

## “I MUST VISIT ROME ALSO”

Acts 19:1-41

Key Verse: 19:21

“After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. ‘After I have been there,’ he said, ‘I must visit Rome also.’”

In the last passage we saw how the Risen Christ was with Paul during his ministry in Corinth. In spite of strong opposition, the Risen Christ empowered Paul with his word and Spirit to overcome fear and keep on preaching the gospel. Many souls in Corinth were saved. The Risen Christ is with us. Let’s keep sharing the gospel with our people.

This passage tells us about Paul’s ministry in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. In Ephesus, Paul concentrated on raising disciples of Jesus through intensive Bible study. God worked mightily. The vision for world evangelization burned in Paul’s heart until he said, “I must visit Rome also.” May the Holy Spirit teach us today about Paul’s disciple raising ministry and give us new vision for world mission.

First, the work of the Holy Spirit (1-7).

Paul began his third missionary journey by going through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples (18:23). Then he took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. Ephesus was a harbor city on the western coast of Asia Minor. It was home to the temple of Artemis, the fertility goddess. This temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Around this temple swarmed tradesmen and prostitutes who made their living from the temple business.

As Paul surveyed Ephesus, he found some disciples. But they looked incomplete. He 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.” They had received only John’s baptism, a baptism of repentance. They admitted they were sinners. They knew they deserved God’s righteous judgment. But they did not know the marvelous grace of Jesus Christ or the work of the Holy Spirit. They remind us of people who always look grumpy and condemned. To such people, nothing is possible.

Paul explained to them the coming of Jesus Christ as the point of John’s ministry. He proclaimed that Jesus died for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. He invited them to accept Jesus as their Lord and Christ. They were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. They were filled with power and joy. They could speak about God and his marvelous work. They could see the coming of the kingdom of God. It was the beginning of God’s great work in Ephesus.

God’s work begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus launched his earthly messianic ministry by submitting to John’s baptism. As Jesus was praying, the Holy Spirit descended on him (Lk 3:22). Then Jesus began to drive out evil spirits and heal the sick. After Jesus’ ascension, when the apostles prayed together in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came upon them in power. Their fear vanished and they became bold witnesses of Jesus Christ (Ac 2:4). To do God’s work, we need one thing: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God himself. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Young Timothy was willing to serve God together with St. Paul. But he was timid and weak. St. Paul did not give up on him. St. Paul believed he would be changed into a spiritual general for God’s work by the Holy Spirit. So Paul said to him, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-

discipline" (2 Tim 1:7). The Holy Spirit sets our minds free from the gravity of sin and enables us to think of heavenly things. Romans 8:6 says, "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." One young man is haunted by bad images from the internet. But the Holy Spirit can set his mind completely free to think of God and his kingdom. The Holy Spirit drives out fear from our hearts, fills us with God's love and makes us really strong (Ro 8:15).

Then, how can we receive the Holy Spirit? It is indeed encouraging to know that God really wants to give us the Holy Spirit. God is our heavenly Father who wants to help us in the best way according to our need. Jesus explained that even human fathers, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to their children. Then Jesus said, "...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Lk 11:13) God really wants to give us the Holy Spirit. As we begin this new year, let's ask God for the Holy Spirit.

Second, daily Bible study in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (8-12).

Paul entered the synagogue. The twelve men he had baptized followed him like sheep follow their shepherd. Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God (8). The kingdom of God is where God reigns. God sent Jesus to this world as King. Jesus restores God's reign in this world and in the hearts of men. To accept the kingdom of God is to accept Jesus as our King. To those who accept him, Jesus is the Savior who drives out sin, death and the devil. Jesus rules us with peace, joy and the love of God. Jesus gives eternal life. Jesus gives us heaven as our eternal home. Those who reject King Jesus cannot escape the rule of the devil.

Some people want to be their own king, such as W. E. Henley, who said, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." This is a great deception. Those who reject King Jesus will be ruled by the devil. Judas Iscariot was one of Jesus' disciples. He was cared for so dearly by Jesus. But when he rejected Jesus as King, Satan entered into him.

On the other hand, Paul accepted Jesus as his King and Savior. Once, Paul had been Saul. He thought of himself as a great man and he worked hard to advance his career as a Pharisee. But objectively, he was a slave of selfish ambition. He was under the power of sin and death. He became an instrument of the devil. But the Risen Christ had mercy on him. The Risen Christ revealed the light of truth to Paul. Paul realized that he was nothing but a sinner and that Jesus is the Savior of the world, God's King. The Risen Christ forgave his sins. The Risen Christ gave him peace. The Risen Christ called him to serve world mission. The Risen Christ gave him eternal life in the kingdom of God.

When St. Paul taught the kingdom of God, he was very biblical. He also shared his personal testimony. He must have drawn on his vast experience in doing gospel work for many years. His illustrations and examples were so interesting and expansive in their coverage. At first people liked his teaching. But as the application crystalized, many began to resist. They did not want to turn from the world to God. They did not want to transfer their hope from the mundane world to God's kingdom. They did not want to yield to Christ. They became obstinate. They knew Paul was right, but they refused to believe.

Then Paul left them. Look at verse 9c. "He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus." Here "the disciples" seems to refer to those who had received the Holy Spirit. They had been born again. Now they needed to grow in the word of God. They followed Paul to learn from him. No doubt, Paul proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God. But he did not preach one-sidedly. He started a Bible school and encouraged

discussion. Anyone could ask questions. Some must have presented the ideas of scholars of the day. Then Paul shared with them the truth of the gospel. In the end, only the gospel remained in people's hearts as the absolute truth of God that stands forever. The gospel is the only way of salvation which God has given to men.

