

When a city is visited by God, part 1

Intro to series Life-lessons. Ephesians paints the new life through the grace of Jesus.

Background: Being a prisoner in Rome who was awaiting trial, Paul could not revisit the church in Ephesus, as he had revisited other churches he had started during his first and second missionary journeys. Paul had planted the church in Ephesus on his third missionary journey about three to five years earlier. He wrote his letter to the Ephesians to do what he could not do personally. He wrote to strengthen and confirm the believers there in the grace of God and the gospel of Christ, as well as to encourage them in performing their works of service and holiness in response to God's saving grace.

So what was this geographical place like? How did it all start in Ephesus? What happens when a city is visited by God?

Acts 19:1-10 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. ⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for 3 months...not his normal pattern. There was much work to be done there, and with a population of 300,000 people, it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

Ephesus was a large city that was situated by a river that led into the ocean, much like Gothenburg. Multicultural harbors and cities of commerce, key cities for the region. Great possibilities, but also great challenges of sin.

1. Paul's opportunity

I Cor. 16:8-9 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

v. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Look at what happened in just 2 years time. Every single person heard the Word. Not all got saved, but all had the opportunity...because Paul saw a door of opportunity and walked through it!

2. Paul's opposition

Paul had to deal with a number of kinds of religion in that region:

- Inadequate religion

- Imitation religion

v. 11-12 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

v. 13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed.

v. 15 One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?"

3. Paul's overcoming

When God visits a city things happen! The power of the gospel will tear down the temples of hell...even in our area.

We have many opportunities...and sure, there are many obstacles, but we can be overcomers in Jesus' name, and tear down the temples of hell!

That's what happens when a city is visited by God!