

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With a Resolve to Last (Part 1)

Acts 19:1-10

1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. 7 There were in all about twelve men.

We live in a “disposable” society. We buy things, use them up and then dispose of them. I remember when Laura and I first got married in 1988, I went out and bought a phone, an old-fashioned (okay, not completely old-fashioned as it was a tone, not rotary) phone. If any of you know me, you know I researched it and bought the best that I could both afford and find. I think that at the time it might of cost me around \$50. That phone journeyed with us from our first apartment in San Diego, to Grand Junction where I interned, back to San Diego and served us for many years here in Arkansas. I finally threw it away just a couple years ago, not because it stopped working, but because I no longer had a “land” line in the house. That phone lasted well over 20 years. About ten years ago, the church was intent on getting me a cell phone. And in the past ten years, I have counted having 5 cell phones, meaning they are averaging around 2 years each and the last two prior to my current one, simply gave up. And while I may have gotten some of them for “free” so long as I had a two-year agreement, they certainly cost me more than \$50 each.

We are a people who like new things and convenience; we long for the latest bells and whistles. That may be okay when it comes to phones, but are you aware that this mentality has crept into churches? Following the consumer-oriented mentality, “it better be new and flashy” mindset, many churches build their ministries around “getting the crowd” – of seeing numbers. They put on a show, full of glitz and glamor, seeking not to please God, but to satisfy the customers. Attention is focused on style rather than on substance. If you have had the opportunity to visit a consumer-oriented church, you will often find a crowd. Why, because there will be a production, with quality music, perhaps some powerful drama, and technology-enhanced messages full of movie clips and interviews. All of this may impress, motivate and even fire up people to go and change the world, but in the end, these same people are still struggling to see change in their own lives, much less inciting change in the people around them.

I am not saying it is wrong to use new tactics and technology to accomplish our God-given mission. However, what is at stake, the question we must ask is this, “By doing ministry in such ways, are we building something that will *last*; something that will stand the test of time? How are we to pursue an enduring ministry that sees people truly growing the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ in the midst of a fast-paced, I have to have this instant, disposable society? That is the question we need to answer. Our goal is not simply doing things that might attract the crowds, but rather in seeing people continue to grow in their knowledge and service to Christ in a lasting fashion.

I can tell you by experience within both this ministry and even more so by observing many ministries here in NW Arkansas, crowds come and crowds go. I remember for many years that there was a cycle of Christians that I knew who about every two years moved between two churches because one of them started something new, it fizzled out and then the other church did

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

something new so they went back. Beloved, that is not the biblical way of doing ministry; that is man’s way. Ministry is not to be done via marketing strategies, but via the message of the Book! So just how are we to do ministry? Are we left to what we think? Of course not. We have been given the Word of God to direct the people of God how to do the ministry of God. And this is what we find in our text this morning; ministry done God’s way.

And what we find by way of instruction from this passage are two activities of Paul that we as believers are to imitate is we would be involved and resolved in a ministry that lasts. I warn you, you have heard these before and so the temptation will be to say in your head, “Oh yes, you have told us this before.” Let me remind you that I am not up here simply to give you some facts about Paul, the early Church, or Jesus; but to exhort and challenge you to “do” likewise. It is time for the people of this church to resolve to be a people of action. So, I exhort you, myself included, to not just write down an outline, but to work out your obedience to the challenges I now present to you. Let us notice the first of Paul’s two activities. If we would be resolved to live with a resolve to build a lasting ministry...

I. We must expose people to the Word of God (1-7).

Enduring ministries, those that stand the test of time, whether it be the preaching ministries of men like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, John MacArthur, or even our own, are all ministries that majored on exposing people to the Word of God. Such ministries never toyed around with the Word; never made the Word of God second but rather they placed the Word of God as the centerpiece of the ministry.

Sadly, Bible is nothing more than a merely a decoration in many homes, something that sits on the shelf. But beloved, the Bible is becoming nothing more than a decoration in many of our churches. How can I say this? Even Pollster George Gallup Jr. has stated that America is a “nation of biblical illiterates.” In a poll he did some time back, only 4 in 10 Americans knew that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. More than 50% of Americans are unable to name the four Gospels of the New Testament. Less than 30% of teenagers know why the church celebrates Easter. Nearly 70% of Americans believe there are few, if any, absolute principles that are to impact human behavior.