At one time, communism was considered the way of salvation by some. To actualize the communist ideal, its proponents killed many people. But communism is merely a human idea. It failed completely and collapsed in the course of time. Islam is the devil's attempt to counterfeit Christian faith. Like communism, it is nothing more than a fallen man's idea. And like communism, it will fall completely in the course of time. In a free discussion, the gospel always prevails. This is why some Muslim countries do not allow freedom of religion. They know that Islam cannot endure the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They fear most the message of the gospel. Surely it is only a matter of time until the gospel sets free those living in darkness. We thank God for DMF, who preaches the gospel boldly where it is forbidden by law.

Paul's discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus went on daily for two years. During that time, the disciples could really learn Paul's gospel message and spirit. They also learned his lifestyle. They all became like little versions of Paul. This rigorous disciple training laid the foundation to spread the gospel throughout Ephesus and Asia Minor.

Many people came to the lecture hall. Those who heard the gospel shared it with others. The gospel spread by word of mouth. In the course of two years, all people in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. The secret to effective evangelism is not a marketing technique. It is devotion to God's word and to raising disciples. It is not easy for anyone to spend several hours a day in Bible study. It requires self-denial and constant meditation on the word of God. It is not easy to meet the same people daily and to teach them again and again. It requires the patient endurance of the Holy Spirit. Still, devotion to Bible study and disciple raising is God's wisdom to spread the word of God.

Look at verses 11-12. "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." God did these miracles through Paul to authenticate his gospel message. God wanted people to believe the gospel and be saved.

Third, Paul's vision for Rome (13-22).

Something very interesting happened during Paul's ministry in Ephesus. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, went around driving out evil spirits. They tried to invoke Jesus' name as though it were a magic word to drive out evil spirits. Then something happened that revealed the true power and unique nature of Jesus. One day, the evil spirit answered them, saying, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding (15-16). The people of Ephesus realized that evil spirits were real and dangerous. Yet the evil spirits were afraid of Jesus. The people were all seized with fear and held Jesus' name in high honor. Jesus' light shone into the darkness; the darkness fled before it. Deeds hidden in darkness were confessed openly. Sorcery scrolls were burned publicly. The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

When Paul saw God's work, he was sure that Ephesus had been fully pioneered. Now it was time to move on. He decided to go to Jerusalem, and then to Rome. As the book of Romans explains, Paul went

to Jerusalem to take an offering from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church (Ro 15:24-27). Paul wanted the Gentiles to acknowledge their spiritual debt to the Jews, and he wanted the Jews to embrace the Gentiles with world mission vision. Paul wanted to unite the Christian church and inspire it to march forward for the sake of world mission. Personally, he decided to visit Rome. Paul said, "I must visit Rome also" (21). Rome was the center of the world. Paul believed that God would conquer Rome with the gospel as he had done in Ephesus. Paul was burning with vision to spread the gospel to the whole world through Roman roads. Paul believed that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven during his lifetime. This vision was the fruit of his lifetime obedience to the Holy Spirit. When we obey God's leading and give our hearts to one-to-one Bible study and disciple raising, God will lead us to have a great vision for world mission.

When Mother Barry left for Korea, she did not have a great vision for world mission. She simply wanted to obey the world mission command in a practical way. Then God led her to cowork with Dr. Samuel Lee. God blessed their ministry to transform Korea into a missionary-sending country. God led them to pioneer Germany, America, Canada, Russia, and many other nations. Recently, Mother Barry gave us the prayer topic for the evangelization of Muslim countries and North Korea. Her vision in the love of God covers the people of the whole world. It is the fruit of her lifetime obedience to God's word and to raising disciples of Jesus. May God help each of us give our hearts to one-to-one Bible study until we each have God's vision for world mission.

Fourth, God protects his work (23-41).

As God's work was flourishing and Paul was burning with world mission vision, the devil did not sit back. He attacked God's work through a selfish silversmith named Demetrius. Demetrius appealed to Ephesian craftsmen and citizens on the basis of their bank accounts, their civic pride, and sentimental attachment to their religion. He manipulated them into an emotional frenzy. They rushed as one man into the theater, shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Most of the people did not even know why they were there.

Here Luke wants us to think about the real source of evil and chaos. It is the devil, working through selfish people like Demetrius. Later, Paul wrote, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10a). People who love money more than God become the devil's agents. They cause trouble for many innocent people. Luke encourages us to see the "money motive" behind chaotic events. It is interesting that journalists and detectives are taught to "trace the money" in solving mysteries. In the midst of danger, Paul was not frightened. He wanted to address the crowd. But many coworkers begged him not to do so. Paul was courageous; he had a great vision for world salvation.

Finally, the city clerk appealed to the crowd on the basis of law. He reminded them that there was no reason for their gathering and that they were in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government. After speaking these words, he dismissed the assembly. In fact, through the rule of law, God protected Paul and the gospel ministry.

In this passage we learn many things. Let's remember three things. First, God wants us to live the Christian life by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we ask, he gives the Holy Spirit to us. Second, where there is devotion to the word of God and to disciple training, there will be a great work of God. Third, God's vision is for the evangelization of the whole world in our generation. We can have this great vision when we commit our lives to God's work. May God help each of us to serve him daily until we can say like St. Paul, "I must visit Rome also."