

Place: Lurgan Baptist 6:12:2011

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Reading: Acts 18:23:19:12

29. EVENTS AT EPHESUS

A reporter once visited Mark Twain's haunts in Hannibal, Missouri, U.S.A. some years ago in order to gather material for a story on the famous writer. Samuel Clemens was the real name of the man who used the pen name Mark Twain. While he was there he found an old crony of Samuel Clemens who discounted the glory and fame of his former school friend. He said, "*I knew as many stories as Samuel Clemens. He just wrote them down.*" There is a difference between knowing and doing. Many believers know they need to go into the world to share the gospel. Only a few actually do it. Paul was one of those few. He constantly translated his theology into biography. He had a message and he wanted to share it. Indeed it's interesting that at the end of his second missionary journey he cuts his hair "*for he had a vow.*" (18:18) The Nazirite vow was established in the Old Testament in (Num 6:1-23) It was an act of consecration to God for one's whole life as in the case of Samson, or for a temporary period of time as in the case of Paul.

Perhaps Paul's vow had been an act of gratitude to the Lord for safety and fruitfulness in ministry. We aren't told

the specific reason. But part of the vow involved not cutting one's hair, so that when Paul had his hair cut in Cenchrea, it was a sign that the time of his vow was over. Do you recall that Nazirites couldn't drink alcohol, cut their hair or be defiled by a dead body. When the vow was complete, the Nazirite was to come to the door of the tabernacle, or temple cut his hair and place it on the sacrificial fire that burned there. (Num 6,13, 18) *Now why Paul do this ?* Some think that Paul was in error here, even sin, by entering into this vow. But do you recall his strategy ? The gospel was to the Jew first then to the Greek. (Rom 1:16) My in every city we have seen that Paul's first destination was to the Jewish synagogue or wherever Jews worshipped. You see, as Paul contemplated going to Ephesus he saw this vow as another bridge to his Jewish kinsmen, another contact point for spreading the gospel to them. Here was a man who was willing to become all things to all men in order to save some. (1 Cor 9:19-23)

Do we need to learn from the apostle Paul ? Are there not plenty of areas in which we can identify with non-Christian friends without violating our own conscience and principles ? Was it not D.L. Moody who spent a whole afternoon playing tennis with an unsaved friend and then led him to Christ ? That's the principle of accommodation, accommodating ourselves to the needs of others for the sake of the gospel without compromising our own personal principles. Now do you remember from a previous study how Paul was "*forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia ?*" (16:6) Will here we

are going to see Paul returning to that region from which he was originally barred. You see, sometimes God's "No's," are not permanent sometimes they are "Not nows." And if we submit to God's timetable, we will often see our original desires come to pass, but at a better time. Now keep in mind that Paul engaged in three missionary journeys.

His First Missionary Journey: is from (13:4-14:28)

His Second Missionary Journey is from (15:36-18:22)

His Third Missionary Journey: is from (18:23-21:17)

Paul made his first contact with the city of Ephesus on his way back home after the second missionary yet he refused to establish a ministry at that time, Leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to begin the work he returned to Antioch to report on his glorious adventures for Christ. Now we don't how long Paul remained in Antioch before leaving on his third missionary journey but perhaps it was as long as a year. Just like his second missionary journey he visited the churches and strengthened the believers. But Luke does not describe this journey in detail because his main purpose is to get Paul to Ephesus.

How many of you have ever visited the magnificent ruins of the city of Ephesus ? It's well worth a visit. The grandeur, the structure, the architecture is amazing. The city of Ephesus was an inland city three miles from the sea, but the broad mouth of the Cayster River allowed access and provided the greatest harbour in Asia Minor. Four great trade roads went through Ephesus, therefore it became known as the gateway to Asia. This was a

prosperous business centre for it was located on the trade route from Rome to the East. Ephesus was also a centre of pagan worship. *One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was located here in Ephesus, the Temple of Diana, a massive structure that was long as two football fields.*

With Temple worship there came not only idolatry but immorality. Small wonder businessmen travelled the four major roadways to Ephesus. They came flocking into the Temple to have every sexual fantasy fulfilled. For the worship of Artemis (Diana) was unspeakably vile. Her idol was a gross many breasted monstrosity, popularly believed to have fallen from heaven. (Acts 19:35) The temple was attended by numerous priests, eunuchs and slaves. Thousands of priestesses who were little more than temple prostitutes, played a major role in the worship of Diana. Ephesus, became known as the "***Vanity Fair of the Ancient World.***" Yet it was there, in that midst of that godless city, that God planted a church. Paul's three years in Ephesus (20:31) the longest he stayed in any city were certainly exciting and fruitful. Let's meet some of the people who were involved.