An even more recent poll by the Barna Research Group reveals the increase of our biblically illiterate culture when we learn that 3 of 4 Americans (and nearly 50% of “born-again” Christians) believe the Bible contains the phrase, “God helps those who help themselves.” Beloved, if we are to have lasting ministries, we need to be serious about this first activity; we need to expose people to the Word of God. And this is what we see Paul doing in our text.

Remember that Paul is now on his third missionary journey. One thing you would notice if you look at a map of this journey is that Paul did not travel to new places. What we see him doing is visiting the places where he had led people to Christ during the first two trips. Paul’s goal then was to strengthen, train, and recruit people in and for ministry. In other words, Paul did what was necessary to ensure his ministry lasted. And for Paul, ministry meant exposing people to the Word of God. But what does this mean? What does it look like to expose people to the Word of God? Glad you asked. Notice with me the two things we find Paul doing so that we can resolve to do the same.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

A. We must assess where people are at spiritually (1-3)

1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.”

If we would resolve to a lasting, Bible-centered ministry, our first task is to know where people are at spiritually. Remember back in chapter 18 that we were introduced to Apollos, a gifted Jewish preacher who was then groomed by Aquila and Priscilla. Apollos left Ephesus to do ministry in Corinth. Shortly after, Paul arrived in Ephesus. Now Ephesus was a strategic city. Paul had made a brief visit there on his second journey and promised to return if it was God’s will (18:21). Well, it was God’s will and Paul would stay in Ephesus longer than any other place he went, nearly three years. Let me remind you of the significance of Ephesus. The population was huge for the day, some 300,000 people. It boasted a theater that seated 25,000 spectators. Materialism – the desire of having possession, dominated the mindset of the people. Additionally, Ephesus was a center of the occult, housing the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The Temple of Artemis was over 400 feet long, 200 feet wide (roughly an oversized football field), and had 127 pillars made of marble. The city attracted every kind of magician, sorceress, psychic, and criminal. The streets were filled with con artists, perverts and even murderers. Ephesus has been called the Dark Castle of Asia Minor.

How do you reach such a people for Jesus? Paul’s goal was simple; expose the people to the Word of God. But to do this effectively, Paul would need to know what these people knew about the Bible, where they were at spiritually. He needed to assess them. So, how did he do this? Notice three things with me:

First, in verse one we see that Paul “*found some disciples.*” Verse 7 tells us there were twelve of them. They are identified as “disciples” which in Acts usually speaks of being a follower of Jesus. But our text seems to be using this word in a more general sense. While these men were followers of Jesus, the Jesus they knew was the Jesus taught by John the Baptist. What they knew then about Jesus was not inaccurate, but it was incomplete. These men then were religious, but they were also ignorant. How did Paul find all this out? This lead to the second thing Paul did.

Second, Paul asked questions. Notice how Paul assesses them by asking them in verse 2, “***Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?***” Why would Paul ask this? He is seeking to know their spiritual condition. I have nothing against using tracts to share the gospel with people, but the problem with tracts is that they can assume everyone you speak with will understand what is in the tract. Some people will know more, some will know less. Our job in sharing Jesus is to first find out what others know, or perhaps, what they do not know. Sometimes we need to find out what they have done with what they do know.

These men respond in verse two saying, “*No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.*” “***No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit...***” What would you conclude if someone said to you that he had not heard there was a Holy Spirit? It would reveal to you his spiritual condition. Since these did not know about the Holy Spirit, they would have been unaware of one of the most significant events of human history. What event do I speak of? Remember that after Jesus died for sinners on the Cross, after He conquered the grave, and after He returned to heaven, He kept His promise to send another like Him to earth. Who is the other? He sent the Holy Spirit of God. Do you realize that we are living in the age of the Holy Spirit? This

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

time between the first and second comings of Jesus is the time of the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is a key theme in New Testament theology. Without the Holy Spirit, a person cannot become a Christian or live out the Christian life.

And these men to whom Paul was speaking knew nothing of the Holy Spirit. This prompted an additional question by Paul. In verse 3 we read, **“Into what then were you baptized?”** And they replied, **“Into John’s baptism.”** Now Paul knew where these men were at spiritually. This brings us to the next thing Paul did.

