

Prolific Kingdom Ministry

Acts 19:8-10

There is a little proverb that is used to teach ministers about preaching: Paper fire doesn't burn. That means you can have a painting or even a picture of fire, but it will not heat or harm your hand if you touch it. It looks great, but in reality, it has no effect. And what that means is that when it comes to the Christian life or Christian ministry, we cannot fake or fabricate true spiritual power. That is something which only God and God alone can bring about.

One preacher of old, a favorite minister, James Thornwell, was described as "logic on fire." Someone said of him: "His sermon was a model of what is so rare, - burning hot argument, logic in ignition, and glowing more and more to the end."

The preacher takes the Word and so makes it his own and presents it both warmly and brightly, like fire. Not merely heat, not merely light, but heat AND light. It is truth for the mind that moves the will, enflames the affections, pierces the conscience, and fills the imagination.

This is precisely what is seen in the Apostle's ministry in Ephesus, in 8-10 Acts 19. You mark his boldness as he steps into the synagogue; you see him reasoning and persuading – not once, not twice, but continually, for 3 months; then continuing with a long ministry of over 2 years, as he is teaching in the school next door.

And the effects are that the Word goes forth to all in Asia.

Isn't that we want to see here? The Word going forth to all?

This passage, many believe, forms what many believe to be the *high-water mark of Paul's ministry*:

This is the beginning of the 3rd missionary journey. He had purposed to come to this great city in the 2nd journey, and had shortly been welcomed at the end. More time is spent here than any other place – 3 years total. The effects seem to be more impressive and wide-spread: this is the place where even more intensive and wonderful miracles are done.

Finally, we see Paul as never before well-known to friend and foe alike, known to both heaven and hell, as we will see in a later message.

But we apply this, not to ministers but to you, the congregation: for what made Paul tick, what filled His mind and heart, and how the people responded to the Word of God, all point to how the church and not just here pastors are to be.

True – how we need men ablaze in the pulpit. When the Frenchman de Tocqueville sought the source of early America's success, he did not find it until he came into the churches and found the preaching white hot for holiness.

Nevertheless, what was central for Paul in this short passage comes right up to your door!

First of all, see here a **God-Gripped Man**

The words bold and courageous jump out here; thus the God-strengthened man. He is a NT Joshua: "*Have I not commanded you?*"

Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Jos 1:9)

But it doesn't stop there, for we find reasoning and teaching; he is a God-taught man; a man gripped by the truth. Like John Hus who gave his life, and said: *Seek the truth, listen to the truth, teach the truth, love the truth, abide by the truth, and defend the truth, unto death.*

But it doesn't stop there, for we also find the words persuading, moving; Paul is a God-earnest man. Later in the chapter, hear the testimony: "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all.* (Act 19:26)

I wonder if there are any here today who are seeking to live for Christ apart from His strength, His truth, His joy? How impossible!

Maybe you have been stumbling over what you know to be right, but the reason is, you seek it in your own power, your way, your feelings.

How could we what only God can work in us? And why then are we surprised when we fail, and want to blame God for our failure?

Jesus never fails! Are you gripped with Him? Are you a God-gripped man or woman? You cannot be without the Kingdom of God, without the Word of the Lord, as emphasized as central to the ministry.

This brings us to the next point here: **The Kingdom Way by His Word**

His teaching, the source of that teaching, and the center of that teaching, is put before us.

The substance is the very Kingdom or Rule of God. We are regularly taught in the Gospels how to enter this kingdom, the change of character wrought in us, and the blessed fullness and finality of being a part of this kingdom or city of God.

What a wonder – you are disciples of the Lord, children of the King, to live and dwell with Him forever.

The source of this is the Lord's way. In the great Book of Ephesians which was written for these saints, what do we find?

Chapter 1. An everlasting heavenly way;

Chapter 2. The way of grace out of death;

Chapter 3. Part of the cosmic church;

Chapter 4-5. The way of the victorious Christ exalted over all;

Chapter 4 - the way of holiness, or the highway;

Chapter 5 – the way personally and relationally;

Chapter 6. The way of battle.

All of this centers on Jesus – the message of life. Some preach religion, be religious, worship something; others speak of morality, a good life; others preach good feelings, positive thinking. Paul preached the cross!

This brings us to a pointed question then regarding receptivity. Some hardened their hearts and turned away, and some received the blessed message with repentance and humble faith, at the hand of the Lord.

Which quality characterizes you?

Look first at the Rejecting

First the word “hardening” – the root means to dry up; so like clay hardening, the heart of man dries up. Any reception they had given to Paul and his message was now being baked by the Word instead of softened. Notice how this process of hardening was something being done to them. They became hardened. How? By whom? What was the agent?

In Romans 2:5 – we read of hard and impenitent heart treasuring up wrath for the day of wrath.

In Acts 7:51 – Stephen accuses the Jews of a hard and uncircumcised heart.

Hebrews 3-4 calls men not to harden their hearts at the Word, as their fathers did in the wilderness.

But in Romans 9 – it is God who hardens the heart.

Our hearts are naturally hard; they can be further hardened by ourselves; but it is God alone who can open and soften the heart. And He as well can and will harden the heart that hears the hope of heaven only to resist the Lord.

You see the fruit of this – being actively disbelieving and disobedient; they were continually, actively active in doing so.

That turns to publically speaking out and reviling, blaspheming, the only Way that can save them.

How sad to think some of these continued in their hard hearts and attitudes, loving darkness, and finding themselves cast into hell and eternal suffering.

And they rejected the very One who would have and could have saved them and brought them to life.

That is what those who received the Word, rather than rejecting found.

So second, **look at the Rejecting**

Here are souls which followed wherever the Word leads.

They followed Paul as he had to separate from this synagogue. Paul continues to dialogue in a school of Tyrannus.

The twelve disciples followed too, it seems.

They were willing to follow to a less acceptable, more challenging setting – to worship in the afternoon.

Understand, their culture had more people awake at 1 am than 1 pm!

And not only did they come themselves but brought others with them. They became instruments in carrying the Word to all of western Asia. Our aim must be beyond ourselves; not just enough for me, but for my spouse, for my children, for my parents, for my fellow-workers, for my friends and extended family.

Let us quickly close with this observation – we found Paul serving in this wider, greater ministry. But his ways and means and

commitments did not change over the years. What does that teach us? Well, it means that there are no shortcuts to godliness.

In order to be a God-gripped man; to live as Kingdom Citizens; to make progress in the way – Your living Lord must speak to you, and you must speak to Him. you must give yourself to Him and He must be received by you. If He stands at your door and knocks, how can you not come and knock on His door for all in your life?

As someone has rightly said: *Never presume God will grant you apart from prayer what he has ordained to grant you only by means of prayer.*

Amen