**Spread the Word!**

Acts 19

Farmers today can irrigate their crops to get through an extended drought. But **farmers in ancient times** depended on RAIN. There were ***things a farmer could do*** and had to do to prepare - plow the fields, sow the seed, chase off animals. But after doing everything in their power, farmers had to sit back and simply pray for rain to come. There were things they could do and very clearly things they could not do, ***that only God could do***.

This principle applies directly to evangelism. There are **things we can and must do** - pray for our friends and neighbors who don’t yet know Jesus; build relationship with them so they know we care about them; and take advantage of opportunities to have spiritual conversations leading to the gospel. There are things we can do - but there are other **things only God can do**.

* Only God can open blind eyes to see the truth about Him.
* Only God can soften a hard heart.
* Only God can bring conviction of sin to a proud spirit.
* Only God can draw a sinner to Jesus, giving them the gift of spiritual interest.
* Only God can open deaf ears to hear and understand the good news of Jesus.
* Only God can transform a sinner into a new creation in Christ at the moment of saving faith.

Acts 19 gives us an inspiring picture of ***how we can join God in His work of reaching an entire region with the gospel***. Here is a map of Paul’s third missionary journey.

By spending two years in Ephesus, there on the western coast of what was then called Asia, the gospel spread through that entire region! Acts 19 is a key passage for strategic planning in the church. **Reaching CITIES** is very important in order to penetrate a culture and help the gospel spread through a larger area. Let’s walk through Acts 19 and learn three essential practices to reach our region with the gospel.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commit **Everything** to Jesus

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.” Acts 19:1

***The Lord’s timing*** is so significant in the advance of the gospel. Remember how Paul had wanted to work in Asia, but the Holy Spirit overtly forbade the stop there? Instead, Paul had a clear vision of a man in Macedonia - so he went up to Philippi, on to Thessalonica and down to Corinth and Athens. Paul was totally led by the Holy Spirit, and the timing was write in Macedonia and Achaia, and it wasn’t yet ripe for Asia.

But just because Paul hadn’t gotten to Ephesus didn’t mean the Lord wasn’t at work and the gospel wasn’t moving. **God is ALWAYS working** - we just have the privilege of joining Him from time to time. By the time Paul finally arrived in Ephesus there was already a gathering twelve men - twelve believers, some of whom probably had wives and children.

Remember, in Acts 18 Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus and left **Priscilla and Aquila** there. Apollos, an educated Jew from Africa and follower of Jesus came to Ephesus and was teaching in the synagogue. He only knew the baptism of John the Baptist, so Prisicilla and Aquila pulled him aside and helped him understand the baptism of Jesus, and the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord led Apollos over to Achaia and eventually to Corinth.

It could well be that the twelve men in Ephesus were ***converts from the early ministry of Apollos*** and they somehow didn’t get the full training. So Paul explained that John was the forerunner, preparing for Jesus, but John’s baptism was not sufficient - Christians need the Holy Spirit! So Paul baptized this group of believers and they were all immediately filled with the Spirit.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commit **Everything** to Jesus

“On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 19:5

**Baptism** represents dying to yourself and rising to new life in Christ. You go under water as a picture of the death and burial of your old life. Then you come up from the water as a sign that you have been raised to new life in Jesus. Baptism is a public commitment to Jesus as YOUR Lord and Savior. The water does not save you, it simply represents the grace of the Lord Jesus that did save you and wash you clean.

And the beauty of baptism is that it is wonderfully clear and definitive. You have been baptized or you have not. Faith in Jesus can sometimes be fuzzy. Do you believe in Jesus? Sure! Most American would say. Have you committed everything to Jesus completely? Well, that’s a much bigger question. But that’s exactly what baptism represents: ***your old life is dead and gone and your life now belongs entirely to Jesus.***

If we have any chance of reaching Tampa Bay with the gospel, it must start here: with total commitment to Jesus, desperate and complete surrender to Him.

Just as those twelve men were ***powerless apart from the Holy Spirit***, so we are powerless apart from the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches, without Him we can do precisely NOTHING.

Later in the chapter **seven sons of a Jewish priest** tried to cast out demons in Jesus’ name. A particularly strong demon spoke to them saying, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (v. 15). To those seven young men the name of Jesus was like a magic word - a powerful token. But since they didn’t actually know Jesus, they weren’t actually committed to Jesus, the demon had no need to submit to them in Jesus’ name. There is a really important lesson here!