Third, Paul discovered their deficiency. I find it interesting to note that these men were not wicked, evil or even irreligious. Rather, they were religious people that were missing something necessary and practical. What they knew was not bad but it was incomplete. Beloved, we assume too much with people, particularly concerning the most important matter of knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. A question many of you have heard me ask before, a good question to use in order to assess the spiritual condition of someone is this, “If you were to die tonight, and stand before God; and He were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven,’ how would you respond? There are sincere believers who simply do not know how to answer that question. There are sincere unbelievers who do not know how to answer that question, or answer it by suggesting that they would have God look to see that their good works outweighed their bad. It is a good assessing question. That is what Paul was doing here. He had asked them a question to gauge their knowledge. All they knew was the baptism of John, which was a baptism of expectation rather than a baptism of fulfillment. John the Baptist had taught that the Messiah was coming and so people needed to repent and be ready for Him. Those who were baptized into this revealed their sincerity. But their belief essentially made them Old Testament saints. Remember this was all that Apollos knew. It may be that these were converts of Apollos and so they never heard the rest of the story concerning Jesus. They had believed in what they knew. But they had not known all that they needed; that Messiah *had come* and that the Holy Spirit *had come*, and that those who believe in the Messiah, in Jesus, receive the promised Holy Spirit.

With two simple questions, Paul assessed the Bible knowledge of his audience. Beloved, we must be doing the same. We must figure out what people actually know versus what they think they know. There is a story about a new pastor who was asked to teach a boys’ class in the absence of the regular teacher. He was determined to find out what these boys knew, so he asked them who knocked down the walls of Jericho. *[pause]* All the boys denied having done it, and the preacher was appalled by their ignorance. At the next deacons’ meeting, he shared his experience. “Not one of them knows who knocked down the walls of Jericho,” he lamented. The group was silent until finally one seasoned veteran of disputes spoke up. “Preacher, this appears to be bothering you a lot. But I’ve known all those boys since they were born and they’re good boys. If they said they didn’t know, I believe them. Let’s just take some money out of the repair and maintenance fund, fix the walls, and let it go at that.” I think the pastor learned a lot more than he expected. But the point is, if we are going to help people grow, if you are to take an active role in securing a lasting ministry, it begins as we assess where people are and what they know spiritually. That is the first activity, but there is one more I would have you learn this morning.

B. We must aim people to where they need to be (4-7)

4 Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. 7 There were in all about twelve men.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

Notice what Paul did here. Having found out where these men were spiritually, he next aims them to where they need to be. This is the ministry of the Word. This is exposing people to the truth of the Word of God. But how did Paul do this. Look with me at two things Paul did.

First, *Paul built upon what they already knew*. These men knew John’s baptism, and so this was Paul’s starting point. Sometimes, when people state something that is incomplete, we shoot them down and tell them they are wrong. We need to remember that people cannot respond to that which they do not know. Paul’s conversation with the men in verse 4 went along the lines of this, “So you know about John’s baptism? That’s good. John taught people to repent, to get their lives ready for Messiah and that is important!” Do you see what Paul was doing? He was building on what these men knew. This is what make a good witness for Jesus. A good witness for Jesus knows that he or she most likely is not the first person God has ever brought into the hearer’s life to teach Him the Word. Their hearer has picked up some things. We need to use what they have picked up to aim them more focused upon Jesus. So, Paul built upon what they knew.

Second, *Paul taught them what they did not know*. John the Baptist not only preached repentance, but He also instructed people to *believe*, to believe on the One coming after him, to believe in Jesus. Jesus was the missing piece of the puzzle. These men had understood some truth, but they did not really know Jesus. They had believed in John the Baptist, but not necessarily in the One who died for their sins and rose again for their salvation. However, God was at work for as they heard about Jesus, what did they do? They believed and were baptized according to verse 5.

Let me remind you that baptism does not save a person. God saves sinners the moment they *believe* in Jesus. Baptism is God’s designated way to show that you have believed in Jesus. Being baptized as it says here in verse 5 “**in the name of Jesus**” is not a formula that must be recited in order to make a baptism valid. To be baptized in the name of Jesus simply means that a person is acknowledging that Jesus is the Savior—which is what His name means, *Yeshua*, the Lord saves. It is to declare, “I can’t save myself. I believe that is why *Jesus* came, to save me.” These twelve men came to realize this. And all of this happened because one person took the time to expose them to the Word of God. Does this kind of ministry last? Indeed, it does as Paul’s ministry is still enduring to this day.

If we would be resolved to be involved in a lasting ministry, we must expose people to the Word of God, we must tell them who God is, who man is, what sin is, who Jesus is, and what is necessary according to Scripture! And so, there is an implied demand here; that demand being your commitment to be in the Word yourself. For if you are not readying, studying, mediating, memorizing and applying God’s word to your own life, you have nothing to offer other people.

Martin Luther once shared, “I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb--study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.” That is a believer resolved to know God’s word so that he can expose God’s word.

