Acts 2024 Juan Seo (Sep 15, 2024)

**PAUL’S DISCIPLE-MAKING MINISTRY IN EPHESUS**

Acts 19:1-10

Key Verse 19:9b-10

**9b So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.**

Today's message is about the Apostle Paul's ministry in Ephesus. What kind of city was Ephesus? Ephesus was a political, religious, and commercial center in Asia Minor. At the time of Paul, its population was about 250,000, making it likely the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. The city's temple honoring Artemis, known as Diana in Roman mythology, was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. I want to highlight disciple-making ministry as a key feature of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. In today’s message, I would like to share three principles of his disciple-making ministry.

**Principle 1: Paul helped the disciples receive the Holy Spirit.**

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, whom did he meet? Look at verse 1b: ***"There he found some disciples."*** Paul was so happy to meet the disciples in Ephesus that he greeted them warmly, saying, “Hello! I’m the Apostle Paul. It’s such a pleasure to meet you.” However, they responded by simply saying, “Hi!” Their response didn’t seem very enthusiastic. To encourage them, Paul spoke more energetically: “Praise the Lord Jesus, who saved us from our sins!” But they responded, “We are wretched sinners,” with tears in their eyes. As believers in Jesus, they should have been filled with love, joy, peace, and hope, but they weren’t. Paul realized there was something wrong with their faith. So, he asked them, ***"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"*** They replied, ***"No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."*** Their answer was shocking. They were so spiritually ignorant that they hadn’t even heard of the Holy Spirit. So, Paul asked them again, ***"Then what baptism did you receive?"*** They answered, ***"John's baptism."***

What is John’s baptism? Paul explained to them, ***“John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance.”*** John the Baptist was a prophet who preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in the wilderness before Jesus came. At that time, many people came to him to receive a baptism of repentance. However, John the Baptist was not the Messiah. He was ***“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord”*** (Luke 3:4). So, while he could offer a baptism of repentance, he could not give the baptism of forgiveness. John the Baptist was well aware of this. That’s why he prepared people to receive the Messiah who was to come. He said, ***“I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”*** (Luke 3:16). Who is “the one who is more powerful than I” that John spoke about? It is Jesus. Paul clearly taught that John the Baptist testified about Jesus. ***“He (John) told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”*** Therefore, Jesus is the Messiah who gives the baptism of forgiveness with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire that Jesus gives is fundamentally different from the baptism of repentance given by John the Baptist. The baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire is the baptism of Jesus' forgiveness through the work of the Holy Spirit. When we sincerely repent through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus allows us to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit saying, ***“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*** He declares that our sins are forgiven and that we have crossed over from death to eternal life. The baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire is a baptism of purification, where the Holy Spirit’s fire burns away all our sins, and we are made as clean as snow. Therefore, those who receive Jesus' baptism of forgiveness are filled with love, joy, peace, and hope in their hearts. Those who once lived meaningless lives under the power of death find true meaning in life through Jesus and begin to live for the glory of God. People who once lived in weakness, repeatedly falling into sin, become strong through the power of the Holy Spirit and overcome sin, living fruitful lives for the glory of God.

The disciples in Ephesus had only received John’s baptism of repentance. They had not received the baptism of forgiveness that Jesus gives through the Holy Spirit and fire. So, they had no peace in their hearts. Because of their sins, they were constantly condemning themselves, feeling sorrowful and complaining, leaving no room for joy in their hearts. Without the indwelling and fullness of the Holy Spirit, they lived meaningless and powerless lives day by day. Lacking the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit, they were unable to live fruitful lives for the glory of God.

How about you? Have you received the baptism of forgiveness that Jesus gives with the Holy Spirit and fire? I believe that most of us here have received Jesus' baptism of forgiveness. However, there may be some among us who have not yet received the baptism of forgiveness through the Holy Spirit and fire. These people may still lack assurance in their hearts about their salvation. They may have doubts about the existence of God. They might struggle to accept that Jesus died for their sins. They are unsure whether the Holy Spirit is dwelling within them. Some may have once received the baptism of forgiveness and were filled with joy, but now that joy has faded, and they live powerless and meaningless lives. Others, having not received the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit, are unable to serve God's mission fruitfully and live with a sense of defeat.

At this time, I would like us to take a moment to close our eyes and reflect seriously on ourselves. “Have I truly received the baptism of forgiveness through the Holy Spirit and fire?” “Am I truly living a Spirit-filled life, walking with the Holy Spirit?” “Am I truly serving God's mission powerfully with the gifts of the Holy Spirit?” If your answer is not positive, I encourage you to earnestly ask Jesus to grant you the baptism of forgiveness with the Holy Spirit and fire. Ask Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit and help you live a life walking with Him. Ask Jesus to give you the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that you can serve God’s mission powerfully. If you ask, God will gladly pour out His Spirit upon you.

How did the disciples in Ephesus respond to Paul's teaching? ***"On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"*** (v. 5). Without any hesitation, they immediately received baptism in the name of Jesus. They accepted Jesus as the Messiah. And when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. As evidence of this, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying, were manifested through them. God gave them these gifts to assure them of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The number of disciples who received the Holy Spirit in Ephesus was twelve men in all. Why are these twelve disciples in Ephesus significant? It is because they became the foundation of the disciple-making ministry in Ephesus. Paul began his disciple-making ministry with these twelve Spirit-filled disciples. When we engage in disciple-making ministry, it is crucial to help disciples receive the baptism of forgiveness with the Holy Spirit and fire. Without personally encountering Jesus, one cannot grow as a disciple of Christ. In the book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims, evangelizing and making converts is described as the stage before becoming a disciple. In my personal experience, I have also seen that those who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and encountered Jesus personally grow well as the disciples of Jesus. On the other hand, I have seen that those who have not experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in personally meeting Jesus find disciple training too difficult and burdensome. Some of them even gave up on becoming Jesus’ disciples and returned to the world.

