

Jesus Eyes the Ends of the Earth

Acts 19:21-20:5

Acts of the Exalted Jesus Sermon Series

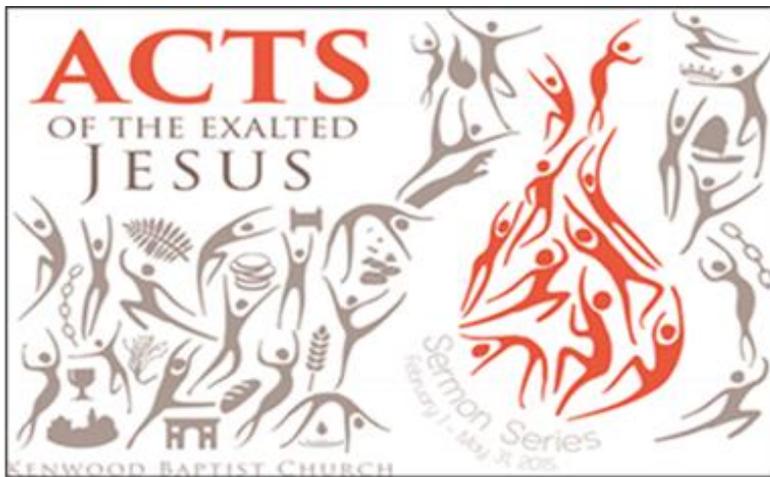
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 24, 2015

TEXT: Acts 19:21-20:5

We continue this Sunday in our spring series on the Acts of the Exalted Jesus. This Sunday has many features to it: it's Pentecost Sunday; it's Memorial Day; and it's Teen Challenge Luncheon



Sunday, so there are a lot of elements this morning. But, I want you think this morning in terms of Pentecost for just a minute. Pentecost is that interval between Passover and this summer celebration, the interval between Jesus' resurrection from the dead and His exultation to the Father. Think back how long ago Easter feels from now, and that's the

interval that Jesus spent with His disciples after He had been raised from the dead, teaching them of the Kingdom, and prompting them that they were to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth.

This spring, we have been following Christ as He moves out in an ever-increasing sphere of witness. This morning, we look at the ministry that takes place in Ephesus, and it is really an impossible task. Luke tries to summarize in Acts 19 and 20 three years of ministry in about 10 minutes. How can you summarize three years of ministry in 10 minutes? Yet, that is the challenge of these chapters. These chapters are anecdotal. There are several different scenes that are included, and there is a lot that happens in Paul's ministry that Christ does through him and others, as we'll see. I want to approach these chapters with a question: What does Paul discover, what do the followers of Jesus discover, about Christ in this period of ministry? We have the privilege, if you know Christ, of offering Christ to people. As you know Christ, then you discover what it is like to walk in faithfulness to Him; what it is like to have Him as your Lord and Savior, leading and guiding your life. If all we had in the Scriptures was Acts 19 and 20, what would we know about the journey of following Jesus Christ? A Hindu scholar once asked

Dr. Stanley Jones: "What has Christianity to offer that our religion has not?" and Stanley Jones' response was just two words: "Jesus Christ." That's what we have to offer. Jesus Christ is offered to us in these chapters, and I want us to enjoy together this morning five ways that we see Jesus at work.

It is an impossible task to summarize so much ministry, and I want to pick up the story of Ephesus before the passage we read together. The verses before this, in Acts 18, talk about Jesus' ministry in the city of Ephesus. Paul arrives in Ephesus, and the first discovery we make in this ministry city is that **Jesus corrects the partially informed**. Do you know someone who has partial information? Jesus, in His great kindness, corrects people who are partially informed, and we see this happening in Ephesus. The first example of this is a man named Apollos. In Acts 18:24 we learn of Apollos:

"Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures."

He is even teaching in the synagogue, proclaiming Good News about Christ. Yet, we see that Jesus uses the people that we met last week, *Eagle and Pristine*, Priscilla and Aquila, to bring him alongside and teach him a little more. Aren't you glad that Sunday School teachers keep growing in faith? Aren't you glad that means that when you start teaching Sunday school you don't plateau and stop learning and growing? There is more to discover of Christ. I love hearing from Sunday School teachers of children and adults: "I'm really growing. I don't know about the students, but I'm growing and learning." Jesus graciously uses this more mature couple to allow Apollos to grow and become more effective in his ministry. This happens also with another group of disciples, in Acts 19. In Ephesus, Paul meets a group of disciples, and yet they know only about the baptism of John, which is a baptism of repentance. This is a fascinating incident. It is unique in Acts. This is a people who know that we should repent from our sins, but it seems they don't know about faith in Christ and being filled with the power of the Spirit. Paul then teaches these people, and Christ uses him. The first thing we see in Ephesus is Jesus' correcting the partially informed, so do not be discouraged if you know just part of Christ. He will pursue you and teach you and train you.

