

Acts 19

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[0 : 00] The 1980s philosopher Phil Collins once wrote, you always need to hear both sides of the story.

! The first explanation is about people, people that God used to persuade you, to speak to you about the gospel.

The second explanation of how you became a follower of the Lord Jesus is about the grace of God and God's total undeserved kindness. Both those things are true.

People come to faith because of the work of other people and because of the work of God. At the end of the day they're the same thing, aren't they? And in actual fact that reflects a reality that is true all the way through this book of Acts.

What I'm going to call two stories. There's the story of what the early church and the early Christians were doing. But there's also the story of what Jesus was doing by his spirit.

[1 : 21] Acts is rightly called, isn't it, the Acts of the Apostles. But it could also be called the Acts of God. Both those stories are important. And they are inextricably linked.

You always need to hear both sides of the story. And so as we come to this chapter in Acts 19, what I want to do is I want to really talk you through the chapter in kind of four different headings. And then I want to go back over the story and give you four things that God is doing. So really there's eight points. But I didn't want to tell you that. Four really.

Versus one to seven. Can you look it down? It's Paul and the disciples with John. Paul and the disciples of John. He's been in Ephesus chapter 18.

You might remember that. And the Ephesians have gone to him and said, Paul, can't you stay a little bit longer? Paul has declined. Nevertheless, he told them, I will come back if God allowed him to.

[2 : 22] And so here is Paul and the return of Paul to Ephesus. And when he gets there, the first people that he meets are disciples of John the Baptist. And they obviously see themselves as believers.

But for some reason, Paul is not sure they've got the same picture. So he asks them, have you received the Holy Spirit? They say, received the Holy Spirit? We haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit.

And so Paul asks them about their baptism. And they admit, well, we received the baptism for the forgiveness of sins of John the Baptist. So Paul helps them to understand, doesn't he, things more fully.

The first thing he does is, he says, you need to know that John's ministry, I was pointing forward. It was pointing to the one who came after him. So look again at verse 4 of the chapter.

Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance. Telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him. That is Jesus. And so Paul baptizes them again.

[3 : 26] And he baptizes them into the name of Jesus. Paul places his hands upon them. And the Holy Spirit came to them. They speak in tongues.

And prophesied. Again, it is a picture, isn't it, of a mini Pentecost. That is the point. What is happening here is unique. It is quite unique.

Because you and I, when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the moment that we believe in him, we receive the Holy Spirit. People don't, ordinarily, break into tongues or prophecy.

This is an unusual time in the history of the church. The Old Testament era has come to an end in many ways. John the Baptist is the era's final prophet.

And the New Testament era has arrived with the coming of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit. So this is, in the book of Acts, a transitional time. And here we find people who have not made the

switch on that day of Pentecost.

[4 : 37] The speaking of tongues and prophecy were a sign given to the early church of this new era's arrival.

We mustn't expect what went on in the early church, in that foundational period, to be mirrored exactly today. And that's why elements of Pentecost are again seen in Acts chapter 19.

These people must know Christ and they must have his Spirit. And so Paul is seeking a servant at the end. That's the first section. The second section, and Paul preaches publicly. 8 to 11.

Paul, usual strategy, where does he go? First of all, first stop in town, you go to the synagogue. To the Jew first. The Jews, many Jews, as per normal, refused to believe, despite Paul spending three months there arguing.

And very persuasively, many had hard hearts. They're described in verse 19, aren't they? As stubborn, as obstinate. They publicly criticise the Christian faith.

[5 : 41] They refer to it as the way. That's what the Christian faith was first known as. The way. I think it's referring back to Jesus saying, I am the way. The truth and the life.

And so as a result, Paul leaves the synagogue and goes elsewhere. And he chooses to rent a lecture hall, a town hall, where he's able to hold a lunchtime service. With people who wanted to come.

People who wanted to engage. Amazingly, he preached at lunchtimes for two years. And the outcome, according, well, it's remarkable. Listen, look at verse 10. It continued for two years, Paul speaking in this lecture hall, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

That is an astonishing statement. All the Jews and all the Greeks. Well, that is kind of everyone, isn't it? Presumably, that doesn't mean that everyone came and visited the lecture hall in Tyrannus and heard Paul speak.

But I think it's trying to suggest to you and I that those who heard Paul in that lecture hall and maybe debated with him, they went back to their towns and their villages all over Asia and they talked about that message so that the news about Jesus spread everywhere.

