



NOW FOR THE REST OF THE STORY
Acts 18:23-19:7

We have been preaching and teaching our way through the marvelous book of the Acts of the Apostles. I have shared with you that the book of Acts is a very important transitional book. We have seen and studied the importance of those transitions for evangelism and the ministry and mission of the church – as the Holy Spirit drove the church out into the world.

Last week we saw how the Lord shared with the Apostle Paul a vision in Corinth – and how it renewed his soul and spirit - and he evangelized the city of Corinth for 18 months. At the appropriate moment and time – he concluded his work and made a brief stop in Ephesus and eventually back to Antioch from which he had started. This was the conclusion of his important second missionary journey. Like our missionary, Jessie – who was with us a few weeks ago – he enjoyed a short sabbatical.

Today – we begin with another important transition – the beginning of Paul’s third missionary journey. There is no ‘rocking chair mentality’ for Paul. He rests only to begin again. It begins with Paul visiting and sharing fellowship and nurture with the body of Christ at Galatia and Phrygia. These churches were very dear to Paul’s heart.

Ephesus – much like the world of the Roman Empire – is similar to ours. It was an arrogant and degraded society. It struggled with injustice, disease, sexual immorality, and political corruption.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia Minor. It was the marketplace of Asia Minor. Some of the most famous court trials of that era were held in this capital city. It was a city of great wealth, culture, and architecture.

When Paul arrived at Ephesus the very first thing he saw on the horizon was the famous Temple of Artemis or Diana by its Latin name. The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This was the crowning jewel and glory of the Ephesus community. Much of her life and culture was centered around this landmark. The Temple complex became the major banking center of Asia. People made sacred pilgrimages to the Temple every year. She was the goddess most worshipped and venerated in the Mediterranean world.

Ephesus – like Corinth – was a wicked city. She was famous for charms and spells called “Ephesian letters.” A colleague shares that “the major problem in Ephesus

was that it was a center for witchcraft. Superstition – demonism – witchcraft held this city in its grip. The city was filled with priests, magicians, witches, warlocks, and quacks of every description.”¹ Much like Corinth – the city looked nice at a distance – but was rotten to the core the closer you got. Always be careful of the glitter and bright lights.

In March, 2003, Mary and I spent a week in Edinburgh, Scotland. We were privileged to attend a prayer service at St. Giles Cathedral which was the center of the Scotland reformation led by John Knox. We walked and shopped along the Royal or Golden Mile. However, our guide shared with us that this once great city was now the center of drug trafficking and black magic and witchcraft. To think that John Knox once had a vision of winning the entire nation of Scotland for Christ. When we had visited the great capital cities of London and Athens we heard much the same report.

When God calls you to ministry and mission for the kingdom of God – you must know what you are up against so you will understand why the baptism of the Holy Spirit was important for ministry in Ephesus – and anywhere – even here in New Holland.

For reasons known only to Dr. Luke and the Holy Spirit – we see the entrance of the biblical character Apollos into our biblical drama. Apollos was considered one of the greatest orators of his time. He was called the “Golden Tongue” – which meant he could be very persuasive. He had great academic credentials – being trained in Alexandria’s great universities. It is believed he studied under the great Jewish scholar and philosopher Philo. Therefore he was well-versed in the Old Testament.

From our lesson today we learn that he spoke with energy – fervor - and conviction. He not only had head knowledge – but spoke from the heart as well.

Somewhere in his journey of faith he came in contact with John the Baptist or his disciples. Because Apollos was a seeker of truth and had a great interest in spiritual matters – he responded to the teaching ministry of John the Baptist. We know from the recent Advent sermon that John the Baptist only prepared the way for the Messiah – he was not the Messiah. People flocked to the Jordan River side for the spiritual scrubbing that John offered. Apollos recognized humanity’s need for repentance and a savior. He knew the role and purpose of the Messiah – but had not yet come to know him as a ‘living presence’ in his life. He talked accurately about Jesus as an historical figure – but not personally as his Lord and Savior. Apollos had not yet come to know of the death – burial – and resurrection of Jesus – his ascension – and the day of Pentecost. He knew of Jesus – but he did not **‘know’** Jesus. Churches all across America and the world are filled with folks like that. They are close to the kingdom – but have not yet fully submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

There is a reason that Dr. Luke begins the book of Acts with the disciples waiting in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus – to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. William Barclay teaches: “It is quite possible for a power to always exist – but for men and women to experience it at a given moment in their life. For instance –

humans did not invent atomic or nuclear power. It always existed – but only in our time have we tapped into it. So God is eternally Father – Son – and Holy Spirit, but there comes a moment when we experience that power – which has always been present.”² In the Apostles’ Creed we do share the words, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The baptism of repentance – this spiritual scrubbing by John – was an important first step. It signaled a desire to walk in a new direction.

We acknowledge our need for a savior and new birth. However, John the Baptist shared with those who came to the Jordan River – “I baptize you with or in water for repentance – but after me will come one who is more powerful than I – whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” **(Matthew 3:11-12 NIV)**. The Holy Spirit grants to us the power and presence of God – to sustain us in the new life that we now walk in. Here the new life that Christ’s death and resurrection makes available can emerge.

Please notice it is Priscilla and Aquila who Paul has strategically placed in Ephesus who hear Apollos speak – and quietly invite him to their home for dinner (our first hint they are Methodists). They see and hear Apollos is speaking accurately – but nobody has shared with him the rest of the story. You can almost imagine the joy that must have flooded into his heart when he heard that the Messiah has actually come. As Paul Harvey would say, “Now for the rest of the story.” I believe that in the greater New Holland area – there are legions of folks who know about the historical Jesus – but do not know him as Lord and Savior and are waiting for you to share the rest of the story. Apollos – with Priscilla’s and Aquilla’s blessings – goes down to Corinth and helps the church plant there.

