the Spirit who is making Jesus real in the heart of the believer.

We, like Paul, have been commissioned to speak and not be silent. Then we watch and cooperate with Him as He does the heavenly work that enforces the victory of Jesus' death and exalts the love of the Father. Find some others who want more than anything for the word of the Lord to grow and prevail. You will see the success of the church Jesus purchased with His blood.

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