

“FINDING SOMETHING MISSING IN EPHESUS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 19:1-10

When God wills, 19:1.

Early this month we had all our sons and their families home which meant we had six grandkids three and under playing in the house. Mind you we have tons of toys, more than enough for all of them to play with, but the word we heard most was “mine, mine, mine.”

It reminded me of that scene in the Disney movie Finding Nemo where the seagulls are all saying, “mine, mine, mine.”

We live on a strong-willed planet filled with seven billion strong-willed people who are all saying, “Mine, mine, mine.” “My will be done.”

Someone has said the definition of hell is “my will be done” and the definition of heaven is “thy will be done.”

I spoke last week about building the kingdom by praying “Thy will be done.” That is an easy prayer to pray, but a hard prayer to wait for an answer to. How many of us have prayed and prayed for God’s will and waited for a sign, a door to open, an answer to be given?

What is God doing, when will He do it, how will He do it? So many questions. One of the hardest things in the Christian life is waiting and not knowing.

At the beginning of Paul’s second missionary journey he traveled through Phrygia and Galatia.

Acts 16:6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

At the end of Paul’s second missionary journey he made a brief stop in Ephesus and they begged him to stay, but he said he would return if God wills, and he left.

Now at the beginning of Paul’s third missionary journey he retraces his steps through Phrygia and Galatia but it happened that this time God willed for him to go to Asia minor and into Ephesus.

You don’t know what you don’t know.

You don’t know when the fullness of time will come in God’s plan.

You don’t know when in the mysterious counsel of God He wills this way or that.

When we look at all the twist and turns of our lives, all the circumstances and situations, all the differences between our life and someone else's life, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight, and that means total trust and dependence on God.

Paul is living this important truth. While Paul was in Ephesus he wrote two letters to the church in Corinth. We hear how he was applying this truth.

I Corinthians 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills.

I Corinthians 16:5 I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

II Corinthians 1:9-10 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Being in the center of God's will does not mean everything will be sweetness and light, or a bed of roses. Actually it will be more like a garden of roses, flowers and thorns. Jesus prayed, "Father, not my will but thy will be done" and He ended up on a cross.

So Paul is in Ephesus now according to the will of God. In the good and the bad God has great purposes for Paul in this great city. Paul finds *three things* in Ephesus.

Ignorance which is answered with instruction.

Opposition which is countered with separation.

Opportunity which is seized with great boldness and fruitfulness.

Ignorance which is answered with instruction, 19:2-7.

And it is a great ignorance, a serious deficiency. Something serious is missing in Ephesus.

Paul encounters twelve men, probably Jews, who are called disciples. We aren't sure if they are followers of Jesus with a defective knowledge of Jesus or disciples of Apollos before he was corrected by Priscilla and Aquila, or disciples of John the Baptist. They have some knowledge of Jesus but no experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

We might say they were spiritual infants or novices. In the school of Christ they had the lowest level of understanding. They are still stuck in the OT, in the old covenant. They know what the OT says about the Messiah and about the Holy Spirit but they don't know the Holy Spirit has been given.

They did not know the blessing of living in the new age, in the new kingdom under the promises of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

They didn't know what they didn't know.

Paul explains the purpose of John's baptism, that it was to point to Jesus. John's baptism showed us our need, our inadequacy, and the judgment of God. Jesus' baptism shows us the good news, the grace of God that takes away our judgment and condemnation.

John's baptism was the porch, they needed to come into the house. They needed to move from milk to meat.

Notice one refreshing thing about these men. They are humble, they readily own they don't know something, they are missing something. I bet these guys might even stop and ask for directions. Their masculinity isn't on the line by saying they haven't heard of the Holy Spirit. They accept correction and instruction.

The Holy Spirit.

We see in the book of Acts certain times when God withholds the special gifts of the Spirit at the beginning of the Gospel. God waits to manifest the visible signs of grace through his apostles to confirm their ministry, to show the trustworthiness of their teaching and the power of the Gospel.

Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In Acts 2 there is the Jerusalem Pentecost, in Acts 8 is the Samaritan Pentecost in Acts 8, in Acts 10 Cornelius receives a Pentecost and now Acts 19 we have the Gentile Pentecost. Notice they all receive the same sign, in God's kingdom all are equal, there is no Jew or Greek.

These miraculous outpourings of the Spirit with signs and wonders point to the move of the Gospel and the missionary movement of the Christian Church. Ephesus would become a new center for this movement and these twelve disciples would be the nucleus of this church.

Those who had not so much as heard of the Spirit were now filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Do you know the Holy Spirit? Do you see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in your life? If not, is that a matter of concern to you? Are you willing to ask the question "do I have the fulness of the Holy Spirit?" You don't know what you don't know, are willing to ask God to show you what you don't know, what you don't have?

Paul's question is still worth asking. Am I being led by the Spirit, am I walking in the Spirit, submitted to the government of the Spirit? Is there the evidence of obedience to Christ, of subduing and killing sin, of increased love for God, a desire for worship, increased faith, courage, boldness?

We all have blind spots. We shouldn't make peace with them or ignore them.

Opposition which is countered with separation, 19:8-10.

