

Journey 3: The Effects of the Word in Our Life

Acts 19:1–41

Studies in Acts #24

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When we left the story of Acts, Paul was back with his home church in Syrian Antioch, where he **spen[t] some time** (18:23) with them. But soon after he was back at it on his third missionary journey going back **through the region of Galatia and Phrygia**—the **inland country** our text speaks of (v. 1)—visiting the churches he planted and **strengthening all the disciples** (18:23). Now he’s back in Ephesus (v. 1), which was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, a city of half-a-million, a leading commerce point, and a spiritual center housing one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the massive temple of Artemis. Recall from chapter 18 that this is where he merely stopped on his way back home (18:18–21), and where after the believers there **asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined**, saying, **“I will return to you if God wills”** (18:20). God formerly forbade him from preaching here; now God has willed it!

There are several points here that we’ve already seen throughout Acts. The Holy Spirit repeats himself so that we get his message. In verses 1–7 and the strange account of the believers who had been baptized into John’s preparatory baptism (vv. 3–4) and who had **not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit** (v. 3) we have the Spirit baptizing these **twelve men** (v. 7). This is the same thing we saw when the Jews received Christ and were baptized by the Spirit (2:4), when the Samaritans received Christ (8:17), and when the Gentile God-fearers received Christ (10:45–46). The Spirit is confirming that the true

gospel has gone out into all the regions of the world through the words of the apostle Paul. In verses 8–10 we have Paul’s pattern of preaching in the Jewish synagogue first for **three months** (v. 8) before moving on to a focus on the Gentiles, utilizing the lecture **hall of Tyrannus** for two years (v. 9). In verses 11–16 we also see Paul performing many miracles, which he calls in 2 Corinthians 3 the “sign of an apostle.” His words were confirmed by his deeds. This leads to what I want to focus on tonight: what happens when the Word of God intrudes itself the world—into *our* world?

The Word Conquers Us (v. 20)

The first thing we see here about the Word is that *the Word conquers us*. How do we think of the work of the Word in our midst? We want eloquent speeches. We want theological precision. We want application. Then we want to go out and do our normal routine. But do we want to be conquered?

We see that here in verse 20 where we read one of those great summary verses about the Word in Acts: **So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily**. The word of God can do this because it is the *Word of God*. Oh, how we need to be praying throughout the week and when Sunday comes pray even more, “Conquer me, Lord, by your mighty Word! Conquer our minds that are so filled with junk all week and that therefore want to hear what is convenient. Conquer our wills that are so selfishly curved in upon ourselves. Conquer our hearts that are so dissatisfied because of our sins.” As one hymn says, “May thy Gospel’s joyful sound conquer sinners, comfort saints.”

The Word Changes Us (vv. 17–19, 26)

And because the Word is powerful to conquer us *the Word changes us*. There is a powerful illustration of the power of the Word to change us in our story. There was a Jewish high priest named Sceva and he had seven sons. And when they played around with the name of Jesus they were overpowered by a demon. Then we read: **And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled** (v. 17). Then we read the results of true conversion: **Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all** (vv. 18–19). This comes up later in the story when the Ephesians complain about Paul saying, **And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods** (v. 26).

And notice that there was a literal cost involved in following Jesus: **And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver** (v. 19). A *drachma* was a silver coin that was a day's wages. The value was fifty thousand day's labor! Let me apply this and say that not only is there an initial work of conversion that has a cost, but that we constantly need to count the cost of following Jesus, and be willing to lose that he may change us. This is where it gets uncomfortable for us. We want to follow the Word but then the cares and pressures of the world encroach around us. What do we do? I heard a dear saint say once that we as parents are called to train our children

to be Christians, which lasts a lifetime; we are not called by God to raise up the next great superstar, which fades. And if the world requires us to forsake assembling together on Sunday for the sake of its activities, it is obvious what our response should be: turn your back on those activities and find another thing to do.

The Word Challenges Us (vv. 23–34)

And as the Word conquers us and changes us *the Word* also *challenges us* because it brings us face to face with an ungodly world. We read here that **there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way** (v. 23); in other words, there was a huge controversy about Christianity and its societal effects on the lives of its followers. The idol-maker **Demetrius...gathered together...the workmen in similar trades** (vv. 24, 25) because Christianity was cutting into their business (vv. 26–27). And this led to a huge confusion and riot in the city (vv. 28–41).

Children, let me say to you that being a Christian means you do not value the same things your friends value, your team mates value, or even your extended family values. And it's going to be hard to live in the world when everyone wants you to skip church, to give in a little here and a little there. "It's only one service, it's only one Sunday, God will understand." But are we Christians or not? Are we followers of Christ for seven days for just one day? And how important is Jesus Christ if you are willing to turn your back on him for a game, for an family gathering, or for an event? And parents, what are we saying to our kids when we allow our families to do this? Do we follow Christ or convenience?

The Word has intruded our lives. Let God do his work! Amen.