

## **October 1 – Called to Give** Third Missionary Journey

Scripture Acts 19:11, 19-27

Today we look at Paul's third and final missionary journey of about four years in length. During this time Paul will re-visit most of the churches he had begun during his first two missionary trips. A shepherd's heart caused Paul to walk to Ephesus instead of sailing there. It was a journey of 736 miles across mountains and valleys. This is the equivalent of walking from Seattle to Salt Lake City! He did this so he could stop and encourage the believers in the churches he had started in Galatia during his first missionary journey. On this trip he challenged them to take up an offering to assist the believers in Jerusalem. This offering was likely intended not only to meet the needs of the struggling Jewish Christian believers, but to build a bridge between them and Gentile believers. Luke, in writing about these years, emphasizes Paul's time in Ephesus where he would have arrived several months after starting out. Estimates of the population of Ephesus during Paul's time vary widely. Some suggest it was the Roman Empire's fourth largest city with a population of more than 250,000. Others suggest the numbers were much smaller, perhaps 90,000. Regardless of size, it was the major city of Asia Minor. Paul had visited here briefly at the end of his second missionary journey. He had left Priscilla and Aquilla to establish a beachhead for the gospel.

Paul will spend the next two to three years in this city. When the Sabbath comes, he makes his way to the synagogue, as was his practice. The leaders soon reject him so he rents Tryannus's lecture hall, which was right beside the synagogue. He teaches here daily for the next two years. Besides teaching people, Paul was also mentoring others and then sending them to take the gospel to new areas or to go and support churches he had already founded.

One of the most amazing things to happen during Paul's ministry was the impact his teaching had on the entire city. Ephesus was known as a center for healing in Paul's day. Through the temples they sold magical incantations with instructions that were meant to unleash healing power upon those who needed assistance. These scrolls or spells have been found in various places around the Mediterranean. Here is an

example. "Give me your strength Abrasax, give me your strength," Say this seven times while holding your two thumbs. There was money to be made selling these incantations. If you were hoping to become pregnant but had been unsuccessful, you knew that in Ephesus you could purchase a saying that promised the likelihood of conception. You would pay a lot for that!

Into the midst of this came Paul preaching that it is Jesus Christ, not some incantation, who breaks the power of demons and heals us. Paul himself, in the name of Jesus, becomes known as a healer. Paul undoubtedly challenged the usefulness of the magic scrolls. So many people came to follow Christ in Ephesus that it began to affect sales. Then something even more dramatic happened. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done in the past. A number who had practiced sorcery brought together their scrolls and burned them publicly." Acts 19:18-19. Someone has calculated the value of the scrolls in today's dollar and has come up with the fantastic sum of five million dollars! The converts didn't simply sell their scrolls to someone else, they burned them as a sign that they were leaving the past behind.

This makes me ask: "Is there anything that I need to rid myself of? Are there things that are a distraction or aren't in keeping with my desire to follow Jesus Christ?" In some cases our scrolls are those things we have previously trusted or made our source of security, but which we now have come to realize that they can't really provide us with hope or help in the way that Christ does.

I am reminded of a story from my father's life. While he was serving in World War II he began smoking. By the time he was discharged he was a chain smoker going through three to four packs a day. In the early 50's many people smoked. This was before we knew how harmful it was to our bodies. He went to a weeklong retreat hosted by the church and was touched by the preaching of the minister. He had planned to go one night and ended up going every night. During this week an old nudge to become a minister burst into flame. He scheduled a meeting with the pastor to tell him that he thought he was called to ministry. The pastor, later a good friend, said that if you had had him rank everyone in the church as to his or her suitability for ministry my dad would have come in dead last. Yet, instead of rejecting him the pastor said, "You need

to change if you are ever going to be a minister.” When my dad asked him what he meant, the pastor pointed at his shirt pocket with a pack of cigarettes in them. He said, “Once you quit smoking come talk to me.” Methodist pastors were forbidden from smoking at that time. My dad stood up, handed him his smokes and said, “I have had my last one.” The pastor smiled thinking that it would never last. My dad went home, burned all of his cigarettes and took all of his ash trays and lighters and threw them in the trash. He would not give them away to another to be tempted. He never smoked again. Was it hard to go cold turkey like that? You bet. He talked about the sleepless nights and all the rest. But for him, it was a symbol of a past that was gone because he had accepted something new.

We all have habits or things we hang on to that we need to let go of if we are to fully embrace Christ. What is God laying on your heart to release?

As you can imagine before the fires cooled on that pyre, the artisans of the community were up in arms. They clearly understood that, if Paul prevailed, their livelihoods were at stake. Demetrius, one of the chief silversmiths, brings together his workers telling them about what Paul is doing. He proclaims that he is doing it because Paul is attacking the great goddess Artemis. Though he talks about faith, it is clear that it is his wallet that he is concerned about. Soon a riot breaks out. They cannot find Paul, but they grab some of his associates and abuse them. Paul wanted to go and address the crowd but others beg him not to venture into the plaza knowing that it would likely mean his death. The equivalent to the town mayor comes and warns the crowd that this is an unlawful assembly and they should go home. The implication is that Roman troops will soon be here. He said that the Christians had not directly attacked Artemis or stolen from her treasury and that if Demetrius had a complaint to come to the next council meeting and lodge it. It caused the crowd to disperse.

What kind of an impact do we have on Sequim? Are we so faithful that it causes some in the community to take notice? Are there businesses upset because those Methodists are causing them problems by their actions? Are there things we should be doing intentionally in living out our faith here that would make a difference? These are the questions that time in Ephesus should make us ask.

Paul now returns to the churches he had first visited and receives their offering for Jerusalem and heads to that city. He wants to be there by Pentecost for worship. We know what is ahead. He will be arrested, imprisoned, and ultimately be taken to Rome for trial and execution. I will share some of this last journey of Paul when I get back because I will have had the privileged to see where he was shipwrecked on Malta; be near where he landed in Sicily; see where he first set foot on Italian soil around the town of Naples; and ultimately see the basilica that was raised over the site of his execution. We will talk about his last witness and the lasting implication of his life to the church when I get back.

Today, think about how those who looked to Paul were always trying to set the past behind them and move into the future. Where do we spend too much time focused behind us instead of asking what God would have us do next? Also, they believed faith would transform their lives and could transform the world. In what ways do we need to live with this imperative and possibility in our lives today?