

Intro. Let me take a quick poll of the audience & these two questions are not trick questions: who here is burdened today (whatever the burden is)? Now who here is blessed today (whatever the blessing is)? But do you ever think of the two as one & the same? Psalm 68:19 alludes to the blessings of our Lord as that which He loads us up with every day & He is our salvation. Your job may be both a burden & a blessing. Your family may be both a burden & a blessing. Your possessions may be both a burden & a blessing. Though much could be said about burdens, our text today in the “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth” series helps us answer the question, “What Does the Lord Bless?” Let’s look in Acts 18-19.

Theme: Blessing & persecution

Background: Ephesus is located in modern-day Turkey, just across the Aegean Sea from Athens. It was one of the largest cities in the Roman world in Paul’s day, boasting of some 250K people. It was an educated people with a large library (show pic). It was a large commercial center, accessible by both road & sea. It was a religious center with one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world there—the Temple of Artemis (at 425’ x 225’ x 60’, it was 4x the size of the Greek Parthenon). Ephesus could assemble crowds beyond 24K at its theatre (show pic), where a riot nearly broke out over Paul’s preaching.

➤ When I mention “blessing,” I’m talking about the biblical sense, not the worldly sense. The worldly sense often includes lots of money, fame, health—that’s why the health-wealth-prosperity gospel is so damaging—it’s rooted in people rather than in the Lord. Biblical blessing may include health, wealth & prosperity, but it often means encouragement, protection, God’s favor, etc.—that is to say, while God’s blessing can include physical or material blessings, it often has more to do with spiritual blessings—wisdom, peace, joy, encouragement, growth, righteousness, etc.

Illus: F.E. Marsh has enumerated some of God's blessings: An acceptance that can never be questioned. (Ephesians 1:6). An inheritance that can never be lost (I Peter 1:3-5). A deliverance that can never be excelled (2 Corinthians 1:10). A grace that can never be limited (2 Corinthians 12:9). A hope that can never be disappointed. (Hebrews 6:18, 19). A bounty that can never be withdrawn. (I Colossians 3:21-23). A joy that need never be diminished (John 15:11). A nearness to God that can never be reversed (Ephesians 2:13). A peace that can never be disturbed (John 14:27). A righteousness that can never be tarnished (2 Corinthians 5:21). A salvation that can never be canceled (Hebrews 5:9).

➤ **What do we see the Lord bless?**

1. The Lord blesses you when you encourage others in ministry (18:22-23)

- Paul made it a habit to revisit churches from previous journeys to encourage them in the faith & he did so here with churches from his 1st journey (at the conclusion of his 3rd journey, he revisited some of the places on his 2nd journey)

Illus: Everyone has a spiritual gift & some have the gift of encouragement & we should be thankful for those. They help offset those who have the spiritual gift of criticism. We need more encouragers in the world & the Lord blesses you when you encourage others in ministry

2. The Lord blesses you when you are open to growing in the faith (18:24-28; 19:8-10)

- Scholars debate whether Apollos was a genuine believer when Aquila & Priscilla met him in Ephesus & needed to be saved or whether he was a young Christian who needed more training—probably the latter because Luke tells us he “taught accurately the things concerning Jesus” (18:25)
- Apollos was open to growing in the faith & took the private instruction from Aquila & Priscilla in stride & became even more effective for the kingdom—he probably learned about the gift of the Spirit whose coming initiated the new covenant era
- The same openness to learning the faith is evident in those who gathered to learn from Paul 6 days a week, probably from the hours of 11 am – 4 pm, when people rested from the extreme heat (19:8-10)

Illus: I meet too many Christians who think & act as though they have it all figured out & they won’t listen to a differing viewpoint—the world is full of close-minded people & while we should be narrow-minded about the core truths of Scripture, we should also be open to learn & grow in the faith