(1) A MAN WITH POTENTIAL

Apollos was the kind of man who stood out in any gathering. He is one of the most significant men in the New Testament yet by in large he is overlooked. My Here was a man with potential.

(a) What a Remarkable Person Apollos Was:

Do you see how Dr. Luke describes him ?

1. He was Educated:

For he was from Alexandria. Alexandria was the second most important city in the Roman Empire. It was a centre for education and philosophy. It was founded and named after Alexander the Great, and boasted a university with a library of 700,000 volumes. Its population was about 600,000 and a quarter of the population was Jewish, and the Jewish community was very influential. Apollos knew the Old Testament Scriptures well for Luke says he was “ *mighty in the Scriptures.*” Indeed if you look at (18:28) it says “ *For he,*” Apollos stretched the Jews to their intellectual limits as he crushed their arguments. John Broadus one of the founders of the Southern Baptist Seminary in the U.S.A. and the author of one of the most influential books on preaching was lecturing his class just nine days before he died. He paused and said this,

Gentlemen, if this were the last time I should ever be permitted to address you, I would feel amply repaid for consuming the whole hour endeavouring to impress upon you two things. True piety, and like Apollos, to be men “ mighty in the Scriptures.”

Broadus then paused and stood for a moment with his piercing eyes fixed on the class. Over and over he repeated these words “ *Mighty in the Scriptures, mighty in the Scriptures, mighty in the Scriptures.*” Apollos knew the Word. Do you ? Many young pastors today are more enamoured with growing big churches by the use of clever

marketing, management principles, gimmicks than they are with being mighty in the Scriptures. Oh, may God make us a people of one book, the book of God.

2. He was Eloquent:

“ *An eloquent man.*” (18:24) He revelled in the messages of the Old Testament prophets and no doubt he could hold a crowd in the palm of his hand. You see, he not only had knowledge but he was able to express that knowledge in understandable and inspiring words. He was a communicator.

3. He was Experienced:

Luke says, “ *This man was instructed in the way of the Lord.*” (18:25) That is, so far as he knew. His knowledge of the gospel was apparently limited to the fact that John the Baptist had been proclaiming the coming of the “ *Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*” (Jn 1:29) Does Apollos not illustrate a principle in the Word of God ? Those who have a hunger to know God will be given what they lack in knowledge. (Jn 7:17) Here was a man who followed the light he had and then God gave him more light in the persons of Aquila and Priscilla. 1, 2, 3,

4. He was Enthusiastic:

For Luke says, he was “ *fervent in spirit.*” Literally, the word means “ *burning or boiling hot.*” He exemplified Martin Lloyd Jones definition of preaching, “ *logic on*

fire.” Here was a man who was enthusiastic, excited, fervent. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have a church of believers like Apollos ? Did you hear about the little boy who walked out of the church building one Sunday ? Out in the porch was an engraved plaque listing all the members of the church who had died in the war. The little boy asked his father, “ *Daddy what’s that ?*” His Daddy replied, “ *That’s for the members who died in the service.*” To which the little boy asked, “ *Which service did they die in Daddy ? The morning or the evening service ?*” Isn’t it amazing that Christians get excited about football, rugby, golf, and the stock market and when they come to church they sit like wooden Indians ? (a)

(b) What a Real Problem Apollos Had:

For did you notice two phrase’s in the context that cast a shadow over Apollos ? Look at (18:25-26) You see, something was missing in Apollos understanding. He accepted John the Baptist message that Messiah was coming. He even believed that Jesus was that Lamb of God. He expounded the Scriptures that pointed to Christ. *But he did not understand the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection. Nor was he acquainted with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost.* So do you see what happened ? “ *They took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*” Aquila and Priscilla filled in the gaps in his understanding, and completed his faith. I mean can you picture this scene ? On the one hand is Apollos educated, a communicator, holding people spellbound with his eloquence. On the other hand is an

older couple, Priscilla and Aquila taking him aside and saying, “ *Apollos, you are so gifted. God can really use you. But we have noticed some inadequacies and we would like to help you.*” How would Apollos react ? “ *Inadequacies in me ? You’ve got to be joking.*” Or “ *Me learn from you ? Who do you think you are to tell me what to say ? I have received a Ph.D. from the Alexandria Training Centre, what kind of decree do you have ?*” I mean wouldn’t it have been easy for Apollos to react like that ? But that the mighty preacher and scholar would be taught by a lowly tentmaker and his wife shows us his genuine humility.