He becomes a powerful force for the Lord in Corinth – so much so that a certain part of the fellowship claims loyalty to him **(I Cor. 3:4)**. Paul must correct that kind of thinking in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

Now let us turn our eyes to **Acts 19:1-7**. We see Paul arrives in this great city to discover twelve disciples. Paul asks if they had received the Holy Spirit upon becoming believers, and they respond that they know nothing of a Holy Spirit. “Into what then,” he asks, “were you baptized?” “Into John’s baptism,” they reply. Paul reminds them that in baptizing, John was pointing away from himself to Jesus, the one John said would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Yes, “these disciples have heard of Jesus, and seem to believe in him, but lack the power necessary to sustain them in Christ’s life and way. Faith has begun in them, but is dramatically short of what it could be. They remind me of so many American Christians today: they know about Jesus, they believe in him, but have so little experience of him and his power in their lives. To live a Christ-like life, one needs the power of God.”³

Paul proceeds to baptize and commission the twelve in Jesus’ name. As he lifts his hands from their heads, the Holy Spirit engages them, and they begin their growth in faith. Immediately they are caught up in the two things that are essential for growing into the Christian life: worship and ministry. They begin to speak in the ecstatic speech

common in the worship of those days, and they begin to prophesy, which means to speak openly and clearly about their faith. Worship and ministry – these are the two places where the Spirit of God most regularly engages us to change us, to make us more Christ-like and more Christ's own.⁴

Our Long-term Strategic Planning Committee has tried to get across the message of the importance of everyone being involved in a learning experience such as Bible study – adult classes – or some ministry place to serve. For here, you put your hands to the plow – and the Holy Spirit engages you – and the work of spiritual formation and transformation begins. As we give ourselves to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – in worship, study and service – God gives himself back to us.

When Paul came to Ephesus he found a city that had everything – except the living God. We know from Solomon and his journey of faith that we can try to fill our lives with everything that the world offers – but that dull ache of emptiness just won't go away. You can have all the marbles and money – but it is still only marbles and money.

I love the story of the senior Pastor who invited the youngsters down for the Children's sermon. He said "Today, I want to talk about frogs. Children what do you think about when I say the word 'frog?'"

One small lad raised his hand and said, "Pastor – I think of God."

The pastor replied – "Why did you say that?"

He said, "I know you did not bring us down here to talk about frogs."

Paul was in Ephesus to talk and testify about the living God – who had revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul knew Ephesus – just like Athens – was a most religious city. Ephesus was one of the most tolerant cities for religious expression in that era. As long as you honor Caesar or the emperor – you could worship any other god you wanted.

However, we know from the rest of **chapter 19** that the preaching of Paul about the lordship of Jesus Christ threatened the people of Ephesus to their very core.

It always does. When we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – it means exactly that. Either he is Lord of all – or he is Lord of nothing.

Hopefully, by now you understand why Paul had to be sure that all the disciples then – and now – must receive the Holy Spirit. You can **not** do ministry without this important relationship. It was the Holy Spirit empowering the Apostle Paul that enabled him not to capitulate and bow down to the cultural and secular forces of that time. He transformed them.

We are a 'called out' people. We are not a survey crew – or a Gallup Poll people. We are a Spirit-anointed people. Once we are transformed – then we can share in the transformation of others. You can't share what you don't have or have experienced.

Let me tell you again about a man called John Wesley (hopefully a name known too many of you) who the Holy Spirit touched and whose mission and ministry transformed the entire capital city of London.

On two occasions Mary and I have taken the Wesleyan Heritage tour. We saw with our own eyes the place where Wesley sent the missionaries and lay preachers off to the New World with the commission to offer them Christ. He also stayed in ministry and mission in London as well.

The secular historian J. Warren Breedy in his book **ENGLAND BEFORE AND AFTER WESLEY** writes "England was spared the bloody revolution of France because John Wesley returned to England its soul."

The 18th century was one of the worst chapters in the life of the great city of London, England. There were 30,000 homeless children on the streets of London. Alcoholism destroyed many a family unit. Animals were tortured for sport by the rich. Factory workers were chronically misused.

The prison system was a disgrace to such a civilized society. All of this changed because a man named Wesley traveled the land offering Christ – not frogs. When I visited London in March, 2003, I wondered who would be the John Wesley of the 21st century to that great city.

In closing, I want to share this personal testimony. The Holy Spirit has taken me to places I would have never gone myself and caused me to do things I would never have conceived of doing myself. It has elevated the work that I have done and granted insight and inspiration I would never have achieved by myself.

I once heard Michael Jordan, perhaps the greatest basketball player ever, share in a TV interview that his team had lost and his performance was lousy because they had not played with any spirit.

That same principle works, not only in the sports arena, but also prevails in the sanctuary as well. It's the difference between offering frogs and offering a relationship with the living God.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
February 1, 2009
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ENDNOTES

¹ Ray C. Stedman Library, "**Discovery Paper No. 11,**" www.raystedman.org.

² William Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible Series, THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,** revised edition, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, page 12.

³ Fred Anderson, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church pulpit, NYC, sermon of 1/11/2009, accessed 1/24/2009, www.mapc.com, page 5.

⁴ Fred Anderson, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church pulpit, NYC, sermon of 1/11/2009, accessed 1/24/2009, www.mapc.com, page 5.