**Jesus has the power, not us!** If you think YOU have the power, expect to be humbled in the very near future. Those seven guys got a severe beat down that left them bleeding and naked. Your humility lesson may not be so graphic but God has His ways of reminding us that He has the power and we do not. Word of this encounter spread:

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commit **Everything** to Jesus

“This became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, and fear fell upon them all.” Acts 19:17

**In times of revival** - times when God moves in power - this is the common observation: that an overwhelming sense of the presence and power and glory of God settles on a region. There is a weightiness to life and death and a clarity about God and His holiness. Having the supernatural world exposed so visibly with the seven sons of Sceva brought this spiritual heaviness to the city. It wasn’t just a Jewish thing anymore - word spread all over town. And look at the response!

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commit **Everything** to Jesus

“Many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.” Acts 19:19

Those who had committed to Jesus came and publicly repented of their past idolatry and superstition. They collected stacks of books on magic and burned them and Luke estimated the value at 50,000 pieces of silver - close to ***$100,000 worth of Wicca and witchcraft***, magic arts books. Publicly confessing and giving up these valuable books to be burned represented full commitment.

When I was a sophomore or junior at Taylor University in Indiana, two young men came from **Wheaton College** and shared ***how revival had come to their campus***. As students gathered at Wheaton to worship and to pray, a sense of conviction came over them and they began to weep and cry out to God. One by one students came forward to publicly confess sins and repent. They brought immoral magazines and music and movies and piled it up in the chapel.

After these two men shared, a similar thing began to happen at Taylor. Every night there were meetings for worship and prayer. And one by one students went forward, confessing sins and repenting.

This is **what revival looks like in history**. ***And it is what revival looks like PERSONALLY***: committing everything to the Lord Jesus. Holding nothing back. Surrendering totally. Baptism is the sign that you have started with your commitment to Jesus. But devotion to the Lord doesn’t end there. We must continually give ourselves to Him - confessing when we hold out and fall short - and taking steps to thoroughly and clearly repent.

***What do you need to bring to the Lord today?*** What do you need to lay on the altar? What does it look like for you to commit EVERYTHING to the Lord Jesus?

Hear this, brothers and sisters - we will not reach anyone with the gospel until we commit ourselves completely to the Lord. The gospel demands our full allegiance, our total commitment. Jesus gave everything for us, and the call of the cross is to come, follow Jesus and take up your own cross.

That’s the first essential step to reaching our region - we must commit everything to the Lord. Second, we must:

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commission All Believers as **Evangelists**

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul… came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.” Acts 19:1

The story of Acts is the story of normal, ***everyday Christians bringing the gospel*** with them wherever they went. How did the gospel reach Ephesus? We don’t know for sure. But we know that it did. Most likely it was regular, working class believers who moved from Jerusalem to the province of Asia and, as they were living life, shared the good news about Jesus with others until this little group came together.

These guys were actually behind the times, since ***all they knew was the baptism of John***. Remember, there was no 6:00 news, no Fox News App, no internet, no telephone or even telegraph. News travelled very slowly. These guys knew about John the Baptist. Their intel was around 20 years old. So Paul had very good news for them!

The points is - that is how the message traveled - with **everyday Christians**. The idea of paid, full time, vocational pastors - or priests as they became known - would not develop for another 300 years. Most churches were led by lay people, lay elders. And most of these were started by lay people as well - average, typical believers just being obedient to the Great Commission and working to share the gospel and make disciples wherever they went.

***The gospel will not spread through our city if we wait for the paid pastors to do the work.*** The only way every man, woman and child in our city will see and hear the good news of Jesus Christ is if people like you and me walk across the street or walk across the office or walk across the gym to talk and as we talk with people we point them to Jesus. It’s that simple and that profound: ALL BELIEVERS. It’s not the chosen few, the gifted, and the extraverted. Spurgeon said, ***“Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor.”***

After explaining the gospel more clearly to this group of twelve men:

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commission All Believers as **Evangelists**

“When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.” Acts 19:6

Everyday, church-going, God-fearing believers - suddenly filled with the Spirit and look at the result! All of them began speaking in tongues and prophesying. Remember, ***speaking in tongues*** in Acts almost always meant recognizable languages - and was a confirmation that the Holy Spirit had actually been given to groups like Gentiles, Samaritans and, in this case, some obscure disciples in Ephesus.

Prophesying didn’t mean predicting the future, it meant speaking boldly in the name of the Lord, like a prophet. The Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise of Jesus to bring all of His teachings to mind and to give understanding of the Scriptures. Since the early church was still collecting the letters that would make up the New Testament those gatherings still depended on Spirit-filled Christians interpreting and explaining the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Christ.