Can you think of anyone this who ministered the way Priscilla and Aquila did ? I can. Is this not the kind of ministry that our dear brother Bob Minnis engaged in ? As he encouraged the young preachers, strengthened the young believers, and as he instructed the new babes in Christ. Is this the kind of ministry you engage in ? Oh, what potential Apollos showed as he headed off to Achaia and into new fields of service.

(2) A GROUP WITH PROBLEMS

At a certain Christian school the teacher taught her class to repeat the Apostle’s Creed, clause by clause, each pupil having his own clause. They would begin each day with this group recitation of the Apostles Creed. One morning the recitation began with the first boy who said, “ *I believe in God the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth.*” The second boy said, “ *I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.*” Then a sudden silence interrupted

the roll call. As the teacher looked up to see what had happened, one of the pupils said, “*Teacher the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn’t here today.*” That’s a precise description of these so called disciples whom Paul encountered in Ephesus. They claimed the name of Christ but something was missing in their lives and that missing ingredient was the Holy Spirit. They said to Paul, “*We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*” (19:2) The Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost but not everyone had heard that. So Paul explained to them that John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance that looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah, while Christian baptism is a baptism that looks back to the finished work of Christ on the cross and His victorious resurrection. John’s baptism was on “*the other side,*” of Calvary and Pentecost. It was correct for it’s day, but now that day was ended. When this group of twelve men were baptised that day, “*the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.*” (19:6) And thus the point of conflict and controversy. Let me deal here with,

(a) THE TEXTUAL PROBLEM:

Look at (19:2) or another translation puts it, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed ?*” The phrase “*since you believed,*” has led to some mistaken ideas from this passage of Scripture. For instance, some people have read this passage of Scripture and they have taught mistakenly that the believer is to ask for the Holy Spirit, after his salvation experience. There are those who teach that. They teach that you’re saved at this point in

time and that at another point in time you are to ask God to give you the Holy Spirit. My I want to tell you that the gift of the Holy Spirit is sovereignly and eternally bestowed by the Lord to every believer at the moment of his salvation. When you’re saved you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, so the believer doesn’t have to ask God to give him something that He has already given to him. Do you recall Paul’s words in Romans ? “*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.*” (Rom 8:9) Now if that’s true then the opposite is true. If you have the Spirit of Christ you are His. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer, every believer at the point of conversion, not at some subsequent time.

A second misunderstanding that has arisen from this question is this. That you can ask the Lord, to give you more of the Holy Spirit. In other words you can get some of the Holy Spirit now and then at a later time you can get a little bit more of the Holy Spirit and then on down the road you can get a little bit more of the Holy Spirit. My when you study the Bible, in relation to the person of the Holy Spirit, there is one thing absolutely clear. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is not an “*it.*” The Holy Spirit is a “*He,*” a “*Him,*” a person. (Jn 14:16-17) And a person does not come in instalments. For instance, when you came in this room tonight you didn’t stand at the door and say, “*All right, I’m going to roll my eyes in first.*” And your eyes come rolling in and jump up on one of the pews. And then you say, “*That’s pretty good. I think I’ll throw a couple of arms in.*” So you pitch in your arms and they come plopping up on the pew. And then you say, “*I think I’ll*

send my chest and my torso.” No, no, no. You’re a person. You’re an individual, and when you come, you come in your fullness and there you are. Well, the Holy Spirit is the divine person, the third person of the Godhead, and when you’re saved and the Spirit of God comes to dwell in your heart, He comes in His fullness and you don’t have to pray to get more of the Holy Spirit down the road. The question is not do you have more of the Holy Spirit, but does the Holy Spirit have more of you ?

Another misunderstanding that has arisen from this question is that people uses this as the basis for “ a second experience,” “ a second blessing,” “ have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ?” But this is clarified when we read it “ *when ye believed ?*” (a)

(b) THE TRANSITIONAL PROBLEM:

Now keep in mind that the Acts of the Apostles is a *transitional period*. From beginning to end in the Book of Acts changes are taking place. In Acts we go from the synagogue to the church, from Old Testament saints to New Testament believers, from a body of Jewish believers to a body the church made up of Jews and Gentiles who are one in Christ. In Acts the dead are being raised. (9:36-42 20:9) *Is that happening today ? Where are the so-called healers in our land who can raise the dead ?* You see, this was a transitional period. In fact (19:6) is the last instance in the book of Acts where the gift of tongues is mentioned. Tongues are mentioned in three books of the Bible. (Mk Ch 16, Acts Ch 2, 10. 19 & 1 Cor

