



URBAN CURRENT

Where matters to God

This sentence intrigues me. “And this continued by the space of two years; so that they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” This is Luke’s line in Acts 19:10. Inspired? Without a doubt! If inspired, this line is neither incidental nor accidental.

Speaking of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, Luke says from that base of gospel operations the message of Jesus spread throughout the continent. That’s quite an accomplishment! Later in the chapter, part of the accusation against Paul by the silversmith, Demetrius, was “... that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that there be no gods that are made with hands ...” Hmm ... no television, no radio, no printing press, no webpage, no Twitter. This got me thinking and digging.

Genesis 2 says God planted a garden and put Adam in it. The end of the chapter says, “The Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden ...” He put him in. He took him out. He placed him and then said, “You can’t stay here.”

In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham to leave Ur and go to a place he would be shown. In Genesis 22, Abraham is asked to sacrifice his long-awaited son ... not just anywhere, but in a specific place.

Joseph struggled with *where* on a personal level. He must have had some pretty intense thoughts in the pit. Then, more mature, but no less intense thoughts, in the Egyptian prison. By the time the brothers showed up, he had clarity. He told them not to be upset with themselves for what they did to him. God had sent him to Egypt. He understood it wasn’t his brother’s actions that landed him where he was. It was nothing less than the sovereign hand of God.

In Numbers, the people of God were

approaching the Promised Land. The majority were afraid to move into the place God was giving them. They died in the wilderness away from the place God wanted them.

Jerusalem was a heathen city God chose to make the center of His grand plan (2 Chronicles 6:6). Much later, Jeremiah told Jerusalem residents to surrender to the Babylonians. Jerusalem, the place of blessing, had become the place of judgment. The people had taken for granted the blessings of God, ignoring the “Blesser.” He told them they couldn’t stay there. Ironically, he tells them if they stay in Jerusalem they will die but if they go to Babylon they will live. Far away from Jerusalem, a place marked with and for the presence of God, the chosen people are told to pray for the blessing of the heathen city in which they had been exiled.

In Luke’s record of Jesus’ words to His disciples immediately preceding the ascension, Jesus told them they would be His witnesses where they were, but also throughout the province. Strangely, they would deliberately go where Jews never went, Samaria, and ultimately to the far corners of the world. You remember the story from Acts 16 about Paul wanting to go to a couple places and being forbidden by the Holy Spirit. Then, the vision of the Macedonian, “Come here.” God makes much of *where*.

So when we come to Luke’s summary of Paul’s Ephesian ministry results, it seems we should give this some weight. With our budgets, our programs, our global efforts, and enough technology to make heads spin, we are behind in world evangelization. The efforts of Paul evangelized the entire Roman Empire.

It’s fascinating that no declarations are made in Acts or elsewhere regarding *how* God wants Paul to evangelize. What we know from Luke’s account is that the Holy Spirit led Paul

every step of the way, complete with “Don’t come here.” “Don’t go there.” “Come here.” The history is that the Holy Spirit led Paul from city to city to city to city.

In the last 100 years, God dramatically urbanized His world. In the same 100 years, American believers packed up their families, churches, denominational headquarters, parachurch organizations, mission agencies, and in many cases colleges and seminaries, and left the city. The challenges, the burdens, the needs, and the crisis of the city were left behind ... at least temporarily. Where we live and work colors our understanding, if not interpretation, of scripture. It should not surprise us that evangelical quest for bigger, better, greener, airier in the 50s and 60s has evolved into wholesale acquiescence to the culture. This all has significant ramifications.

Because many of those training believers and leading corporate evangelistic efforts have not been urbanites, they do not understand the function, much less the power, of the city. What Luke recorded in Acts and made abundantly clear in chapter 19, verse ten, should have been informing our efforts to reach the world all along. Sadly, we’ve had better ideas — ideas that have left millions unreached.

The *where* of Paul’s evangelistic efforts are no more accidental or incidental than the words the Holy Spirit guides Luke to use in describing the incredible first-century gospel advance.

Luke makes clear that the Holy Spirit’s *where* was the Holy Spirit’s *how*.



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