[6 : 59] The reach of Paul's ministry in this way is incredible. And I guess that's another reminder to you, isn't it? That obstinate opposition and public criticism cannot stop the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly, and we turn to verses 11 to 22, and we see there the power of God at work. Verse 11 and 12 tell us about these miracles that Paul was able to perform.

Verse 11, God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick and their diseases left him and the evil spirits came out of them.

This is unique, isn't it? Other people in Ephesus, I'm hearing about this, they saw this, they thought it's very, very exciting and suddenly they want a slice of the action. I was telling somebody this week who was my age and we were talking about when you were in school.

Do you remember on a Monday or a Tuesday of the week, somebody would come into school with a yo-yo? Do you know what a yo-yo is? And by Friday, everyone in the school had a yo-yo.

[8 : 12] It was this astonishing thing, wasn't it? Do you children know what a yo-yo is? You don't know what it is, do you? Ask your parents about what a yo-yo is. But it was this astonishing craze, wasn't it? Everyone had a yo-yo.

If you didn't have a yo-yo by the end of the week, you were badgering the amount of time. You felt terribly left out. Well, something similar is happening in verses 11 and 12. I told these seven sons of Sceva, they're magicians.

They look at what Paul is doing and they think we've got to get a piece of this action. But the name of Jesus is not some talisman for these people.

It's gone, pear-shaped. Verse 16, you have this extraordinary incident. The evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, Paul I recognize, but who are you? And the man in whom was the evil spirit leapt on them, mastered all of them, overpowered them.

So they fled out the house naked and wounded. But God is at work even in this, isn't he? People of Ephesus, as a result of this, came to realize that what Paul was doing was not magic.

[9 : 16] He really did have the power of God. Listen to what verse 17 says. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear.

And the name of the Lord Jesus was held high in honor. But if you read on, people weren't just awed, they were also repentant.

Verse 18 and 19 tells us that they came and they confessed to what they'd done. They confessed their sin. Sorcerers, these magic men, came and publicly burnt their sorcerer's scrolls at huge personal cost, we're told.

People were turning from darkness to light, from the occult to the gospel, turning from their sins in repentance to the Lord.

And Paul summarizes it, doesn't he, in verse 20, the word of the Lord, we've seen it before, spread widely, grew in power. The last section, verses 23 to 41, is the big uproar.

[10:22] The big uproar. A big uproar was caused by the ministry of the gospel in Ephesus. Verse 23 calls it a great disturbance.

No little disturbance. It starts with a guy called Demetrius, he's a silversmith. And he stirs up his fellow silversmiths in Ephesus, all of whom made a lot of money out of creating shrines to the local goddess of the time, Artemis.

And these guys have a bit of an economic problem, because as people hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus, they're starting to repent and turn away from their idolatry. And as a result, there's less work for these guys to do, and there's less trade for these guys to sell.

And the Artemis idol industry is suffering. They can see their monthly bank balances getting smaller, and the Christian church across the road getting bigger.

And when Demetrius tries to convince the other silversmiths to do something about it, he doesn't make it sound like his motive is money, does he? He makes it sound that he's very concerned for the goddess Artemis, and her worship.

[11:42] Listen to what he says in verse 27. And there is a danger that not only this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.

The little speech is very effective. All the tradesmen that have got together to listen, and Demetrius, they are roused by this speech, and they start shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And before you know it, the whole city is up in arms. There's an angry mob. And they're looking for a scapegoat, and so they lay their hands on a couple of Paul's colleagues, Gaius and Aristarchus, and they take them to the theatre.

Paul wants to go and speak in their defence, but his friends talk him out of the commotion. And so verse 32, most of the crowd are in such an uproar, they don't even know why they're there. They're just swept up in the moment.

A Jewish man, Alexander, at that point, stands up, and he speaks to the crowd, but he's shouted down, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

[13:10] Well, in the end, the authorities get wind of it, the city clerk turns up, and he manages to settle the whole thing down. And he urges the people, don't get so worked up.

As if the great god Artemis needs you to defend her. He reminds the crowd that Gaius and Aristarchus, they're not guilty of any crime. And he says that if Demetrius and his mates want to make a complaint, go to the courts, and he sends them all home.

I guess it's a little reminder to you and I, that God sometimes will use secular officials to provide justice and to protect his people as they speak about his word.

It won't always be like that, but sometimes it will be like that, isn't it? That's what we're praying with the Assisted Suicide Bill, that even those who don't want anything to do with the gospel, that God would cause them to vote to protect life.

Well, that's a quick summary of Acts 19. At least from one side of the story. It's what Paul and his colleagues are doing and how people are responding to them.