12 & 14) In (Acts Ch 2) Jews were baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. In (Ch 10) Gentiles were baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ and now in (Ch 19) a group of twelve Old Testament saints are baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Once it was proven that Jews, Gentiles and the remnant of Old Testament saints could come into the body of Christ, there was no need for the filling of the Holy Spirit to be accompanied by tongue speaking. You see, this gift was given to prove that these different groups were all part of the church. What God did through Paul for these twelve men is not the norm for the church today. How do we know ? Because it was not repeated. The people who were saved under Paul’s ministry in Ephesus all received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they trusted the Saviour. Paul makes this clear in (Eph 1:13-14) and this is the pattern for today. So there is (a) (b)

(c) THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM:

I mean here were a group who were absolutely ignorant of the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Now I have a feeling Paul could ask that same question and could get a similar answer in the average church tonight. If Paul should say to the average congregation of people, “ *Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed ?*” I have a feeling a lot of them would look at him with a blank look on their face and they’d say, “ *We’ve never even heard there is a Holy Spirit.*” Well, the Spirit of God is working in this world tonight and in the lives of believers to do some very wonderful things. You see, there are,

1. The Sovereign Acts of the Holy Spirit:

When you were saved there were several sovereign acts of the Holy Spirit that took place. Number one, when you got saved the Bible says you were **baptized** by the Holy Spirit. Paul says in (1 Cor 12:13) “ *For by one Spirit were we all baptised into one body,*” If you can answer the question, “ *When was I placed into the body of Christ ?*” then you can answer the question, “ *when was I baptised by the Holy Spirit ?*” The moment you believed. Number two, you are **indwelt** by the Holy Spirit. “ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.” (Rom 8:9)

**As soon as my all I ventured
On the atoning blood
The Holy Spirit entered
And I was born of God**

Now watch. You're baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, you're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Number three, the Bible says that you are **sealed** by the Holy Spirit when you are saved. Why to these very Ephesian believers Paul says, “ *Having believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*” (Eph 1:13) Now the sealing of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of your eternal security. Now those are the sovereign acts of the Holy Spirit. 1. But what about,

2. The Subsequent Acts of the Holy Spirit:

Let me just mention one that the book of Acts touches on

time and again. It is the **filling** of the Holy Spirit. Do you recall Paul's words ? “ *And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess but be filled with the Spirit.*” (Eph 5:18) What does that mean ? It simply means living each moment of each day under His sovereign control. My for these twelve men there was a missing ingredient in their lives and that missing ingredient was the Holy Spirit. Are you trying to live your Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit ? You see, when we miss misappropriate the Holy Spirit, or misunderstand the Holy Spirit we like those in Ephesus will be a group with problems. (1) 2)

(3) A CHURCH WITH PURPOSE

A certain mother was talking to her daughter about a friend one day. She said, “ *I want my daughter to have enough religion to make her respectable but not enough to make her uncomfortable.*” Is this not the kind of Christianity that most people have ? Enough to make them respectable but not enough to make them uncomfortable. What happens when God's people decide to get serious with God ? Luke answers that question with the story of the church at Ephesus. This was a church with purpose. They were willing to get serious with God. Did you notice what happened ? Listen, if God is at work,

(a) There will be Proclamation:

Look if you will at (19:8-10) Some New Testament manuscripts add that Paul taught in that school from the fifth to the tenth hours that is from 11.00am to 4.00pm,

perhaps the time when Tyrannus would have dismissed his students for the midday rest. Paul did not go off duty at 4.00pm but continued ministering well into the evening hours (20:31) no doubt instructing from house to house. During this time, the churches at Colossae and Hierapolis and the seven churches of Revelation were founded. Paul's strategy for evangelism was to preach the Word, make disciples and then let them spread the gospel. I mean how was it that " *all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus ?*" (19:10) I'll tell you how. The Christians in Ephesus got serious about witnessing for Christ. My when will we get serious about sharing our faith ? About talking about Christ. (a)

(b) There will be Power:

Look at (19:11-12) These miracles of healing through pieces of Paul's clothing were never meant to be a pattern for ministry today. They were by definition " *special miracles,*" yet today some unscrupulous ministers will offer to send out a cloth of some kind that has been prayed over, supposedly able to work miracles in exchange for a financial gift. My these " *hankerchiefs,*" were the clothes Paul used to wipe away sweat. The " *aprons,*" were those he wore while making tents and working with leather. I tell you this man, isn't going to sponge off the saints rather God's power is released through a man who makes tents, so that the gospel can be made available to all. A Bible college student testified that he and his fiancée were going into a ski ministry because they liked the outdoors and loved to ski. *Do you ever think that this man Paul ever thought of his own comfort and pleasure ?* His whole

goal was to get the gospel out and when God's is working,

(c) There will be Pretence:

