

Mission Possible

“The Fire of Revival: When the Gospel Confronts Culture”

Acts, Chapter 19

There's nothing more important in this world - in this life - in eternity - than the presence of God. Every time we come together as believers and as the body of Christ, we sense and know the presence of God. If that's not happening, then we have to ask why not.

Psalms 33:12 NIV

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.”

America is a God-idea - that we've been given the privilege and the responsibility to *steward*. America doesn't have a political problem - it has a *spiritual* problem. The answer to what's happening in Washington D.C. and in Austin right now won't be found in the House or the Senate chambers, or in committees developing bills to enact. Those are important and critical to the larger picture, but the biggest issue we have is a *spiritual problem*. America needs a full-on spiritual awakening - and guess what? - *it's happening*.

The UNITE US Movement has been on seventeen university campuses and has seen over 80,000 recorded commitments to Jesus Christ in the last eighteen months from students across America. Jesus is moving among the next generation. Recent research and commentary suggests that America is experiencing signs of spiritual awakening, especially among younger generations.

Barna Group data shows a significant increase in personal commitment to Jesus, with 66% of U.S. adults now claiming such a commitment - that's up 12% since 2021. This trend is especially pronounced among Gen Z and younger Millennials. This renewed interest in Jesus is reflected in new forms of grass-root faith communities and a growing desire for meaning beyond traditional institutions, and we want to throw fuel on the fire, not buckets of cold water. They're hungry, and if the existing churches aren't on fire, then they'll go and find someplace that *is*.

That's why it's important for us to lead the next generation and not be led *by them*. While challenges like declining church attendance and secularization persist, many observers see the current movement potentially as the beginning of a new "greater" awakening in America. The source of all this is God alone, but we also must be praying for the community where we live and for the leaders there, and then be opening our mouths where we live, work, and play, and talking about Jesus. Our goal, job, and responsibility is to make much of Jesus, and make him famous in our time. When we do *that*, he will do the rest.

What can we do? First, we can pray for wisdom, discernment, and Godly strategies to bring our nation back to God's intended foundations of Faith, Family, and Freedom. Second, we can say "Yes" and then we can show up.

The Fire of Revival: When the Gospel Confronts Culture

Everywhere Paul went seemed to be a dark place. Why would God send him into the darkest places on the planet in his time? - because light pierces and out-shines the darkness. God said that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, so we're the ones that are to "go," as the Great Commission says, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.*" As they "*are going*," they do it in lock-step with the Holy Spirit on this, their third missionary journey.

Even now, God wants to show up in the darkest places. He's showing up all over the world right now - in hard places like Iran and Afghanistan - and, he's showing up here. But, because we already have a *little* light, sometimes we don't notice the light that *does* show up - so we need to ask God to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to know. We don't want to miss what God is up to just because we're in a good place, and our nation is better off than it was a year ago.

That doesn't mean that we can stop and go back to living our "normal" lives. It means that we have to stay in the Word, in prayer, in intercession, and keep showing up to meetings, letting our voices be heard in the public square.

1] Bold Faith and Proclamation of the Gospel

So, now Paul is going back to the small outposts of house churches. After he left Corinth, which was a dark place, he went to Ephesus, an even *darker* place. Paul was bold, but he was living the "ordinary" Christian life - he wasn't heads above anybody else. He said he was the *least* of the apostles (or, *missionaries*), but he believed that God could still use the *ordinary* and make extra-ordinary. As he went back, Paul was bringing correction, education, and understanding to fill in any gaps in the churches.

Acts 19:1,2 NIV - The New Disciples are Empowered by the Holy Spirit

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 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.’”

We *all* come from different spiritual cultures, but, at the end of the day, we come because we live and breathe under the banner of Jesus Christ. The most important thing in the world is Jesus in us doing fellowship *together*, and we create this community having Jesus in common with each other. If it’s about anything else, it will bring division, which happens all the time.

Acts 19:3-7 NIV

“So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. 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.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.”

