

Text: Ac 19.8-10

Proposition: You and the word of God can make a difference in your world.

The next few verses in Acts 19 are a summary of Paul's three years in Ephesus. They outline the course of his ministry and give us some details that hint at his success in this ministry. Those hints give us the theme for today's message.

What One Man with the Word Can Do

As we noted before in our series, a major theme of the book of Acts is evangelism. The apostle Paul is most exceptional in this work, sometimes we look at what the Lord did through him and think, "That could never happen to me."

Well, perhaps we won't move into a town and have seven or more churches thriving in the surrounding area within three short years.

After all, Debbi and I came to Victoria 36 years ago, and we have one small church to show for it.

However, I want you to think a bit more about this. On occasion, I've thought back over the thirty plus years of ministry here. Though our numbers have never broken 100 on any one Sunday, we've seen probably at least 200 different individuals in our services over the years. Perhaps more...

Some of those who attended are people who became Christians through our ministry. Others were already believers, and have moved on to other cities, some a third of the way around the world at least.

Now, I want you to think about your own ministry. You, too, have an influence on other lives. If you walk with the Lord faithfully, preach his Word by voice and action, you will influence other people for the Lord. That ministry can easily be multiplied around the world as those you influence in turn influence others.

Paul is a "super-spreader!" He outstrips us all, and of course the Lord was at work in a powerful way through him. Today, however, I want to look at our passage and note the simple terms that express the profound impact of one man with the Word of God over a relatively short period of time.

Read Acts 19.8-10

Proposition: You and the word of God can make a difference in your world.

I. The foundation of ministry

At Amazon.com, the following sub-categories appear under “self-help”:

- Creativity
- Eating disorders & Body Image
- Happiness
- Inner Child
- Journaling
- Journal writing
- Memory Improvement
- Motivational
- Personal Transformation
- Self-Esteem
- Spiritual
- Stress Management

Millions of books sell in these categories every year. Not surprising with “self-help,” all these topics are self-focused.

Over at Christianbook.com, under “Books” you find these categories:

- **Christian Living**
- **Personal Growth**
- Devotionals
- **Marriage**
- **Parenting**
- Fiction
- Gift Books
- Black Authors
- **Personal Finance**
- Biography
- **Health & Fitness**
- Academic
- **Cookbooks**
- Coloring Books
- Catholic

Now, I realize that I am comparing two lists that are Not the Same. “Self-Help” (Amazon Category) and “All Books” (Christianbook category) are two different things.

Yet... are you not struck by some striking overlap in the categories available at a Christian site as opposed to the secular Amazon? [see bolded above]

I also don't mean to be too critical, since I am sure that there are Christian ways to address these areas and many of the books at Christianbook are helpful.

However, as you understand the mission of the Apostle Paul, can you imagine him taking time to address these topics in extensive detail?

What does our passage tell us about the content of Paul's message?

A. The focus of Paul's preaching as gleaned from our text

1. The kingdom of God (8)

- a. The kingdom is a huge topic in the NT

(Will be one of the things we discuss next in our study of New Testament prophecy beginning in a few weeks.)

- b. The kingdom has deep OT roots

- c. The kingdom, however, focuses on the future: God's plan for this world, and for us who believe

2. The Way; the life of discipleship (9)

- a. This term occurs first in Acts 9.2

Ac 9.2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

- b. Our passage is the second reference, but it also occurs in 19.23, 24.14, 24.22

Ac 19.23 ¶ About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.

Ac 24.14 “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

Ac 24.22 ¶ But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.”

- c. What the term means:

- 1) First, it is parallel to the term “Christian” ... “Christian” = “followers of the Way”
- 2) It is a descriptive term for the result of Christian teaching
- 3) In other words, it refers to discipleship, Christian training

In our passage, the opponents speak evil of “the Way,” but “the Way” is what Paul teaches, and what transforms lives.

3. The word of the Lord (10)

- a. The word of the Lord = the gospel
- b. The word of the Lord includes the Scriptural foundation and proof of the gospel
- c. The word of the Lord describes the need of sinning man
- d. The word of the Lord gives hope to those who receive the saving Messiah

B. The significance of Paul’s preaching

1. He is single-minded
2. He preaches God’s message, not his own
3. He proclaims Christ

4. He guides converts in the way of Christ

The genius of Paul's message is his singular focus, driven by the Word of God, to proclaim the message of God.