It was not unusual for Jewish priests to seek to cast out demons (Lk 11:19) but it was unusual for them to use the name of Jesus Christ. Sceva had seven sons who were in the business of magic and exorcism. Seeing the great power Paul exhibited through the use of Jesus name, they decided they would try it themselves. Do you see what the demons said ? " *Jesus I know and Paul I know but who are ye ?*" (19:15) The demonised man then attacked the seven priests and drove them from the house. My had this exorcism succeeded it would have discredited the name of the Lord Jesus and the ministry of the church in Ephesus. You see, these sons of Sceva were not interested in Christ. *They were not concerned about what they could do for the Lord. They were concerned about what the Lord could do for them.* They wanted to use Christ, but the Lord Jesus cannot be manipulated. He is not an errand boy who comes at our beck and call. He is not an Aladdin's lamp we rub when we have a need.

He is not our servant. He is our Lord. He is not to be used. He is to be worshipped, served and obeyed. Its interesting to see that God used this scheme to defeat Satan, and to bring conviction to the believers who will were still involved in magical. You see, when God is at work,

(d) There will be Purity:

Look if you at (19:19-20) Someone has suggested that

eventually every person must either sacrifice his idols to his God or his God to his idols. Many daily sacrifice their God to the idols of their lives, but the Ephesians gladly, willingly, and daily sacrificed their idols to the God in whom their life was centred. You see, when God's people get serious they become sensitive to their sin. Can you imagine what would be burned today if the Holy Spirit's conviction swept through the church ? Would that magazine that you have hidden in the house or office need to be destroyed ? Would that book need to be removed from that bookshelf ? What about those television programmes ? Would they need to be boycotted ? What about that internet activity ? Would it need to be curbed ? My if the world ever sees the church get serious about itself, they will get serious about the church. Notice finally, if God is at work,

(e) There will be Persecution:

There will be. Yes. For “ *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* ” (2 Tim 3:12) Do you see what it says in (19:23) ? You see, the economy of Ephesus was dependent upon the industry of idolatry. As long as people were worshipping Diana (Artemis) the silversmiths many money, when they stopped the silversmiths lost money. Enter Demetrius president of Silversmith Local 666, and thanks to him, persecution. In the latter half of the 19th century in England, the Salvation Army underwent terrible persecution. Do you know why ? The gospel they preached touched the pocketbooks of society. Richard Collier historian of the Salvation Army says the attacks were led by publicans and brothel-keepers

and these people organised the “ **Skeleton Army.**”

When the Skeleton opened subscription lists, brewers and publicans weighed in generously one saloon keeper offered £1000. They took their name from the skull and crossbones banners they adopted, inscribed with strange legends gorillas, rats, and even Satan himself.

My what do you think would happen if the church of Jesus Christ got real ? If we got serious ? If we were to repent of our sins, and faithfully live out our profession ? What do you think would happen ? What do you think would happen if Christians got serious and stopped watching certain television programmes ? And ratings went down, and television producers became angry. What do you think would happen if 20 percent fewer Christians watched sensual films ? *You see, money is the bottom line. And when our Christian faith touches the pocketbooks of society, the wrath of this world will fall upon it.* G. Campbell Morgan puts it like this,

The church persecuted has always been the church pure, and therefore the church powerful. The church patronized has always been the church in peril, and very often the church paralyzed. I am not afraid of Demetrius. Let him have his meeting of craftsmen, and let them in their unutterable folly shout a lie twenty-five thousand strong. The truth goes quietly on. But when the town clerk begins to take care of us, then God deliver us from the peril.

Do you see his point ? We don't the city clerks or the

politicians to protect the church. We are not to cater to the world or seek its favour or protection. If it is God's work, it will have God's protection. Today Ephesus is gone, and so is the world wide worship of Diana of the Ephesians. The city and the temple are gone and the silversmith's guild is gone. Today Ephesus is a place visited by archaeologists and tourists. *But the gospel of God's grace and the church of God's people are still here.* Do you remember what the Saviour said, "*I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Matt 16:18) My the church's foundation is sound, the church's future is secure, and the church's focus is spiritual. Its Christ. *Ponder Him, Prize Him, Preach Him.*