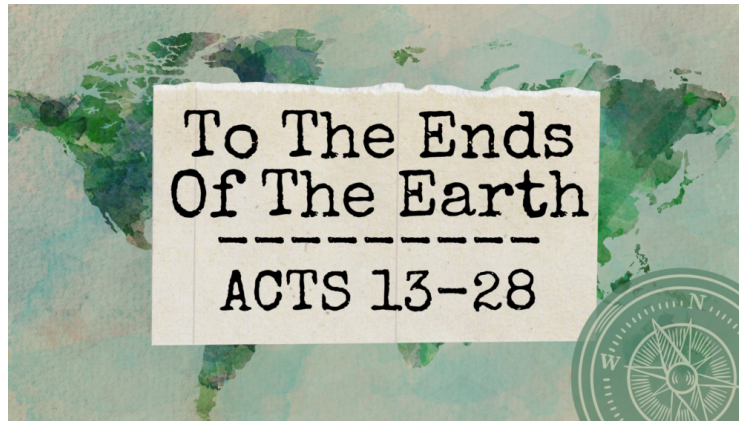


Kingdom Tunnel Vision



Acts 19:8-20:6

Bro Chris Lawrence

I love this time of year because of all the sports that are happening. I am a sports junkie. The NFL playoffs are going on and then basketball season with March madness is around the corner. There are all these different tournaments. As I watch sports events, one of the things I love to do is listen to the coaches. The successful ones always have this tunnel vision. They don't want any distractions. They want their team completely focused on the next game and then all along the path — a road to victory to the championship. Nick Saban has this quote where he talks about the outside noise in media. He calls it a rat poison. He wants nothing to get in the way of his team and where they are trying to go. Right before Covid hit a couple of years ago, I was really excited because my boys started to understand the NCAA Tournament and the road to the Final Four. We were going to watch it together, and of course, that year the NCAA Tournament cancels because of Covid. Even though our family didn't get to go on the road to the Final Four, we started another road. We started reading a book

called *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is a story that represents the Christian life, where the main figure, Christian, leaves the City of Destruction, and walks a path on a road to the Celestial City. As he is on this road, there are all these distractions, like Vanity Fair, that will try to pull him away from getting to the Celestial City. It is this picture of what the Christian life is all about.

We can face the same thing as well. We can have struggles, temptations, and issues that get us off our path. As we pick up in Acts 19, we see throughout Paul's entire ministry that he has tunnel vision. Not just tunnel vision, but he has Kingdom tunnel vision. He is focused on a path that he wants people to come along with him — that no matter what happens here, we are longing for the Kingdom of God to come. We are going to cover chapter 19:8 through chapter 20:6, but our reading will be chapter 19:8–23.

Scripture

"And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the Kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.' Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?' And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of

Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way."

Paul's Focus: The Kingdom of God

We pick up in verse 8 where Kory left off where people were truly having clarity about what it truly means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul continues to teach, preach, and persuade in the Jewish synagogue. What is he teaching and preaching on? The Kingdom of God. That is Paul's tunnel vision. He is focused. He is part of the Kingdom and wants to be more a part of the Kingdom, and his path is for everybody to go to the kingdom of God. When the disciples ask Jesus how to pray in Luke, what does Jesus say? He doesn't focus on the 'how,' but He focuses on the 'who' — "Father, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come." Jesus wants the Kingdom to come. In Acts chapter 1:3, Jesus is on the scene and speaking about the Kingdom of God. As the book of Acts ends, Paul is speaking about the Kingdom of God, proclaiming it with confidence and boldness wherever he goes. This is a common theme throughout Luke and Acts that Paul is focused on wanting people to know about the Kingdom of God.

The question is how do you become a part of the Kingdom of God? How do you get there? In chapter 19, Paul preaches about the Way to get to the Kingdom. As he preaches about the Way in this Jewish synagogue, some of the people do not like the Way to the Kingdom, and they basically kick him out of the synagogue. Why do they do that? Because we know the Way is Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and Paul is kicked out of the

synagogue because they are rejecting that path, rejecting that road. So what does Paul do? He goes to the hall of Tyrannus and he starts doing it all over again, preaching and teaching every single day for two years straight! As he does this, what does a normal day look like for him? Well, he is a tentmaker, so from dawn until about 11:00 am, he makes tents. Afterward, he goes to the hall of Tyrannus. During this time period, they would have nap time. Some of the commentaries said more people would be awake at 1:00 am than there were at 1:00 pm. Paul would sacrifice his naptime to go teach, preach, proclaim, and persuade people about the Kingdom of God. So others started sacrificing their naptime to hear Paul and more and more people got in on the Way, following Jesus, and as verse 10 says, "The Word of the Lord spread throughout all Asia."

