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Let's Keep Sharing The Gospel

Acts 19:8-20

Introduction

1. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard tells a story about a wild duck:

This duck was flying northward across Europe one spring when he landed in a Danish barnyard where there were some tame ducks, enjoying their corn. He stayed for an hour, then a day, then a week, then a month. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed the food of the tame ducks and the safety of the barnyard so much that he ended up staying the entire summer. Finally, as Fall approached, his wild-duck friends began winging their way back south again. As they passed over the barnyard, this duck heard their cries. He felt the thrill of joy and delight, and with a great flapping of his wings he rose in the air to rejoin his old comrades.

However, he soon found that the months of enjoying barnyard fare had made him soft and heavy. He was unable to rise any higher than the eaves of the barn. Finally, he dropped back to the barnyard and said to himself, "Oh well, my life is safe here and the food is good." Every spring and fall when he heard the wild ducks honking, his eyes would gleam for a moment and he would begin to flap his wings. Finally, however, the day came when the wild ducks flew over and uttered their cries, but he paid them no attention at all."

2. Mr. Kierkegaard tells this parable to illustrate how people can lose sight of their ideals and become satisfied with lower standards.
3. The challenge for each of us this morning is to hear God's call to proclaim the gospel and not become satisfied with status quo.
4. When we become too complacent in this world and satisfied with the fare which Satan provides, our souls become heavy and content.
5. We eventually find ourselves unable to rise up and join the saints of old in proclaiming God's message to a world in desperate need of a Savior.

6. One of the greatest examples in the New Testament of the dedication to the cause of Christ, which we seek to emulate, is the apostle Paul.
7. This morning, I would like for us to look at the example he left us, as he preached the gospel of Christ, for over two years, in the city of Ephesus.
 - a. Leading commercial city of Asia Minor with an estimated population of 300,000.
 - b. Beautiful city, very sophisticated, wealthy and pagan
 - c. Major religious center — focus of the worship of Diana (Artemis)
8. Paul picks up where he left off, entering the synagogue and preaching about the kingdom of God.
9. In the events which Luke records for us here we see the sacrifice required, the opposition we will face, and the comfort we find in our sharing of the gospel.

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I. Our Sharing Of The Gospel Will Require Sacrifice

A. THE SACRIFICES OF PAUL (vv. 8-9)

1. For three months, Paul had been able to use the synagogue to “reason” with and “persuade” those who came “about the kingdom of God” (v. 8).
2. However, because there were those who spoke “evil of the Way before the people,” Paul took the disciples he had made and relocated to “the school of Tyrannus” where he continued to teach (v. 9).
3. An extra-biblical source indicates that Paul rented the lecture hall from 11 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., during the lunch and siesta time in Ephesus.
 - a. Tent-making 7:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.
 - b. Teaching 11:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.
 - c. Tent-making 4:00 P.M. - ??
4. It doesn't take a mathematician to realize that Paul was able to accomplish a lot of teaching in two years time.

5. When Paul later met with the elders from Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem, he reminded them that he had worked with his own hands to minister not only to his own needs, but to the needs of the men who were with him (Acts 20:34).

2a**B. WHAT SACRIFICES ARE WE WILLING TO MAKE SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT HEAR THE GOOD NEWS?**

1. How many of you made sacrifices to engage in a hobby, learn a language, perfect a skill, trade or sport?
2. How many of you worked to support yourself while pursuing a college education or some other advanced degree?
2. How many of you worked more than one job to provide for your family?
3. Were there things which you missed along the way? Of course. Was it worth it? Yes.
4. What are you and I willing to sacrifice in order to see that others hear the Gospel?
 - a. Time to yourself or with family?
 - b. Financial gain (less overtime, taking a job which doesn't pay as much but affords more opportunities to share the gospel)?

Slide 3**II. When We Seek To Share The Gospel, Satan Will Always Seek To Interfere****A. THROUGH OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION**

1. Paul picked up in Ephesus where he had left off on his second missionary journey — in the synagogue.
2. In verse 8 of our reading, Luke tells us that Paul again “entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8).

3. However, as time passed, Luke indicates that some of those who came to the synagogue “were becoming hardened and disobedient” — they began “speaking evil of the Way before the people” (Acts 19:9a).
4. He paints a picture of the spiritual warfare which was taking place between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.
5. It is for this reason that Paul would later write to the believers here in Ephesus and tell them, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).
6. We can still expect similar responses today.
7. When the Gospel is preached, Satan will continue to oppose it.
8. There will be those who harden their hearts and speak evil of the Way.
9. Some will even lash out with physical violence.
10. Regardless, you and I, as God’s people, must continue to remain faithful.