The key to his success...

II. The method of ministry

A. The great freedom of Paul's speech

1. Our text translates this "boldly" (as do most, some use "fearlessly")
2. One of my commentators used "freely" which prompted some research
 - a. The word comes from the Greek democracies, describing the key right of citizenship, freedom of speech
 - b. The word then came to communicate a kind of shamelessness that some developed, because they thought they could say anything
 - c. From here, it is easy to see how the word becomes "boldness" or "fearlessness"
 - d. In the book of Acts, it refers to the fearlessness of preachers to proclaim the word of God

Or, their perfect sense of freedom to speak the gospel.

Do we have boldness? Or fear?

B. The way in which Paul boldly spoke: "reasoning and persuading"

1. Reasoning
 - a. The word we get "dialog" from
 - b. "to engage in speech interchange, *converse, discuss, argue*"¹

¹ "διαλέγομαι" in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

- c. Specifically: “esp. of instructional discourse that frequently includes exchange of opinions”²

There seems to be a lot of back and forth going on in this ministry, Paul isn’t doing all the talking.

2. Persuading

- a. “to cause to come to a particular point of view or course of action”³
- b. “to convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended”⁴

C. The course of Paul’s speaking (10)

This took place for two years

1. Paul’s began speaking in the synagogue for around three months (8)
2. He left the synagogue and spoke in the school of Tyrannus (owner or lecturer or both)
3. There is an interesting variant that suggests Paul’s time in this place each day from about 11 am to about 4 pm
 - a. This would mean during the slowest part of the day (lunch/siesta)
 - b. Presumably Tyrannus would teach there in the mornings, while Paul was busy making tents (see Ac 20.34, he labored with his hands)
 - c. When the school was free, Paul would preach/teach/argue/persuade
 - d. All the commentators note this as “not original” but “quite possible”

² “διαλέγομαι” in Bauer.

³ “πειθω” in Bauer.

⁴ “πειθω” in Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

4. All this work went on for over two more years (Paul says three years in Ac 20.31, an approximation)

The whole course of Paul's effective ministry in Ephesus included a central focus (the word of God, the gospel) and persistent activity: Paul was busy about serving the Lord

III. The result of ministry

A. Hardening and disobeying (9)

1. The words are in a continuous tense

- a. The Ephesian synagogue gave Paul more time than others
b. But some of them, at least, developed an increasing resistance

- 1) Hardening: an increasing emotional stubbornness, akin to the increasing resistance of Pharaoh before the Exodus

"The verb is in the middle voice (ἐσκληρύνοντο, *esklēryntonto*), 'they hardened themselves.'"⁵

- 2) Disobeying: this is the negative of "persuade"

- a) If you believe what Paul says, he is persuading you
b) If you refuse to believe, you are "disobeying" what you hear

There is a moral compulsion to the gospel: you *ought* to believe, it is *disobedience* to disbelieve

2. The sad fact about gospel preaching is that some *will not* believe (this is willfulness)

- a. What does Paul do? Keep arguing?
b. No, he withdraws and goes on

There does come a point in ministry when you have said all you can say to someone. Your window of opportunity comes to an end.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 600.

Years ago, I had a Bible study in a home in Shelby, NC. The people in this home were in a mess. They were willing for us to come and teach, but they simply would not let the gospel change their lives. Over Christmas I asked my uncle (a preacher) what I should do. His advice, "Go back one more time, but remember that you can't do anything with those who will not hear."

B. Making disciples (9) and Hearing (10)

1. The ministry in the synagogue produced some disciples (9)
2. The continued ministry resulted in "all Asia" hearing the word, both Jews and Greeks

In the book of Revelation, John names seven churches in this region: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Colosse close by)

Paul didn't go to all these cities, but during his three years there, most, if not all, of these churches began.

What One Man with the Word Can Do

Conclusion:

Proposition: You and the word of God can make a difference in your world.

You aren't called as an apostle, you don't need to expect the same results as Paul.

Yet.

You can make the word of God your focus.

You can speak, discuss, argue, persuade.

And you can reach who you can reach. To God be the glory!