

# ***Sabbath School Today*** **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

## ***The Book of Acts*** **Lesson 10. The Third Missionary Journey**

If some pagan who had never heard of Christ or His gospel should have heard the Apostle Paul preach at Ephesus, his heart would have been warmed. And unless that soul had resisted the seeking grace of Christ, he would have been won to the faith. Paul's evangelism in Ephesians did play a large part in the phenomenal spread of the Christian faith in that early century.

And now today, the Good News Paul preached is more up-to-date than tomorrow's media news because it pulsates with the life of Christ's urgent message He wants to go to the world. Here is that glorious gospel which "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

We live in these last days of earth's history when the world's great High Priest is doing something never done in previous ages—*preparing a people to be ready for His second coming*. Our study will follow Him into His Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary where He is accomplishing this very special work.

The water of life flowing out of Paul's heart comes from a hidden spring deep in his soul. His work is incomparably greater than that of any mere theologian or philosopher. He loves people as Christ loves them! He specializes first in declaring the *objective* gospel—what Christ accomplished for the world even before we were born; then he zeroes in on the *subjective* gospel—how this objective truth of what Christ did for us motivates us subjectively to devote our lives to Him.

All the great cities of the Roman Empire were much the same as Ephesus. Pagan people were bored with life except for sensual pleasures of gourmet food, alcoholic drink, violence, and sex. They would feel right at home if they could be resurrected and set down in our modern cities with our sports, games, Internet, and TV amusements. As a public evangelist, Paul was challenged by these pagan people to win their attention, and then to win their hearts. He met the challenge with the message of the cross of Jesus.

When Paul pleads with the Corinthians, "we pray [implore] you in Christ's [behalf], be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), we know that was also the burden of his heart in writing Ephesians. Now he is appealing beyond Corinth and Ephesus to all the people out there in this world.

Simply substitute modern amenities, clothing, and language, and Ephesus is transformed into a modern New York, Tokyo, or Beijing. People are identical. There are

the poor serfs or slaves who today are technically “free” but they are still caught in dreary boredom; there are the wealthy, as always, obsessed in making more money, and there are the masses in love with violence and sports. The ancient and modern worlds are virtually identical!

Ephesus had its huge amphitheater and arena, as modern cities have today. Archaeologists have unearthed the ancient theater which seated about 25,000 people bent on the same pleasures many gravitate to today. The temple of Diana was the center of idol worship in the city. Four times the size of the Acropolis in Athens, it had columns 66 feet high, as impressive to the ancients as St. Peter’s is to us today. Huge crowds attended the feasts of the goddess whose statue was believed to have descended from heaven.

Further in presenting a challenge to the lonely evangelist of Christ, Ephesus boasted the great banking business of Asia Minor because the worship of Diana fueled the economic life of the city. Let Paul touch the economy, and will they ever hate him!

On the north side of the city stood the stadium where the races and gladiatorial combats were held. The people were drawn to watch men kill each other. The more violence the better the people loved it (aren’t even our video games often based on a secret fascination for killing people?). The Odeum in Ephesus was another theater seating 1500. Self-indulgence and pleasure were all the people knew to live for. Can you imagine—prostitution was a religious duty! How could Paul ever get through with the gospel effectively to people such as these!

Paul’s gospel was an inescapable equation: all belong in the grave! *All would be dead* if One had not died for them, instead of them. That puts “all men” under a common obligation, and Paul simply recognized the truth of it.

From the day of his conversion on that road to Damascus, he has reckoned that *he does not belong to himself*. He has no idea that self-sacrifice is involved on his part; he deserves no compliments or praise. What he realizes he deserves is only the grave, so everything he has that is better than a grave has to be a gift of God’s grace occasioning joy and gratitude.

Paul inspired and trained other fellow-laborers in Ephesus. None were jealous of him and he never shows the slightest envy of their success. For once, in the story of his labors in Ephesus, we see a clear demonstration of what the special love of Christ, known as *agape*, did for a group of workers. There was Apollos, himself “mighty in the Scriptures” and “an eloquent man,” but Paul worked with him smoothly and in love (Acts 18:24). There were Priscilla and Aquila who were also imbued with the same spirit that motivated Paul (vs. 26).

Apollos was from Alexandria, the second most important city in the Roman Empire. Highly educated, a Jew converted to the baptism of John the Baptist, he was an

eloquent preacher. But he knew nothing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and he needed to be instructed in the way of Jesus.

Then dear Aquila and Priscilla, in a kind and courteous way, told him what he needed to know, and thank God, Apollos listened! Sometimes we ministers may not be deficient in the same way that Apollos was, but there are also empty places in our knowledge. The Lord then sends someone to correct us and instruct us and fill in the gaps.

But we are painfully aware that sometimes our dear ministering brethren in a past era were not like Apollos: they may have been “mighty in the Scriptures” and could argue, and like him had gaps in their understanding so that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” in 1888 His messengers (A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner) to fill in, but unlike Apollos they were not ready to listen and learn. In a great degree, history has told us, they resisted and even rejected the light that God would have them accept.

Now we have come collectively to the very end of time, and where “we” have corporately failed in past times we must now overcome. Time is getting short.

—*Paul E. Penno*

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/2Ky-nhKXMqc>

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