

## Gospel Triumph: Gospel Imprint – Acts 19:8-41

Before we moved to Michigan in 2017, we used to drive here from Virginia to visit Bethany's family at least once a year. I always knew we were getting close to the exit we needed to take when we passed the Woodhaven Stamping Plant on 75. I'll be honest with you; I had no idea what happened at the Stamping Plant until we moved here.

I'm hardly a car guy, but if you don't know what takes place at a Stamping Plant, here's the basic idea. Sheets of metal are pressed or stamped into molds to create things like doors and hoods. The metal goes into the press flat and without a form to it and it comes out in the shape of the mold it's placed into. Of course, in a Stamping Plant this is a highly industrialized process, but humans have been using molds and stamps for thousands of years. In fact, one of the most well-known passages of Scripture uses the metaphor of a mold or impression to make an important point. Listen to Romans 12:1-2.

The picture given in verse 2 is that you can be shaped or stamped by the world around you, or by the Word of God. The mind of a Christian must take the shape of God's Word and God's truth and not the culture. When the gospel begins to spread and individual minds are transformed through it, larger cultural changes start to happen. And in that sense, the gospel confronts the culture around it, but it also leaves a gospel shaped imprint on whatever culture it enters.

And this imprint is not always comfortable for people in the culture and that's what we will see in Ephesus as Paul's ministry really gets going in Acts 19:8-41. Here's what we will see today: **3 Ways the Gospel Impacts the World.**

### **1. Christ's Kingdom Advances (vv. 8-10)**

It's a little hard to keep track of Paul at times in the narrative of the book of Acts. Chapter 18 had him traveling all the way from Corinth to Jerusalem and then starting back again to cover ground he's already been over. Look where we find him in 19:1. Ephesus was a major city in the district of Asia and Paul lands here and ultimately spends a very long time here.

Last time we saw him initially preach Christ to some disciples of John the Baptist. They come to faith and are baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the gift of the Spirit. At this point Paul does what he typically does and heads to the synagogue. Look at verse 8. 3 months was a long time to continue to attend the synagogue and for the Jews to listen to him. He's boldly persuading and reasoning about the kingdom of God.

This phrase doesn't appear that often in the book of Acts, but it's like the operating system behind everything in the book. We hear about the kingdom in Acts 1 and at the end of the book in Acts 28. It's a shorthand way of speaking of God's rule and reign promised in the OT and fulfilled in Jesus who died, rose, and ascended to the Father and now sits on the throne of David reigning from heaven and who will one day return to finally install his kingdom on earth.

Not everyone hears the message of the kingship of Jesus as good news. Look at verse 9. Paul leaves the synagogue and moves to this hall, which was like a public venue for discussions of philosophy and learning. Look at the beginning of verse 10. He spent two years in this hall teaching and instructing on the Way of Jesus the King. The impact was significant. Look at the rest of verse 10.

People who came to Ephesus engaged with Paul's teaching and instruction and as the church in Ephesus was established, the proclamation of Christ's kingdom went out to more people. Again, this is how the whole thing works. Notice in verse 10 it says that all the residents of Asia heard. Of course, this isn't saying every individual in this district, but it is saying that the gospel reached every part of Asia. Let me read you a list of the 7 churches that the Apostle John wrote to in Revelation 2-3. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Guess where these 7 churches are found? Asia. We don't know for sure if they were all born during this 2-year period, but it's highly likely that at least some of them were.

This first way the gospel impacts the world is the basis for the other two. The basis of any imprint the gospel has begins with the steady, faithful, accurate explanation of the gospel of the kingdom. And that leads to change in every other area.

## **2. Genuine Power Overcomes (vv. 11-20)**

So far in Acts we've seen God work through healing and signs and wonders and he's about to do that again with Paul here. Let me walk you through this story and then I'll draw out two implications. Verses 11-12. The word miracle emphasizes power and it's clear that God is the one doing these works through Paul. Again, this passage isn't a reason for us to start marketing prayer napkins that bring healing on late night TV. God worked in unique ways here to authenticate the message being proclaimed and that's exactly what happens in Ephesus, but in a surprising way. Look at verses 13-14. They were treating God here like any other spiritual power. They thought they could manipulate this power by saying "in the name of Jesus" like a magical formula. Not so much. Look at verses 15-16.