Something *happened* that was not normal. They spoke in other tongues - other *languages* - in a *heavenly* language. This is scary to many Christians, but it’s still a part of God’s plan in moving the Church along. While this was happening, all of a sudden, the believers were empowered by the Holy Spirit, which meant that something would have to change. As Jesus infuses us with the power of the Holy Spirit, he meets us where we are, *but*, he loves us so much that he won’t *leave* us where he finds us.

2] The Value of Community and Relationships

Acts 19:8 NIV - Paul Extends His Stay

“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”

Most of us came from other places to be here. God brought us together because he knew that we needed *community* - we needed a church - we needed family and a place to call *home*. God wanted us to have a home base to work out of that would give us a foundation to grow in our faith and to challenge us in an ongoing basis. Now we have an opportunity to receive the power, presence, and the Person of the Holy Spirit, and to begin to step up in a place of authority and leadership.

Acts 19:9 NIV

“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.”

The lecture hall of Tyrannus was an open venue - it was the public square. Paul showed us that following Jesus is about cultural engagement and the politics of the community. He shouted the name of Jesus, and we're to do the same. It's not just about Bible studies inside the church walls. Our mission on this earth is to make Jesus famous. That's why we're here - it's not to make *ourselves* or our *church* famous.

Acts 19:10 NIV

“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 would spend three years in Ephesus speaking about the Word of the Lord to all of the Jews and Gentiles alike.

Acts 19:11,12 NIV

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 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.”

Paul did this in one of the worst pagan cities of the known world at the time, because the darker it is, the brighter the light shines, and God was showing up in a most unusual way.

3] Spiritual Warfare and Authority

Acts 19:13,14 NIV - the seven sons of Sceva

“Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.’ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.”

They weren't acting out of authority - they weren't followers of Jesus and they didn't know him personally.

Acts 19:15,16 NIV

"One day the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding."

That got their attention. Don't think God won't do something wild and drastic to get our attention. Signs and wonders are *signs* that make us *wonder*. They crack something open in us so that we might consider something we never were willing to consider before - to open our mind and spirit to greater possibilities.

Acts 19:17-20 NIV

"When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 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. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

They were repenting after that. Sometimes we need a "Truth-encounter," where we *hear* the Truth, and the Truth (Jesus) will set us free. There are legitimate power-encounters that we experience, where the Holy Spirit shows up in remarkable and tangible ways - and things shift - the presence of God causes things to happen. We don't want to miss the next wave of God, or to just cheer the next generation on from a distance. We owe it to them to give them a demonstration of the power and presence of God in our own lives.

They should see us having integrity in how we are at home and out in public. They should see the same person in church on Sunday morning that they see at home on Wednesday or Thursday night. What is *that*? That's the life of Jesus bringing integrity to our life wherever we are. It's "*Christ in us the hope of glory*" shining out. We show up and so does he - wherever we are. With the Holy Spirit in us, we don't have to say "*the God who Paul serves*" or "*the Jesus who Paul serves*." No, we have first-hand knowledge now - we know him.

We can say, "*In the name of Jesus, devil, not today! You can't have my child or my spouse!*" We, in the authority Jesus has given us, with a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, can draw a line in the sand that the devil cannot step over. That's who we are - *child of God* - *son of God* - *daughter of God* - *man of God* - *woman of God*.

Prayer

Father, in Jesus' name, we invite You and welcome You to come. Holy Spirit, fill us with all that You are - fill us with Your Presence - Your Person - and with Your Power. We receive You by faith. We receive a fresh filling of all that You are and Who You are. By our choice and by an act of our will and a quality decision we choose to walk in Your power - Your authority - and we draw a line in the sand and say, "not today, devil, not today." We draw a line around our family and our co-workers and say, "not today, Satan, not today!"

Holy Spirit, we welcome You. Produce in us what only You can - Your fruit - Your gifts - Your ministry. Live Your life in us and through us. We welcome You. We honor You.

Thank You Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen