

November 3, 2024
As You Are Going: God's Extraordinary Power
Acts 19:11-41
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro... As we saw a few weeks ago, as we started Acts 19, Paul has started on his third missionary journey and he had come back to the city of Ephesus. As he arrived, he spent three months sharing the gospel and reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God, as was his custom, but after some of the Jews became hardened and began speaking evil of the Way he turned to the Gentiles and concentrated his ministry with them for a period of about 2 years. And vs. 10 of ch. 19 tells us that this ministry was effective so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. And we see this play out in the next several decades as all seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation were located in this same province of Asia and find their root during this period of time when Paul was in Ephesus.

As we move to vs. 11 today, Luke, the author of Acts, gives us some additional details about how God demonstrated his extraordinary power through the ministry of Paul as he concluded his time there. Because of the length of our passage today, we are going to make our way through it a couple of verses at a time and I won't have you stand at every reading today. So sit back, get comfortable, and let's hear God from his word together as we continue to follow Paul during his time in the city of Ephesus. If you have your bibles, please turn with me to Acts 19 starting in vs. 11 where we see that God is working Miracles through Paul [Read vs. 11-12]

First, we're told that Paul's work in Ephesus was accompanied by "extraordinary miracles." The word here translated "miracles" is "dunamis," a word most often translated in the New Testament as "power." It is the same word used to describe the power that Jesus promised to his disciples in Acts 1:8 when he said: "But 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." Do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 24, "wait in Jerusalem, for what, until you have been filled with the power from on high." It's hard to wait, but we can't do anything meaningful for the gospel without the power of God or else we would have something to boast about. We see this play out in the passage.

Notice that Paul was not the source of these miracles, but it was God working through Paul. Luke writes clearly that this power belongs to God. Vs. 11 begins by saying: "God was doing" or "God was performing" these miracles "by the hands of Paul." In our own strength, we are not powerful. Paul was not powerful. But he was empowered. That is an important distinction. Paul is an instrument of the Holy Spirit so that everyone would know that there is a living and powerful God. It's important that we remember the same is true for us.

And notice one more thing about these miracles in vs. 11. Luke writes that these miracles are not just "miracles," but are "extraordinary miracles." Now, a miracle itself is extraordinary. By definition, a miracle is "an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause," according to the dictionary.

But, according to this passage, not all miracles are alike. There are in fact ordinary miracles, and there are extraordinary miracles. Miracles of an elevated nature. The type of miracles God worked through Paul in Ephesus are described as being "extraordinary miracles."

The original Greek helps us understand this better because it literally reads: “miracles, not the ordinary.” And these miracles are described for us in vs. 12. [read] 1) Not relics... 2) Not the way God always operates. God can do anything he wants, for he is more than able, but these “extraordinary” miracles seem to come at times when God is moving in such a way that these miracles give validation to the message of the Gospel.

And this tells us something about the spiritual climate in Ephesus. Ephesus had a reputation as a center for the learning and the practice of the magical arts. The city of Ephesus was known throughout the world as a city that had become callous to signs and wonders in such a way that what we might call miraculous, they would call normal because they worshiped idols, and dabbled in magic, and gave footholds the powers of darkness.

But notice, in the midst of this, God is still working. In a city that was known for the magic arts, known for the supernatural, God met them there and His word prevailed. God showed the Ephesians that He has power and victory over all that they were dealing in and with, even over the spiritual powers of darkness. Is it any wonder that our “go to” text for spiritual warfare is contained in the letter that Paul wrote back to these very same Ephesians in Eph.6. The passage that starts out, “We do not fight against flesh and blood, but against powers that are not of this world.” These “extraordinary miracles” added weight to the things Paul was teaching about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

But the miracles performed through Paul in Ephesus also attracted the attention of those that wanted to do the same things for their own gain, but did not have the power of God to do so. Luke gives an example of this in the failed attempt by the sons of Sceva in verses 13-17. [Read]

[summarize] Here we see a great contrast between the power of God working through Paul and the failure of those who perform rote religious rituals. Much like Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8, who tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from the apostles for his own gain, these men were trying, in their own strength, to duplicate what God was doing through Paul and even attempted to cast out demons by using Jesus’ name in the same way that a modern day magician would say “abracadabra.” So of course, their efforts fail resulting in the man attacking and defeating all seven of them. And the text is very descriptive here, it says they are beat up and flee without their clothes. They are left wounded not only physically but their pride took a hit as well.

As can be imagined, the story of what happened to these men spread quickly around the city resulting in a clear understanding that this Jesus that Paul was proclaiming was not only very powerful, but his power could not be matched. Vs. 18-20 tells what happened as a result among those that did believe. [Read]

The story caused believers to be more serious about their faith. It seems many of them up to that point had kept one foot in their old ways including keeping their books that explained how to tap into magical and demonic powers and when they see the obvious difference between the power of God as demonstrated through Paul and the failure of the efforts of rituals of magic, they repent and this resulted in a radical change. Those who had been involved in demonic practices brought their books which contained their formulas and secret rites and rituals and they destroyed them at great personal financial loss. The value of these books, listed here as 50,000 pieces of silver, would be millions in today’s money.