This is what I love about Paul's ministry — his tunnel vision is the Kingdom of God. How do you get there? Not by works, but by trusting and believing in who Jesus is and what He has done for you. What is our authority? The Word of the Lord. There are circles today that want to minimize the Word of the Lord, but God's Word has power. When we submit ourselves to the Word of God, it is amazing what path we can find ourselves on. We find ourselves on the right path going to the Kingdom of Christ. We might not have halls of Tyrannus like Paul did, but they are out there. People spend about two to three hours a day on social media and maybe another two to three hours on TV. There are people trying to persuade, reason, and boldly proclaim their message, whether it is on a news station or in an advertisement, to become a part of their kingdom. We hear a lot of worldly messages, but we don't need to hear more from the world; we need to hear more from the Word. It is amazing that no matter how off track we might be, the Word gets us back on track.

I have done college ministry for a long time. The one thing I have seen change students over and over again is they want to hear from the Word of the Lord. I remember a student from years ago. I was having *my* hall of Tyrannus and trying to be at that place on a weekly basis, and I even tried to meet with some of the guys on a daily basis. It was basically a Bible study design for people who are not walking with the Lord. We were trying to persuade them using the Word of the Lord to direct their path to the Kingdom of God by putting their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. At the time,

there were probably about five or ten guys in this group. There was this guy named Tyler who walked into the Bible study. When Tyler walked in, I had two reactions. Either he walked in by accident and will immediately regret it and leave, or, he was going to try and pick a fight with me. I had no idea what this guy was going to do. Unbelievably, he just wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord, so we got into the Bible study. Logan Stout, a college student, was with me at the time. Logan was part of my discipleship group, a group that equips and trains people about the Word of the Lord. It is meant for believers. But then Logan had the audacity to ask Tyler to come to our dgroup! I heard Logan do it. I thought there was no way Tyler would ever come to a Bible study like that. A few days later, we had dgroup with Logan's group, and I think we were going to be talking about something controversial, like predestination. It was going to be deep. Then there was a knock on the door...Tyler walked in. Do you know what? He wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord. Tyler's pattern continued. One day, I was walking across MSU campus and I see Tyler in the library. I thought what is Tyler doing studying in the library. Then, I see that he didn't have a textbook. He had his Bible out, all by himself, just reading. Do you know why? It was because he wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord.

Shortly after that, Tyler came to Christ. He got baptized, and now he is on the path. He is on the Way! Now, he wants to tell the guys who might want to pick a fight with him about the Way. He wants to hear from the Word of the Lord so he can help others know it. He went to Brazil with us...because he wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord. Shortly after that, he met a godly Christ centered lady who was way out of his league. He wanted to know what to do, so he wants to hear from the Word of the Lord. He won this girl over and they got married. After they married, I got a phone call from Tyler because he wanted to talk about churches and where they were going to be moving — he wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord. Later on, they started having children. Do you know what they wanted to do when they started having children? They wanted to hear from the Word of the Lord. Last year, I got a phone call to have lunch with Tyler and his wife, Kirby. They were pregnant with their third child and they told me there were complications and they had no idea how it would turn out. It was

scary for them. Some of the doctors even recommended abortion. Of course, that wasn't going to happen. They wanted that baby no matter the cost. Why? It was because they heard from the Word of the Lord and they were going to have that baby. But the future was unknown. By God's grace, they had that baby and sweet Charlie is growing. They are working through health issues and they are praying for that baby. I just see how they are handling all these situations that have come about in the last year. One of the things that have so touched me when I was talking to Tyler and Kirby is this statement: "We have heard from the Word of the Lord so many times when we were in college, and now through this trial, we are holding on to it." It is just amazing when I think about that guy walking into that Bible study and the path he was headed on is now completely different. Tyler's career, who he married, the way he is raising his children, the way he loves those children, and the way he is handling every single situation. Do you know why his path has been completely changed? It is because he heard from the Word of the Lord and he got on the Way, and the Way is knowing who Jesus Christ is. No matter what comes Tyler's way, he is focused on the Kingdom of God. When we live like that, believing in the power of the Word of the Lord, it brings about change in our lives. We cast down the idols of this world and we truly have that Kingdom tunnel vision.