Sometimes when we get into God’s word, we come across things that seem hard to understand. Notice verse 6 with me. We read, **And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.**

Why did Paul lay his hands on them? We have not seen this elsewhere in the book of Acts. Also, why is it that these believers spoke in tongues? Is this something all believers are to

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

do? If we would answer such questions we must see this passage in the light of the rest of Scripture. Remember that Luke is telling us what happened in the early church in the book of Acts. Luke is not concerned so much with what should or will happen for other believers, but is simply telling us what happened to twelve men in Ephesus. Paul laid his hands on them, the Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues, literally “other languages,” and they prophesied. This is not stating such is to be normative for the church. In fact, this is the last time Luke mentions the speaking of tongues in the book of Acts.

Let me give you a bit of direction when interpreting the New Testament. Acts is narrative (a historical story); and the epistles are normative (what is normal for the church). In Acts, we have what happened in the early church. The epistles instruct us as to what should happen thereafter. Some who believe that the church today is to speak in tongues as an evidence of being filled with or baptized in the Holy Spirit have a real problem. For while the early church did in fact speak in tongues at the beginning, as is evident in the book of Acts, when Paul would later write the church and to his friends at Ephesus concerning the filling of the Spirit, he in fact said nothing about tongues (Ephesians 5:18ff.). Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit, or to speak in tongues, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. As you read Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church you will note many references to the Holy Spirit of God and His work in the believer, but never the command to speak in tongues.

The point is that Acts 19 does not give us the pattern for the church today. The purpose of this text is to show the unity of God’s people. In Acts 2, we see what happened when God saved Jews in Jerusalem. In Acts 8, we see what happened when God saved Samaritans. In Acts 10, we see what happened when God saved Gentiles. In Acts 19, we see what happened when God saved Jews living outside the promised land. And what happened each time? Each time the same thing happened. As God opened the door of faith to Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and even Jews outside of Israel, He gave them the same gift, the Holy Spirit, and the same spectacular demonstration of the Spirit’s presence, speaking in tongues. By this, God was making it clear that He has no second-class citizens in His family. Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles all received the Spirit once saved, and are all one in Christ. What took place here in Ephesus was a unique event in a place that would have a unique role in God’s unfolding outreach plan. As one commentator noted (F. F. Bruce), “Ephesus was to be a new center of the Gentile mission—the next in importance after Syrian Antioch—and these twelve disciples were to be the nucleus of the Ephesian church. By this exceptional procedure, then, they were associated in the apostolic and missionary task of the Christian Church.”

Some today like to use this text to “prove” that receiving the Holy Spirit is an event that occurs after you are saved. This is a misuse of a narrative text. What we see God doing for these twelve men in Ephesus is not the pattern for the church as revealed in the Epistles. So what is the pattern? It is what we see happening to the rest of the people who were saved in Ephesus. Notice that Paul did not lay hands on them. They all received the Spirit when they *believed* in Jesus, even as Paul explained to the Ephesians in his letter to them. In Ephesians 1:13-14 we read:

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Beloved, this is what is normal today. When a person believes in Jesus, at that very moment he or she receives the Holy Spirit. At that moment he or she is baptized by the Spirit into

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). It is all a one-time event. The Spirit seals that person for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is in you and He will never leave. Do we have any involvement when it comes to the Holy Spirit? Yes, we do. We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit by obedience to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:18). We can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and even quench His impact in our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We are to walk by and in the Spirit, allowing Him to produce His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). Clear enough?

Then why is there so much confusion and different teachings concerning the Holy Spirit? There are a number but the key one is this; too many churches are failing to expose people to the Word of God. And so, people look to their own experiences and human opinion rather than the Word of God. They see experience as being superior to Word of God.

Beloved, if we would be a people resolved to be involved in a ministry that lasts; in a ministry that pleases God, it begins by being a people of the Book, of knowing the Word of God better so that you can expose people to its truths; particularly those truths surrounding the person and work of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord to all who believe.

Will you commit afresh to exposing people to the Word of God? How can you do that? Here are a few reminders:

1. Read the Word of God daily
2. Pray to understand and apply the Word of God
3. Intentionally ask others questions by which you can assess their spiritual condition.
4. Take what some one knows about God, Jesus, or the Bible and build upon that information.
5. Fill in any missing information of which that person is ignorant.
6. Keep asking questions
7. Pray that God changes hearts and minds so that the person and work of Jesus may be believed.

Soli Deo Gloria

Community Bible Church

Copyright © 2013 Edward K. Godfrey. *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*