The second thing that we learn or see Jesus doing in Ephesus is that **Jesus tames tyrants**. This is very encouraging. In Acts 19, Paul begins to preach and teach in the synagogue. There is opposition to his preaching and teaching, and he is driven out. Just as in Corinth, where he went next door to the adjoining house, in Ephesus he moves next door to a lecture hall, a public building. We might think of it as a theater, a high school, or a space that's available for ministry. In Acts 19:9, we read:

"He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus."

Can you imagine a school and the man in charge of the school is called Tyrannus? Tyrannus is not a given name, it's a nickname. Just imagine the principal of the school: Mr. Tyrant! Can you imagine perhaps the teachers called him this, the students? We don't know, but it was known as the *Lecture Hall of Tyrannus*. What is interesting is this place begins to be used daily, but there is no record of paying a charge. It is used every day, and as we read in Acts 19:10:

"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."

One of the manuscripts of the New Testament, *Manuscript D*, indicates in the margins that the hours of Paul's daily lectures were from 11:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon. This is the quiet time in the Mediterranean, probably the time when there weren't regular classes, and what I find astonishing is that Mr. Tyrannus says: "You can use my school every day for five hours at no charge." Do you think Jesus Christ can still do that? I do. If Jesus can have Roman emperors who do not know Him pay for expanding Christian mission, He certainly can persuade the heart of a tyrannical principle to say: "Use my school every day for the cause of Christ." The ministry grows: Jesus Christ tames tyrants. In God's providence, Paul teaches 3000 hours in this city, and it is that 3000 hours of teaching that clarifies his thinking, and out of that 3000 hours of teaching, he will later write the letter to the Romans, his greatest letter, crystallizing this time of instruction.

What else did Jesus doing in Ephesus? The third thing we see is that **Jesus rescues those trapped in the occult**. We read in Acts 19 that God did extraordinary miracles; people with demonic power in their lives are set free. The city of Ephesus was known as a place where magic was practiced. There was even an ancient expression that to write in Ephesian letters was to write incantations or magic spells. When people who were involved in the occult saw the power of Christ, they turned away and embraced a superior power, that of the Lord Jesus. We read that these people who were involved in sorcery and magic turned to Christ and held Him in great honor. They turned away from their sins. We read in Acts 19:18:

"Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done."

They turned away from their magic and sorcery and other types of practices that God opposes. This is no small event. Acts 19:19 tells us:

"A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas."

This is one of the only times it is a good thing to burn books. They burn them, and it turns out to be a massive number of people. There were 50,000 silver coins worth of magical papyrus incantations burned. That is a lot! The power of Christ is being seen in the city.

What does Jesus continue to do in Ephesus? Not only does He correct the partially informed; not only does He tame tyrants; not only does He set people free who were bound to magical occult practices, but the fourth thing **Jesus reveals** to the city of Ephesus, and to us this morning, is the profound truth **that gods made by human hands are no gods at all**. This is a focal point of Paul's preaching ministry in this large city. Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor, with a population of probably 250,000. It was the cult center for the worship of the goddess Artemis. The Temple of Artemis, as we will see in a moment, was the largest Greek building in the world at that time. It was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and yet the Gospel comes and Christ is proclaimed. The Gospel reveals that man-made gods are not gods at all. Paul begins to preach and share the Good News of Christ in Acts and is having such an effect that, in fact, the attendance is down at the Temple of Artemis. The business deals for small silver replicas of the shrine of Artemis and the idol of the goddess is down. As Pastor Scott said a few weeks ago: "The Gospel is bad for some types of business." Isn't it good, actually, that that Demetrius' sales are plummeting? Isn't that a good thing? Isn't it a good thing that there is no back order for papyrus from magical incantations? Wouldn't it be wonderful if certain types of business in our city started to wither and dry up because of the number of people that were turning to Jesus Christ? Demetrius, like many who profit from the business of idolatry or human degradation, is upset, and he accuses Paul publicly in Acts 19:26:

"This fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all."

He recognizes the proclamation of Christ. Christ's gospel, Christ's person, turns over this false truth that is so ubiquitous in the human heart. We worship things that we make. In Isaiah 44:9 the Lord says:

"All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame."

Isaiah offers a parity of the person who cuts down a tree and burns half of it in the fire and carves the other half and bows down and worships it; or a person who pours a sculpture of gold into a statute and worships it. Instead, the living God says in Isaiah 46:3-4:

"Listen to Me, house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

The Lord God is the living God, and He calls for our obedience. John Calvin said: "The human heart is an idle factory and we love to worship the creations of our own hands." We look for

security and trust and confidence and meaning and significance in the things that we manufacture and place around ourselves, instead of turning to God. And yet, when the Gospel comes to our heart, these false things that bind us drop away. Paul says in Acts 17 that we should not think that God is like gold, silver, or stone, an image made by human design. He says in 1 Thessalonians 1:9:

“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

Well, Demetrius and his guild are upset because Artemis is being dishonored. I mentioned the Temple of Artemis, a massive structure, the largest building of this type. It was the first building ever constructed completely of marble. It was twice the size of the Parthenon; 127 columns around it, each column 60 feet high. The Temple of Artemis was placed in the list of one of the seven wonders of the world, and this elaborate structure was built for one main reason: it was built to house an idol, an idol that the Ephesians believed had fallen from heaven like a meteor. This idol statue in



the middle is the statue of the goddess Artemis. Here she is. A few of her statues have been found; none of Demetrius’ silver replicas or shrines have been found. They probably have all been melted down into earrings, rings, jewelry, or nose rings. Artemis was the goddess of fertility, and you can see this stunning, unique feature of the goddess of fertility. She was the goddess of the hunt. She was revered. We laugh, in part, when we see her, especially her unique frontal features, but you know, our grandchildren or great-grandchildren will laugh at some of the things that we have

trusted in. All the idols of this world fade away. Jesus Christ alone has power to save. I want my grandchildren, I want your grandchildren, to speak of what we did and the Person that we served with admiration and delight. If you serve Jesus Christ, there will be no regrets.

The people of Ephesus had not ever heard the good news that God came to this world, not as a meteor, not as a statue that should be worship or controlled, but God came to this earth in the Person of His beloved Son, and that Jesus Christ descended from on high. Paul wrote later in

Ephesians 4:10:

“He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.”

The solution to human idolatry is Jesus Christ who comes from on high and rescues us from our sinfulness and claims us as His very own. Jesus reveals, not just in the teaching of the Gospel that idols are as nothing, but He Himself shows that idols are as nothing because He, the living, breathing, exalted Son of God, has come to this earth, and that changes everything. He came, He suffered and died, and He is now exalted at the right hand of the Father, as exalted Son.

The fifth thing we see Jesus doing these chapters is that **Jesus gives to us an eternal life worth living** now. Jesus, from heaven, uses these early followers, and He draws them into His service. Paul stays in Ephesus for three years. The church grows and multiplies there. People like Epaphras discover the Gospel and leave from Ephesus and plant churches in Colosse and other cities. We discover what we long to discover, and that is a meaningful purpose for our lives. There is not a meaningful purpose in a business like Demetrius'. The meaningful purpose of our lives is discovered in serving Jesus Christ, belonging to Him. We see this early Christian missionary team growing and extending. I love the number of minor characters, of secondary characters, that are included in Acts. Paul's ministry in Ephesus grows and multiplies, and later in his ministry, he returns to the city of Ephesus with a group of men, people that have been touched and reached: Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus. This is a mixture of Roman names, Greek names, and Hebrew names, and they are drawn in and find their identity and mission in serving the Lord Jesus.

Paul's final stop in Ephesus is to stop there on his way to Jerusalem. He will be imprisoned in Jerusalem and brought to Rome in chains, as will see next week. His last stop in Ephesus is a very moving picture in Acts 20. He stops on his way to the city; he is racing to get to Jerusalem by the season of Pentecost. He stops, and he meets with the leadership of this church, this thriving church in Ephesus, and he tells them in Acts 20:18-21:

“You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Paul continues and says in Acts 20:24:

“My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the

task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Can you say: "My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me?" That is where we find the meaning of our lives, in doing what Christ assigns for us to do. I was at the library recently. I love to see the books that are out, that the library is highlighting. They are trying to catch the attention of all kinds of different segments of patrons. There are romance novels; there are business books; there are few kids' books. I stopped the other day and picked up a book by Gene Simmons who played guitar for the rock band *KISS*. It was a business book, and I thought: "What is Gene Simmons writing a business book for?" He talked about *KISS* and marketing *KISS* and inventing, and his plan. As he went on, he talked about how vacations are only for wimpy people and that you should just work all the time - work your regular job, and with your nonworking time, you should work to advance a second career. You could see as he talked about it, that though this book appeared to be offering a vision of success, it was offering a vision of success that was exclusively self-referential. It was a vision of success that that sought meaning in material gain, that sought meaning in self-promotion. I doubt that our children or grandchildren will stream to purchase the hit singles or albums for *KISS*. I don't think it will last that long. I don't think that book will be placed in the Library of Congress to be remembered and studied by future generations. It will pass through like many things. It will pass through like Demetrius' trade in silver shrines.

I don't know what you're trusting in this morning or building for your core identity, but the vision of Christ's ministry in Ephesus is electrifying. It is electrifying that Jesus Christ is active and takes people with partial information and puts them on the straight road, that He takes people like the tyrannical principle of this school and says: "Guess what! You can be in My service and use your facility for a teaching center for the Gospel." Jesus Christ sets people trapped in the occult free. Jesus Christ demonstrates with His own incarnation that the things that we make are not worth serving. God has made us, and he is worth serving. In the end, it is Jesus that gives us an eternal life worth living now, and we find joy and significance and lasting pleasure in finishing the tasks that Christ gives to us. This is the challenge of Jesus. If we could have interviewed Paul and his companions, and said, "Tell us what you discovered of Jesus in Ephesus," I think these are some of the things he would say, and he supplied for us profound motivations and incentive to make Christ our own this morning.

Amen.