The Word of the Lord Prevails

That is exactly what happens as the story continues in Acts chapter 19. As we pick up in verse 11, it is crazy in there! We have Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons healing people, and casting out demons. What is going on with that? Do we need a new church practice where when Bro Ricky is on the farm we take his farm boots and start healing people with those boots? Is that what is going on there? I don't think that is the case. I think the key part of this verse is that it is not Paul taking his handkerchiefs and aprons; it is God — by the power of God. What God is doing in this situation is this...as Paul is a tentmaker and has these dirty rags on him, this apron on, God is taking Paul's tentmaker ministry and using that ministry to show that God is more powerful than any of the idols of the day. That is what you have happen here. You had poor people and sick people, and they were looking for any answer to their situations. If they were possessed by an evil spirit or had some disease, they would go to an exorcist or a

magician. They would pay these people, and the goal was if the exorcist or magician could call upon the right spirit and they could manipulate the spirit in the right way, the spirit might leave the person or the person might be cured of the disease. Verse 13 says these exorcists try to do it. These seven sons try to do it, and it doesn't work.

What happened? Well, the spirits say they know Jesus, they know Paul, but they do not know these seven sons. Then, the man with the spirits literally beat the exorcists up and exposed them so that they ran around naked throughout town. Now, why is what the spirits say so important? They are saying that these seven sons cannot manipulate them. But you know who does have control over them? Jesus Christ, the King of the heavens and the universe, and they are able to listen to Paul because Paul is a follower of the Way. By Paul and Jesus, these spirits realized and understood that they didn't stand a chance against the Kingdom of God, and the world took notice. The world stops falling for the magic tricks of the magicians and exorcists and they really understand that Jesus really is the Way. It leads to repentance. They take their magic books and burn them. They didn't want to just sell them or get rid of them; they wanted to burn them because they don't want anyone else to read them. People were coming to Christ. Christians who had been struggling with idolatrous practices were burning books, and they counted the value of them at fifty thousand pieces of silver. There is debate on how much this would be today. I read that it was anywhere from thousands of dollars to millions of dollars. Whatever it was, it was a lot of money.

As they are burning these books, getting rid of their idolatrous practices and by trusting the Word of the Lord, by trusting the Way (which is Jesus), they set their eyes to have that tunnel vision of the Kingdom of God, and verse 20 says, the Word of the Lord prevailed — I love that! We are truly hearing from God. Our lives are changed. We are on the right path, and we have victory over the idols and sinful things that distract us in this world. Revival is literally happening in this story. You have people coming to Christ and everything is changing. I love reading about revival stories. Every time I read about one, everything just gets better. Crime goes down, homes get better, churches get better, and the government gets better. Everything just

gets better. Every issue we are dealing with is dealt with when people start truly following the way of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what else happens in the midst of revival? Paul warns us of this. There are still spiritual battles. In Ephesians 6, he warns us that we aren't fighting against flesh and blood, or spiritual forces from the heavenly places. In Ephesians 2, it says every person who is not a believer in Christ is under the prince of the power of the air and there are sons of disobedience. What we have here is Paul being passionate about continuing to make the Way known, and some of those sons of disobedience are going to show up.

Demetrius Starts a Riot

Let's continue in verses 21–27. It says, "Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.'" Because of this, Demetrius is going to start a riot.

Let's give context of what is going on. Demetrius is passionate about Artemis. Who is Artemis? This is a goddess. They have this huge temple, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. It is massive! People from all over Asia would come to worship this false goddess. Not only would they worship her, it was financially lucrative for the town. They had a banking system tied to Artemis. Whether it is for finances, religion, or a new identity, people from all over Asia were coming to worship Artemis.

They would have festivals. Paul may be enduring what is going on during this exact time where all these people bring a ton of money to the town. Demetrius is over here thinking if everybody starts following Christ, he is going to be in trouble because nobody will be coming to see Artemis, he would lose his job, and the culture would be changed. So he starts talking to the town's people saying if Artemis is no longer, their town will be affected and they were all going to be in trouble — and it is all based on the message that Paul is giving about the Way to the Kingdom of Christ. It would make the temple of Artemis absolutely nothing. How crazy is that? He is so worried about a few people spreading this message and that one of the seven ancient wonder of the worlds might be brought to nothing. That is his fear.