Notice the progression in the opposition. They started out begging Paul to stay, but as time went on some of them became stubborn. The word means their hearts grew hard. They became like the hard path in the parable of the sower, so hard it couldn't receive the seed, it just bounced off or laid there.

Then they continued in unbelief, they grew in their hardness, becoming entrenched. Finally they turned and went on the attack. Filled with disdain and hate they called what was good evil. They didn't just reject the truth, they spoke evil of it.

Notice, no one can hear the Word of God and remain unchanged. Either their hearts will be made soft and they will be transformed, or their hearts will become hardened and they will resist submitting to the truth of God's Word and the tenderness of Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness.

For three months Paul spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. For three months he gave Biblical reasons for believing Jesus is the Christ. For three months Paul answered objection after objection. For three months Paul proclaimed the truth of the kingdom of God with power, affection, emotion, persuasion. For three months the light of the glory of the Gospel in Jesus Christ shone before them, yet they remained in darkness.

What about someone here? How many months, how many years have you listened, year in and year out, and been unmoved by the Gospel, by the truth about the kingdom of God, about the Way of repentance and faith? In my first church there was a husband of a member who was an avowed agnostic. For six years he came every Sunday with his wife hearing but not believing.

Who here is resisting the Holy Spirit, who here will be without excuse before God having heard the truth and not surrendered and submitted to it? Watch your heart. If you think you are coasting you are going down a hill. Don't neglect God's grace and mercy, it won't last forever.

The light was removed from them, the salt was taken away and they are without excuse.

Opportunity which is seized with great boldness and fruitfulness, 19:8-10.

In God's time He opened a door for the Gospel in Asia. Ephesus is the pinnacle of Paul missionary travels and success. This is his most significant and sustained ministry. He stays in Ephesus three years, twice as long as Corinth. This is basically the end of his missionary travels.

Ephesus was one of the most important cities in the Roman world. It was the Roman capital of Asia, it sat on the main trade route, it was home to the temple of Artemis/Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

In Ephesus Paul was the most free to preach boldly, clearly reasoning regarding the Kingdom of God. He spoke the truth with clarity and depth and the fruit was greater than anywhere before.

I Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

When he could no longer preach in the synagogue he went to a public building used by a philosopher Tyrannus. There are ancient manuscripts that suggest Paul lectured daily from 11 am to 4 pm for two years. And as a result people all over Asia heard the Gospel of Jesus. The

seven churches in Revelation were planted during these three years in Ephesus. This area was so intensely evangelized it became one of the leading centers of Christianity for centuries to follow.

At least twenty five hours a week, week in and week out, Paul expounded the Word of God with passion and affection, desiring that none should be lost and all should be saved by faith in Jesus.

Like the early Christians in Jerusalem, the Christians in Ephesus devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching. Do we have such a hunger and thirst for God's Word, that an hour a week on Sunday morning can't satisfy it? Are any of us in danger of knowing the Bible too much, of knowing God too much?

Are we ever embarrassed by the abundance of the riches of God's truth He has given us and how little we avail ourselves of it? As I get older I am more and more humbled by the expanding circumference of my spiritual ignorance, by the spiritual poverty of my soul.

We all have blind spots, we all have inadequacies in our theology. We always have a need to be growing, maturing, learning. To be a Christian means to be a disciple, a student of Jesus.

Are you satisfied with what you know, with what you have? We should have a holy dissatisfaction with our spiritual lives. We should have a hunger and thirst for God and the things of God. It don't say this to guilt us into duty. I want to aim higher. Let's pray as Paul prayed for us.

Philippians 1:9 It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.

Colossians 1:9-10 We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

What you don't know matters. What you don't know can mean the difference between knowing the blessings of God in your life and not. The Holy Spirit withheld blessing from these believers until they were learned the truth about Jesus.

We should pray for God to teach us, lead us, draw us further up and further in.

God's design is that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Are you hearing? Are you putting yourself in a position to hear? Are you seeking to hear the Word of God, by reading it, studying it, going to Bible Studies, Sunday School, morning and evening worship.

As we prepare to resume our evening worship, as we prepare to resume our fall education opportunities, as we consider who God is, what He has done for us in Christ and what He has given us in His Word and by His indwelling Spirit, may God by that same Spirit draw us to His glory through a growing hunger for Him and His Word.

Do you ever wonder if there is more than this? Is there a setting past normal? Is revival possible, real revival, not man-made revival? What is it like to have a overwhelming sense of the very presence of God in our lives? To have such an assurance of our faith and an increase of our faith that we have a new found boldness?

This is a call to not be satisfied with the status quo. This is a call to never stop growing and pressing on and praying for more, a call to be asking, seeking, knocking kinds of Christians. May God stir our hearts and minds to seek and desire new and greater things. May God create a hunger in us for more, better, higher, fuller, richer, deeper experiences of God's love and grace and power and victory in our lives.

May His Kingdom come and His will be done in us for His glory.

Prayer: In a few moments of silence profess again in the Lord Jesus Christ and ask for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life, ask for a renewed hunger and thirst for righteousness and truth, for the things of God.

Holy Father, what we know not, teach us, what we have not, give us, what we are not, make us, for Your Son's sake, Amen.