And what is the result? Look at verse 17. God's power at work shows the difference between any other spiritual claim and His genuine power. And it's because of this difference that the name of Jesus is magnified and extolled. The first implication of God's genuine power is that He truly does have all authority, even over the powers of darkness and this should lead us to exalt Him and honor Him.

We tend to downplay the spiritual powers at work in our world because we live in a secular environment. But the promise of the gospel is that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. We have no reason to doubt the power of God and his authority over darkness.

The second way God's power is revealed here is through the change that it brings to people's lives when they are rescued from sin and darkness. Look at verses 18-20. These were people who were believers, but had been holding on to some aspect of their former lives. They see God's genuine power over darkness and the imprint this makes on them is repentance. They see the need to toss aside every value that could possibly compete with allegiance to Jesus Christ.

And notice that this change costs them something. They willingly give up what had real world value to it. Verse 19. Luke mentions this number in the narrative so that we understand how God's power forms and changes our values. I think it can

be very tempting for us to often downplay the work of the Spirit in our hearts and the change that has been made in us and our values.

There's a prayer in the Valley of Vision, which is a collection of Puritan prayers, that has come to mean a lot to me recently. It's called Assurance. There's a line in this prayer that gets to this point. We often lack assurance because we don't accept by faith that the Spirit has truly changed us. And when we don't accept this change by faith, our actions don't reflect the change or we don't recognize the change. Here's the line, "I wrong the work of grace in my heart if I deny my new nature and my eternal life." The part that stands out to me is the statement "I wrong the work of grace in my heart." When I don't accept the change and let the reality of that change shape my values, I'm not living in reality. I'm denying the very work of grace God has promised that He has done.

But when we accept the change and repent of our former way of life and lean into the work that God is doing in altering our values, look at the impact this has. Verse 20. Now, I'm sure this book burning didn't go unnoticed. When people are sacrificing a way of life in this bold of a fashion, it will bump up against cultural commitments. And this is our final way the gospel impacts the world.

### **3. Cultural Commitments Threatened (vv. 21-41)**

Before Luke tells us about a major clash in Ephesus, he briefly explains Paul's travel plans. Look at verses 21-22. In all likelihood, he's going to Macedonia and Achaia to collect an offering for the church in Jerusalem and then he wants to take the gospel to Rome. This previews the rest of the book for us, but things won't unfold as simply as Paul plans it here. In the mean time, he stays in Ephesus for a while and things start to go crazy. Look at verse 23.

We've seen Christianity called "the way" a couple of times in this passage and I think that's on purpose. Luke is contrasting the way of life of the unbelieving world with the pattern of life of followers of Christ. You can only be on one way at a time. Look at verses 24-27. No city in the Roman Empire was more tied to a single god or goddess than Ephesus and Artemis or Diana. Every area of life, social, economic, political, and religious were fused into one way of life for the

Ephesians. Tinkering with the worship of Artemis impacted the economy and the effects would spread from there. Demetrius gathers the guild of those who made silver idols for Artemis and gathers support against Paul. He accurately describes Paul's teaching (v. 26). He's worried about the financial impact of Christianity, but he's also concerned that Artemis will not be honored and extolled. The word translated "magnificence" here is the same root word as "extolled" in verse 17. Here's the point. Either Jesus will be extolled or false gods will be extolled and having it both ways won't work.

This either/or situation leads to what basically amounts to a riot. But as you listen to me read about this riot, notice how unhinged it is. People are confused and it's more of a mob mentality rather than a careful persuading and reasoning of the worship of Artemis. Listen to verses 28-34.

Just when it seems like it will just continue on, a local politician enters the scene to quiet it down. Look at verses 35-41. The bigger concern of the town clerk was getting in trouble with Rome for rioting.

Notice who is absent from the proceedings? Artemis in any real and tangible way. The followers of Jesus responded to genuine power and real-life change, but Artemis fails to show up. This story sort of reminds me of the prophets of Baal with Elijah in the OT. They scream and shout for hours on end and no response.

But the overall message is clear. The gospel places an imprint on the culture in which it gets planted because of the changed lives it produces. This story in Ephesus is really the last extended account of Paul's ministry in one city and it's the longest he spent in any one city. I think Luke wants to sort of leave us with the message of the gospel's work in lives in Ephesus. This is the sort of thing that continues to this day.

And let me just say in closing, this change from the way of cultural idols to the Way of Jesus Christ is an absolute gift of grace. It frees us from the bondage of sin and death and opens up the way of life and joy before us. Let's pray.