I look at that and think about us. Our challenge is that we not be like Demetrius. We look at a world and we do not know where the future is headed, with our careers, the church, or our country. There are all these different things we have to deal with and address, and it can be frightening. When we are worried about our future, we are going to be tempted to have a mob like mentality and fight. Why? Because we are worried about our God being brought to nothing. If we were really thinking correctly, no matter what happens with our jobs, no matter who is in political office, no matter what happens to our country, our God will never be brought to nothing. His temple will live forever. His temple, His church, His body — He will hold onto that temple for eternity. Artemis and her temple is no more. It is in the ground somewhere...archeologists are trying to dig it up. God's temple will survive, will thrive, and will live. We need to live like that. No matter what happens in our lives, no matter how hard life might get, no matter if there is a riot going on, we walk with confidence because we know our God is not dead. Our God is alive.

This is when you take a look at Paul in this passage. Paul wants to go to the riot! He has that Kingdom tunnel vision and he wants people to know about the Way. He doesn't care where he is going; all he wants is people to know about the Way, the path to the Kingdom of God. He wants to tell them about who Jesus is. Yet, this passage says believers are holding him back. Lost people are holding him back. As this riot continues, there is confusion. It says multiple times that people don't even know why they are

there. A Jew speaks up, probably trying to separate himself from the Christians, and they start knocking him down. They chant, "Great is Artemis" for about two hours straight. That is a long time to chant something! The riot picks up more momentum and gets more and more out of control. Then you have the town clerk come in. He basically calms everybody down and reminds them that these Christians haven't robbed from the temple of Artemis and they hadn't particularly broken any laws. On top of that, he tells them if it continues there will be sources that have more power than he does who will come in, and we don't want that. That calms the mob down, everybody goes their own way, and things settle down.

Paul Continues to Encourage

Now, here is my question. You are Paul. What are you thinking? Like...we have a revival, which is amazing. Then we have a riot with a mob, which is dragging some of your friends who were trying to find you, and they are out for Christian blood. What are you thinking? How are you feeling? How would you feel if the mob is coming after you? What would that be like? What does Paul do? Even when a mob comes after him, Paul continues to encourage folks. Acts 20:1–3 says, "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia." The next three verses talk about his path. It is this same ongoing pattern. He continues to encourage, and then there is a plot against his life. How does this man continue to encourage? How does he continue to have this Kingdom tunnel vision when there is plot after plot on his life? How does he do it? Thinking through this question, I am reminded of Luke 9. In Luke 9, there is a turning point in the gospel. Luke 9:51 says Jesus faces Jerusalem. It is repeated again in verse 53 that he is facing Jerusalem. What is going on there? He is on a path, a road. He is going to Jerusalem because a mob awaits Him. That mob is going to mock Him. They are going to spit on Him. They are going to persecute Him, put nails in His hands and thorns in His head. He is going to go on that cross and He is

going to die. Why does He do that? Why does He have that tunnel, cross-centered vision? It is because He knows His Father has a plan. His Father's plan is to go save the mob. Jesus saves the mob by dying on a cross. Do you know why He wants to save the mob? So we can join His Kingdom.

Who else is a part of the mob? Paul. Paul was approving the killing of Christians. But Paul heard the Word of the Lord and his path changed. Instead of living for the kingdom of the world, he lived for the Kingdom of the Word. He lived for the Kingdom of Christ. Paul is all about Christ! And in Acts, Paul is on his way to Jerusalem where he knows he might be imprisoned or killed, but he is willing to go there. Why was he willing to go there? It is because he wants to be like Christ. He wants to be like his King. He wants other people to know the Way. He wants the mob to get on that path, to experience what happened to him. He has such a love for God and for people that tunnel vision carries him all the way to even be willing to die for the mob. He believed what he said in Philippians, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." — He is saying if I go to Jerusalem and die, I be like Christ. I am willing to take that path just as He took that path for me. Even if I die, it is a win because I now have arrived at being in the Kingdom of God forever and ever. That is his life, that Kingdom tunnel vision.

This is the application for you if you aren't a believer. If you are not a believer, you are in the City of Destruction, and your path will ultimately lead to destruction. That idol you are holding onto, that Vanity Fair you are a part of will not satisfy. The good news is you can let that down. You might not publicly burn books, but you can publicly denounce those idols, put your faith and trust in Christ, and get baptized and let the world know what has happened to you. The application for believers is that there will be times in our lives where there will be revivals, and they will be sweet. There will be times there will be riots and there will be chaos and confusion. But those moments are all the more reason to hear from the Word of the Lord, remember the Way to the Kingdom of God and who your Lord and Savior is, and have that tunnel vision. Maybe this is just a reminder for you if you have wondered off the path just a little bit, if you are holding on to an idol, to go back and hear from the Word of the Lord

and start believing and trusting in the Way. No matter what happens here, when we get there it will be worth it.