This brings up an important issue. How many of us today are living now just like these Ephesians had been then? We have made professions of faith, but in our ignorance, we are trying to keep one foot in the world and its ways, not willing to give up those things that are still precious to us, even though those are the very things that keep us from being effective for the

kingdom? But when you understand the true nature of God you turn away from your former foolishness. That's what true repentance looks like. Now that's not to say that we are to have no contact with the outside world, for how else will they hear the gospel unless we tell them, but the Christian is called to be holy, as we're told in 1 Peter. 1:16, "Be Holy as I am Holy." The word "holy" in this context does not mean "perfect," but set apart, or different from. You cannot mix the worship of the one true God with worldliness. If you are not seeing the power of God in your own life both in making you more like Christ and using you to advance His kingdom, then consider if one of the reasons may be that you are still continuing in some of your old practices instead of trusting fully in the Lord.

These verses demonstrate the power of God is not an entity in and of itself, but it is the ability of God to accomplish His will through any means He desires. The amazing thing is that God desires to work through those who humble themselves before Him. He works through us to accomplish things far beyond our abilities with results that are eternal in nature, not just in the here and now. If you want to see the extraordinary power of God working through you, then start by being humble before God and then learn to obey Him by trusting Him to accomplish what He wants through you.

In vs. 21 & 22 Luke tells us what Paul desired to continue with his plan of going back to the areas he had previously been in order to strengthen the churches he had planted. He would then return to Jerusalem before going on to Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to prepare the way while he stayed in Ephesus awhile longer. I think Luke adds this here to show the true reasons why Paul eventually left Ephesus. It was not because of the riot we are told about starting in vs. 23. [Read 23-34]

Verse 23, "About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way." You see, the extraordinary power of God had been on full display for all to see. Paul had been preaching, the church was growing, and the gospel was sweeping over the city of Ephesus and region surrounding it. God was moving and some people got upset. The truth is that's what the Gospel should always do. The church should always create "no little disturbance." Are we? Always in the right way, but are we?

And in vs. 24, we meet a man by the name of Demetrius. Now, very likely, Demetrius is a leader among these silversmiths. In those days, guilds were formed where people who were artisans of the same craft would ban together, similar to what we would call unions today. And so, all of these people would ban together for the common goal of making more money. And Demetrius, as the ring leader, contracted out the rest of these silversmiths to make these shrines.

What were these shrines for, the Temple of Artemis. The temple of Artemis was a huge temple dedicated to the fertility goddess, Artemis, and it was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. Standing 420ft by 250ft with hundreds of columns, it was big business for the local economy and was a treasure storehouse for gold and silver. People from all over the world came there. And the silversmiths made their living by selling these shrines to the tourists and people making pilgrimages to the city of Ephesus to worship at the Temple of Artemis.

So Demetrius called together all these guys and he says, "Guys, we make our living off of making these shrines." You see, what happened was this "no little disturbance" was the result of the gospel hitting them right in the wallet. The gospel was messing up their business because people were accepting the truth of Christ and turning from idols which was bad for business. He goes on to say, "Do you realize that Paul has made people to believe that these gods we're making aren't real? Do you know what that's doing to our business?"

Now at this point, I want us to notice something- the Christians in Ephesus didn't go around blasting Artemis. They didn't have marches against the Temple of Artemis carrying posters around that said, "Down with Artemis of the Ephesians." All they did was preach the gospel message and that's what caused the disturbance, not the Christians themselves.

Well, we're told that Demetrius' speech stirred up everyone and it caused a riot. And the mob, in their confusion, grab two guys by the name of "Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia," ministry partners with Paul, and they rushed them into the theater probably with the purpose of having some type of trial that was meant to run these guys out of town or maybe even worse. [Kathleen and I have been there]

This theatre could hold anywhere from 25 to 30 thousand people. So there is the frenzied mob of 25 to 30 thousand people filling this theater and they have these two guys standing in the middle of them, not a good situation. Now, watch vs. 30-31. I like his courage, don't you? Paul's first reaction was "I'm going over to that theater and make a defense." But his friends talk him out of it. John MacArthur, a well-known pastor, has said when speaking on this passage, "It's one thing to be in danger and believe God will get you out, it's something else to presume on God and go jumping into danger." And so his friends use common sense and said, "No, Paul, there's no sense in going over there. They'll kill you." So Paul takes their advice and doesn't go.

And the mob is all yelling and everybody's screaming and nobody even is aware of what's going on. They don't even know what they're doing. Sound familiar? Even the Jews tried to calm things down but that didn't go well, and they kept on screaming for two more hours. The whole situation seems like its about to erupt in chaos, as these things typically do, and something bad is about to go down. But then something interesting happens.

In vs. 35-41, the town clerk, his role was more like a mayor today, was able to restore order and what I find interesting is that the riot came to an end without Paul's direct involvement. The Lord once again, through his sovereignty and extraordinary power, used a Roman official to protect His people. Vs. 35 tells us that "the town clerk" quieted the crowd and then spoke some sense into the situation by telling them, basically, that they were the ones that were breaking the law. And the crowd listened and dispersed. And here, we again see the extraordinary power of God on display. The Lord uses an unbelieving city official to protect Paul and his companions demonstrating his power over all things.

So, what are you going through today? What are you waiting on the Lord for? In today's passage we see that God is extraordinarily powerful, and therefore, we can trust him with our lives. As we are going, let's be the church on mission, not in our own strength but in the extraordinary power our God. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the table of the Lord.