3a**B. THROUGH OFFERING A COUNTERFEIT TRUTH**

1. Luke tells us of an interesting episode which took place while Paul was at Ephesus.
2. He first tells us that “God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul” (v. 11).
3. However, these “extraordinary miracles” did not happen as a result of Paul directly laying hands on someone who was sick.
4. Instead, people were taking the “handkerchiefs” and “aprons” which Paul was using in his work as tentmaker, and taking them to those who were sick.
5. As a result, “the diseases . . . and the evil spirits” left them (v. 12).
6. These things had no magical powers in themselves — instead, they were

tangible symbols of God's power through His apostle.

7. According to Luke, some of the Jewish exorcists sought to capitalize on this by trying to cast out demons through the use of Paul's name — "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches" (v. 13).
8. In particular, seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva tried this, but found out quickly that their tactics didn't work.
9. The evil spirit responded to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (v. 15).
10. The man, in whom was the evil spirit, promptly jumped on these men and "gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding" (v. 16, NIV84).
11. Satan still works to deceive well intentioned people with that which seems to be real (i.e., prosperity gospel).
12. Christianity has nothing to do with anything which seeks to use Jesus as a magic charm for the benefit of whoever wants it.
13. Only the truth can set us free (John 8:32).

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III. We Take Comfort In Knowing That When We Share The Gospel, God Is Always At Work

A. CONVICTING PEOPLE OF SIN

1. Because of what happened to the sons of Sceva a great conviction of sin fell upon the city and "fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified."
2. Many who believed "kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices" (v.18)
3. "Many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began

burning them in the sight of everyone” (v. 19).

4. The value of those books totaled “fifty thousand pieces of silver” — 137 years worth of salary in collective sorcery scrolls.
5. Through the good news of Jesus Christ, God still calls us to “be holy” even as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16).
6. He still promises that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NASB95).
7. What would we get rid of today if the Holy Spirit’s conviction swept over us as it did in Ephesus during Paul’s day?
 - a. Are there some television channels that would no longer be watched or some internet websites that would be removed from personal computers?
 - b. Would some of us as Christians ask others to pray that we might be set free from whatever was dragging us down?
 - c. Are there those who would come to Christ for forgiveness of sin and deliverance from God’s eternal wrath?

4a

B. CAUSING HIS CHURCH TO GROW

1. In his letter to the Christians in Philippi, Paul told the brethren “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13, NASB95).
2. Here, in verse 10 of our text, Luke informs us that during the time Paul spent in Ephesus “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”
3. In verse 20, Luke tells us that the result of the incident involving Sceva’s sons was that “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”
4. All the roads of Asia came together at Ephesus.

3. All the inhabitants of Asia visited Ephesus from time to time, to . . .
 - a. Buy and sell.
 - b. Visit a relative
 - c. Frequent the baths
 - d. Attend the games in the stadium
 - e. Watch a play in the theatre
 - f. Worship the goddess
4. While they were there they heard of this Christian lecturer named Paul, who was both speaking and answering questions for five hours a day in the middle of every day.
5. Many dropped in, listened to His words, and were converted.
6. These new Christians then returned to their own towns and villages.
7. In this way the gospel spread to towns like Colosse, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia.
8. Almost 800 years before Paul set foot in Ephesus, God spoke through His prophet, Isaiah, and said, “My word . . . which goes forth from My mouth . . . will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).
9. The same still happens today — wherever God’s word is taught, it accomplishes His purposes.
10. There is a reason for this — we find it in at least two passages of Scripture:
 - a. In Romans 1:16, Paul said that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”
 - b. Hebrews 4:12 states, “for the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of souls and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Conclusion

1. When the Gospel is proclaimed, certain things are destined to happen:
 - a. Opposition
 - b. Sacrifices will have to be made
 - c. Satan will both oppose the truth and attempt to counterfeit it
 - d. God will convict people of their sin
 - e. He will cause His kingdom to grow
2. God calls us out of our life of comfort and onto the field of battle.
3. We often sing about "marching to Zion" encouraging one another to "stand up for Jesus" as "soldiers of the cross."
4. If we are going to be "hard fightin' soldiers on the battlefield," we must leave our places of comfort and enter the fight.

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5. Paul once wrote, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
6. Have you asked God to lead you to a lost soul recently? If not, will you do so today?