In truth, the path of being a disciple of Jesus is narrow, difficult, and challenging. Jesus commanded His disciples, ***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*** For someone who has not received Jesus’ baptism of forgiveness, it is unlikely that they could deny themselves and take up their cross for Jesus. Therefore, we must help those who do not yet know Jesus to encounter Him in a personal and experiential way. To encounter Jesus experientially means knowing Him not just intellectually but spiritually. It means that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit become real in our lives—not just theoretical. This is more than just becoming emotionally excited; it involves experiencing genuine repentance of our sins and receiving the forgiveness of Jesus through the work of God's word and the Holy Spirit. Those who experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, receive forgiveness from Jesus, and form a deep and personal relationship with Him can continue to grow as His disciples. I pray that we may be filled with Jesus' forgiveness through the work of the Holy Spirit. May we grow into a Spirit-filled community through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Principle 2: Paul formed a community of disciples.**

Look at verse 8: ***“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”*** As was his custom, Paul first went to the Jewish synagogue in Ephesus to preach the gospel. For three months—a considerable amount of time—he put all his effort into proclaiming the kingdom of God. But what was the result? ***“Some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way”*** (v. 9a). The gospel work did not progress, and, in fact, the situation worsened. As a result, Paul decided to change the direction of his ministry. Look at verse 9b: ***“So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him.”*** Paul did not linger in the synagogue any longer and left the people there. His ministry in the synagogue was focused on preaching the gospel to the general public. Paul shifted from a public ministry to a disciple-making ministry. He focused on training disciples. To do this, he took the disciples with him—those twelve Spirit-filled disciples. Paul separated them from others, forming a community of disciples. He then centered his ministry on that community of disciples.

The formation of the community of disciples was at the core of Jesus' ministry. While Jesus did preach the gospel to the crowd, He focused His ministry on his community of disciples. He helped his twelve disciples receive the Holy Spirit and be transformed. In disciple-making ministry, a large number of people is not necessary. Rather, having a small group of prepared individuals is sufficient. These prepared people must be filled with a spiritual desire to learn from Jesus. They must be humble enough to reflect on themselves before God’s word, repent, and change. Additionally, they must be ready to respect and serve others. They should be willing to share their lives with others. When such people gather together, learning and growing in Jesus, that is a community of disciples. Of course, a community of disciples is not a place where perfect people gather. It is where weak and imperfect sinners come together to learn from Jesus and be transformed into God’s holy people.

The reason this community of disciples is important is that our faith grows through our relationship with God and with others. Some people believe that having personal faith is enough and feel burdened by forming relationships with others. However, our faith grows better within a community of disciples. We mature as we help and are helped by one another. This is because we need God, and we need each other. Each of our families is a community of disciples. Each of our fellowship is a community of disciples. Our New York UBF is a community of disciples. May we grow as Jesus’ disciples by praying for and supporting each other. In particular, I am praying for the formation of communities of disciples among young adults and college students. Do you want to be part of this community of disciples?

**Principle 3: Paul trained disciples through the word of God.**

What did Paul do after he left with the disciples? Look at verses 9b and 10a: ***“He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years.”*** Paul had daily discussions with his disciples. What do you think was the topic of their discussions? I believe it was the fulfillment of God’s kingdom through Jesus Christ. Paul and the disciples studied God's word daily and discussed the kingdom of God. They interpreted the Scriptures with Jesus as the Messiah at the center. They reflected deeply on God's word, wrestled with it, asked questions, and discussed it. They made every effort to live in obedience to God’s word. Moreover, they constantly examined themselves before God's word and worked to transform their lives accordingly.

They gathered daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Tyrannus could have been either the owner of the lecture hall or a famous philosopher. In this school, philosophers usually gathered to give lectures and engage in discussions. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the weather became hot, they typically took a break. The Western text adds that Paul gave his lectures from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Paul rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus during this time—when it was hot and drowsy—to have daily discussions with the disciples about God’s word. This was an intensive class that lasted five hours each day. Though they may have felt sleepy and hot, they faithfully attended the sessions. After the five-hour class ended, they returned to their daily work and also shared the gospel with the people around them. This disciple-making ministry in Tyrannus continued for two years. Can you imagine Paul and the disciples studying the word of God for five hours a day, every day, for two years? They put all their effort into learning and practicing God’s Word.

What was the result? Look at verse 10b: ***“All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”*** Paul's teaching at Tyrannus became so well-known that many Jews and Greeks from Asia Minor came to hear the word of the Lord. Additionally, the twelve disciples spread throughout Asia Minor, preaching God's Word, which led to the expansion of the gospel throughout the region. Ephesus itself was transformed by the gospel. This was truly an amazing work of God. How did such a remarkable work of God happen? It was because Paul devoted all his efforts to the disciple-making ministry. Disciple-making is the wisdom of Jesus. Disciple-making is the most fruitful method of expanding God’s kingdom in this world. I pray that our church will also be devoted to disciple-making ministry. As we learned from today’s message, let us earnestly seek to receive the Holy Spirit, form the communities of disciples, and study God’s word with all our strength. May God bless us to establish a disciple-making ministry among us.