The point is, **these twelve were not apostles**, they were not super evangelists, they were normal believers. But when the Holy Spirit filled them, they were empowered to speak with power, authority and boldness.

And that is how it should be for all of us in the church! **We are commissioned** to encourage and challenge one another - to spur one another on to love and good deeds. We are commissioned to speak to one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We are instructed to build one another up in the Lord. And, of course, we are all commissioned to make disciples of all nations. So the Spirit’s filling did not end with just the fellowship there, but was certainly part of how verse 10 and 20 were fulfilled as the gospel spread through the region.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commission All Believers as **Evangelists**

“The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily... Paul pass[ed] through Macedonia and Achaia… He sent two of his helpers…” Acts 19:20-22

This was a key part of Paul’s strategy - he would enter a city, preach the gospel to all who would listen, train and **appoint leaders and then he would leave**. Just as Jesus entered towns, preached and left, so part of Paul’s ministry involved LEAVING. And it seems from tradition that all of the apostles followed that pattern. Some stayed longer in one place or another, but it seems all of them moved on and moved forward - appointing and empowering others to carry on the work where they had been.

We saw in Acts 18 the importance of team ministry. Paul always brought believers with him for support in the work but mainly to develop them as leaders in their own right. Like Jesus, ***Paul was always thinking about the next generation of leaders*** - he was always pouring into people.

**Who are you investing in right now?** Who are you training and pouring into? As you seek to make disciples and train up the next generation, who are you spending extra time with, studying the Word with, serving alongside?

Our mission as a church is to commission every one of us as an evangelist. YOU are an ambassador for Jesus - with all of His authority to represent God to the people of Tampa Bay. You have been specifically appointed to this task!

Remember Acts 17:26

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Commission All Believers as **Evangelists**

“He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live. God did this so that people would seek him.” Acts 17:26-27, NIRV

***God has positioned you on purpose!*** He has determined the exact number of your days and the exact boundaries of your land. Do you see the purpose for those two divine determinations? “So that they would seek him.” Who? The people God determined to place next to you!

* **Why are you still breathing air?** There are still people for you to reach and bless and love and serve?
* ***Why are you still alive in 2021***, in spite of COVID and all kinds of other global craziness? Because there are people God wants YOU to share the gospel with!
* ***Why do you live and work and eat and play where you do?*** Because God positioned you in those exact locations for the sake of the other people who live, work, eat and play in those same places.

**Every one** of us is an evangelist! Every one of us is an ambassador for Jesus of the good news of His finished work. ***Jesus died for you!*** As soon as you understand those four eternity-changing words, you are ready to share the gospel. You could memorize the whole book of Romans and rehearse Ray Comfort presentations but all you need to know is that Jesus died for you - and share that simple message - wherever, whenever and however you can!

We commission missionaries, we commission pastors and church planters. Let’s do a **commissioning service** today for every single Christian in the room. Listen to Matthew 28.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.’” Matthew 28:18-19

What is the **basis** for our commission? The authority of Jesus.

What is the **substance** of our commission? To make disciples.

What is the **scope** of our commission? The whole world - all nations.

Hear this, Christian believer: based on the authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, YOU are hereby commissioned to make disciples of all nations. Everyone please stand and receive your commission.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.’” Matthew 28:18-19

* **YOU** are commissioned as an evangelist and disciplemaker

Fulfilling this calling and command from our Lord involves evangelism and disciplemaking. Each of us is empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim and explain the good news of Jesus Christ to the people around us - **YOU are commissioned as an evangelist**.

Each of us is also commanded and empowered **to make disciples** - to model, teach and train Christ followers to obey all that He has commanded us. And guess what those commands include? The command to make disciples of all nations!

***Please place your hand on the shoulder of the person in front of you*** or beside you. Or for the three people in the front row, just stretch our your hand toward the front here. Let’s feel the communal part of this commissioning. We are laying hands on one another to call on the Lord for His power and guidance and blessing as we commission one another to carry the good news of Jesus to our neighbors and the nations.

Let’s pray!

Prayer of blessing and commissioning.

Amen. You may be seated.

How can we reach everyone around us? First, we must commit everything we are and all we have to the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, we must commission every follower of Christ as an evangelist and disciplemaker. Third:

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Communicate the Gospel **Everywhere** you can

“And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly…” Acts 19:8

As we’ve seen, this was Pau’s standard practice for both theological and practical reasons - bringing the gospel ***“to the Jew first.”*** In this case in Ephesus it lasted three months before he was chased out by Jews who “became stubborn in unbelief.” Our evangelistic principle is to start with those closest to us.