[14:25] But what I want to do now is to look at the other side of the story in Acts 19, the story of God's work. Four observations. One from each of the sections.

Number one, the necessary spirit of God. It's the most obvious observation of all to make in Paul's interactions with the disciples of John.

In verses 1 to 7, Paul believed that they must have the Holy Spirit. Paul was not content to leave them as they were.

He thought it was imperative that they know more about Jesus and they receive his spirit. So much so that he baptized them again. And that reminds you and I that the spirit of God is absolutely necessary for the Christian life.

If you want to know and follow Jesus, the receiving of the spirit is not a secondary matter. It is essential.

[15 : 38] The Holy Spirit is not an optional extra. We need the Holy Spirit to help us to see who Jesus really is.

We need the Holy Spirit to help us to grow in the likeness of the Lord Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit to enable us to serve Jesus. And it is for those reasons that the New Testament talks often about the Holy Spirit and what he does in the life of the Christian and what he does in the Christian church.

We need the Holy Spirit like we need the Lord Jesus. We depend on him like we depend upon God our Father in heaven.

And it ought to be a source of great rejoicing for people like us in the fact that God gives his Holy Spirit to people so generously. And what we see here calls for gratitude.

And this is what God does all the time, isn't it? He knows what we need before ourselves.

[16 : 53] And he supplies what we need with generous grace. And that is definitely true when it comes to the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian this morning if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus then the Bible says that you have God's Holy Spirit living inside you.

What does he do? He assures you of God's love for you. He points you to our future in heaven. He teaches you about the Lord Jesus.

He shows you your need. He grows you in the character of the Lord Jesus. He brings about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The Holy Spirit has given you gifts that you might build up the body of Jesus as you serve. And God has given us all of that by giving us himself his spirit.

And we ought to be very, very grateful. The second thing we see about God's story in this passage is the irrepressible word of God.

[18 : 10] The unstoppable word of God. That's the section, second section, isn't it? Paul is preaching in the synagogue, in the lecture hall, and there's great obstinance, great stubbornness on the part of his hearers.

But the word goes out so much that we read in verse 10 that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And that is astounding.

And not only that, in the next section, there are people out there trying to muscle in on Paul's gig.

Trying to reproduce his miracles only to discover that Jesus is not a genie in a lamp.

Jesus is not at the disposal of anyone who just uses his name. But even that incident causes people to fear God and to honour Christ's name.

People repent of their sins and that familiar phrase that we read in Acts 6, do you remember it? The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

[19 : 24] And if only that were true in our day, in our city, if only people in Ealing and the surrounding area would hold the name of Jesus in high honour, as verse 17 says, if only the Lord's word would spread and grow in power, as verse 20 says, if only everyone who lived in Ealing might hear the word of the Lord, verse 10.

And I trust that, like me, you are praying for those things. You are asking God to make them happen on your street. And of course, we can have very real confidence, can't we, that this is a prayer that God wants to answer.

Because the word of God is irrepressible. opposition cannot hold it back. Imposters cannot knock it off course.

Circumstances cannot derail it. It's one of the great themes in the book of Acts, isn't it? God's word is uncontainable. You cannot stop it no matter what you do.

God's work does its work. And as we talked about last week, I think the book of Acts has been written for us as a church to grow expectancy in our hearts.

[20 : 55] To make us confident of this. I don't know about you but I don't know who you're thinking of inviting to Hope Explored. There's two neighbours who live over the road.

I have great fun with them and I'm terrified of asking them. I was speaking this week and I nearly asked them and I didn't. I bottled it. But the book of Acts, isn't it, it must give us confidence as we think of the people that we want to come and hear the gospel that the word of God is unstoppable, uncontainable.

Of course, there will be days when there will be opposition, there will be neighbours that say no to us. And there are times when opposition to the gospel seems very great and it looks like nobody wants to listen.

But there will be days, there are days, when people hear the gospel and respond with joy. When they welcome God's message.

When they say to us, I'd love to come, I'd love to hear. And they repent of their sins because God's word is powerful to do that. Do you believe that? Because God's word is powerful to do that.

[22 : 08] Do you believe that? Very enthusiastic. And we ought to trust him confidently to do it. Number three, the transforming power of God.

That's the thing we see in the third section, isn't it? We saw how God's word changes people's lives. We see how it draws them into costly repentance, costly turning away from their sin and their idolatry and walking towards God.

And in that moment of repentance, the Ephesians, the Ephesian believers, they set an example for you and I, for all who would come after us. So, for me and for you, one of the implications of this chapter is to ask ourselves some pretty hard questions about repentance.