What is your ***“circle of influence”***? Who does not yet know Jesus in your family, among your close friends, your co-workers, your neighbors and acquaintances? Make a list. Pray regularly through that list. Listen for the Holy Spirit to direct you to contact someone. It may not be the first few names that come to mind.

***What do you do*** when someone isn’t interested or even tells you to stop it? Look at verse 9.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Communicate the Gospel **Everywhere** you can

“He withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.” Acts 19:9

This is **what Jesus modeled** and taught his disciples - if one town doesn’t welcome you, shake the dust from your sandals and go on to the next town. Whenever Paul was rejected in one place, he simply went to another - taking it as God’s sovereign direction to Him and God’s judgment upon those who were not rejecting him but were rejecting Jesus and the gospel.

***Don’t ever give up*** on resistant family members and close friends, but also don’t get discouraged when the time just isn’t right. Sometimes we can make things worse by being a nuisance. It may be better to back off for a few months and simply pray and look for ways to love the person. Often it takes some kind of crisis for God to open a hard heart.

The point is to keep sharing - keep reaching out! Just because one neighbor isn’t interested right now doesn’t mean you should give up on your whole neighborhood! Go to the next house! Go to the next friend. Keep praying, keep moving forward.

Imagine what would happen if every Christian in Tampa Bay took seriously the call and commission to be an evangelist! Conservatively, if only 10% of our city are true believers, that would give us **300,000 evangelists**! If each of those 300,000 shared the gospel **once per month** we would reach the 3.1 million souls in our city in **one year**! If there are 500,000 Christians we could reach every man, woman and child in half a year! Look at the results in verse 10.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Communicate the Gospel **Everywhere** you can

“This continued for two years, so that ***all the residents of Asia*** heard the word of the Lord.” Acts 19:10

What continued? ***Paul’s preaching and teaching*** and training in the hall of Tyrannus. What was Paul teaching? Centrally, the gospel - the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus - reasoning and arguing that Jesus was, in fact, the Jewish Messiah. But also, no doubt, **Paul was TRAINING**. He was passing on what he learned from the apostles and from the Lord Jesus Himself - ***how to obey and complete the Great Commission***.

His message was basically - ***“Go tell everyone you can!”*** Paul used every means at his disposal. He said “I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some.” That was Paul’s method and strategy - to get the gospel everywhere and to everyone he possibly could. And as he modeled this, he trained believers to embrace that model themselves. “Follow my example as I follow Christ,” he taught.

Paul taught in the synagogue, and he taught in the marketplace. He preached the gospel from house to house and set up in lecture halls. If there had been bowling alleys, he would have used bowling alleys. If movie theaters, he would have used those. Paul preached the gospel everywhere and in every way he possibly could.

When the seven sons of the high priest Sceva were beaten down by demons - guess what Paul did? He used that very ***teachable moment*** to preach the gospel of freedom and the power of Jesus.

**How to reach Everyone around us:**

1. Communicate the Gospel **Everywhere** you can

“This became known to all the residents of Ephesus… and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.” Acts 19:17

When Paul and Silas were in prison, they sang hymns to the Lord Jesus. When they were free, they preached and taught about the Lord Jesus. When they were opposed, then went somewhere else and told people about Jesus. When there were sick people, they prayed for them and healed them in the name of Jesus. When there were demons to drive out, they drove them out in the name of Jesus.

Everywhere they went, at every opportunity, they told people about Jesus. This is our mission - it is our commission! Here is how John Wesley said it.

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” John Wesley

Probably the most productive evangelist since the apostle Paul, **John Wesley** lived this out primarily by preaching the gospel multiple times every day for his entire adult life. He preached in churches, when he was invited, but mostly he preached in fields and marketplaces. Wherever people would stop to listen to him, Wesley would stop to preach.

But the real genius of John Wesley was actually not his preaching. It was his METHOD - to train and empower ***LAY-Preachers***. In other words, Wesley commissioned all believers to carry the gospel with them wherever they went.

This is how we will reach Tampa Bay with the Gospel! First, we must surrender ourselves completely to the Lord. Second, we must commission every Christ-follower as an evangelist. And third, we must communicate the good news of Jesus as often as we can, as clearly and powerfully as we can for as long as ever we can!

Let’s pray.