Is God's word transforming our lives like it did here? Or are we resistant to it? And I guess that is one of the most striking things, isn't it, about the repentance of these Ephesian sorcerers.

Verse 19, they are willing to give up something that was very, very valuable to them because they saw that Jesus is worth far more than what they previously valued.

[23 : 35] And so they were willing to give up their sin. If you're here this morning and you're somebody that wouldn't describe themselves as a Christian or you're not sure that you are, I think this raises a fundamental question.

Could it be that the very thing that is stopping you from becoming a Christian, living for the Lord Jesus, is deep down you know that you would have to give up some things?

Probably one thing. Maybe you're a young person here and you've been taught the truth of the gospel, you've been taught to know and love the Lord Jesus, you can never remember a time when you weren't prayed for, you can never remember a time when your mum and dad didn't tell you about the Lord Jesus.

But there's something stopping you following him. And there's something stopping you living for him. And do you know what it is? Let me tell you what it is. It is that deep down you know that you would have to give up something.

Maybe it's some secrets and maybe it's not that. Maybe it's being in the in crowd. Maybe it's one of those kind of things. But you're hanging on to it and you will not give it up. And the Ephesians tell us, they tell you this, give it up, it's worth it.

[24 : 56] It is so, so worth it. Give it up for Jesus. They would say what you gain in Jesus is infinitely more than 60,000 pieces of silver or however many it is.

Jesus is far, far more worthy. Will you turn away from your sins and start living for Jesus?

Of course you might say, well, I need to know more, I'm not ready to make that decision. Well, come to Hope Explored. Come again to it, sign up to it, talk to someone about it after the service.

But Acts 19 also raises questions, doesn't it, for those of us who already are Christians.

Because repentance is not just how the Christian life begins, is it? It's how the Christian life continues. And being honest with ourselves and with God about our failures, and honest with others and confessing our sin and turning away from them, it's costly.

Repentance is still costly for the Christian, isn't it? It may be this morning that you've been a Christian for many years, and it's still possible for you to find yourself in a situation a bit like these Ephesian sorcerers, that you're doing something that you know is not right.

[26 : 37] And as you think about it now, you feel the heat of it and your conscience burns within you. And to repent of it would be very embarrassing perhaps and confronting, but these verses ask us whether we're ready to do that.

and they ask us to see Christ clearly, to see who Jesus is clearly and so also to see that what we're hanging on to is actually not very much at all compared to Jesus, compared to Jesus and the

forgiveness that he offers.

And Acts 19 provokes you and I to think hard this morning about where we see the transforming power of God in our lives. And are there things this morning we've just got to let go of?

The final thing from God's side of the story is this passage invites us to see something about the divine majesty of God. The divine majesty of God.

I choose that phrase carefully because it's used in the passage, but you'll have noticed it was used about Artemis, the false God. Verse 27, Demetrius expresses this anxiety that he feels if more and more people turn to Jesus, then their goddess is going to be robbed of her divine majesty.

[27 : 58] And we may wonder, mightn't we, whether a God who can be robbed of her divine majesty is actually very majestic at all, or very divine. And then you see the crowds chanting, great is Artemis of the Ephesians, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

And it's hard not to think, isn't it, they're trying to talk themselves into it. Don't misunderstand me, the one true God doesn't need anyone to protect him.

God's divinity and his majesty can never be stolen from him. You cannot rob God of that. He doesn't need people to declare his greatness in order to be great. God has demonstrated his unique power and wisdom in the world and in human history from the very beginning until now, supremely in the death and resurrection of his son, the Lord Jesus.

And those who worship God, we do not need to whip ourselves up into a frenzy, do we? Because we have a settled and a quiet assurance in our hearts that God is who he says he is.

And that Jesus, God's son, is to be held high in honor. God's God. The people here in Acts 19 are desperate to shore up Artemis' image and future.

[29 : 23] And while many in Ephesus are chanting Artemis' name, great is Artemis the Ephesians, the one true God goes about his work really quietly, making his word known by his spirit, transforming his people's lives.

love and he is the one we worship and the only one who deserves to be worshipped. And so once again, can I make sure this morning that you see that?

you see the divine majesty of God. And I want to encourage you to keep worshipping him today, now and always.

Grateful for his spirit who is with you, confident in his irrepressible word that cannot be stopped, and continually repentant because of his power.

May the story of God's work in Ephesus be the story of his work here in us and amongst us that we may know as a church the word of the Lord spreading and growing in power to the high honour of Jesus.

[30 : 41] Amen. Let's pray.