3. The Lord blesses you when you obey His commands (19:1-7)

- Although some translations refer to these Ephesian 12 as “believers,” the word is actually “disciples” (followers) of John, so these are people following the old covenant—similar to Apollos, but they didn’t know about the Holy Spirit, nor the baptism of Jesus, so they received that message & were baptized in water & then the Holy Spirit came on them, so that they spoke in tongues & prophesied—there is no pattern how the Spirit came in Acts (before or after baptism—narrative isn’t designed to teach doctrine but tell a story)
- The baptism that counts is the one based on the name of Jesus & representing the Spirit’s coming (Bock, 596)
- We Baptists are big on believer’s baptism by immersion, because the Scriptures are clear on it—in all 9 baptism accounts in Acts, believing is stressed prior to baptism (2:38, 41; 8:12, 35-39; 9:17-18; 10:43-48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8; 19:4-6)
- Moreover, the word “baptism” means “immersion,” “being dipped,” “dunked” & several contexts make this clear (Mark 1:9-10; John 3:23; Acts 8:38-39)
- The message of baptism is both Jesus’ death, burial & resurrection as well as the believer’s death to sin, having the sin nature buried with Christ & being raised to walk a new life (Romans 6:3-11)—only immersion is a picture of the gospel of death, burial & resurrection

4. The Lord blesses you when your repentance is genuinely evident (19:11-20)

- During Paul’s influential ministry in Ephesus, certain sons of a Jewish chief priest thought they could use the name of Jesus & have the same power at their disposal as Paul did—the problem was they hadn’t surrendered to Jesus

Illus: They are like modern “health, wealth, prosperity” preachers who use Jesus’ name to get rich, like Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Joice Meyers, T.D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, Paula White & more

- The Lord permitted an evil spirit to overpower the 7 sons of Sceva to show the name of Jesus was not to be used lightly (like Ananias & Sapphira learned) & that the reverence of Jesus is demonstrated through acts of repentance which are genuine, even costly—the cost of the magic books being burned was 50K pieces of silver, the equivalent of more than 150 years of wages for the person making minimum wage 6 days a week

5. The Lord blesses you when unbelievers prevent your persecution (19:21-41)

- Luke is selective on Paul’s suffering in Ephesus, for he recounts in his Corinthian correspondence how he fought for his life there (1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8; 4:9-12; 6:4-10), possibly an imprisonment (2 Cor 11:23)
- The main issue for Demetrius having problems with Paul’s message of Jesus was an economic one—it was hurting his sales! Then, it was a religious problem, because people were turning away from the idols & beginning to see the influence of Artemis diminish

Illus: The main problem the abortion industry & porn industry & drug cartels have with Christianity & the gospel is that it hurts their bank accounts! Abortion is not first & foremost about women’s health—Planned Parenthood doesn’t even offer prenatal care—it is about making money from abortions. Drug cartels don’t care about the laws against their practice, because the money is too great for them (even those who aren’t addicted). The porn industry doesn’t care about the women it uses or the men who get addicted, their primary care is about making money!

- The city’s mayor and other civic leaders (Asiarchs) came to Paul’s defense—while they weren’t believers, they knew they didn’t have a legitimate case against Paul or his work
- I don’t want to imply God always allows Christians an escape from persecution, because they often suffer for their faith, but I’m saying when they escape persecution, it’s a blessing from the Lord

Conc. I grew up in a strong, Christian home where my parents taught me the Scriptures & prayed daily (we even had to memorize verses). I knew my sin condition separated me from God & trusted Jesus to save me shortly before turning 6. I always assumed I had been baptized & forgot about it until my mother asked me when I was 13, after the pastor had preached on baptism. I started fighting the Spirit’s prompting, because I had become full of pride & didn’t want others to think I wasn’t saved or hadn’t been obedient. I fought for a year and a half & the Lord made it clear that it didn’t matter what others thought, I needed to be obedient to Him & His Word. When I finally obeyed Him, the Lord began flooding my life with spiritual blessings that He had been withholding to a disobedient child. He may be doing the same to you. You’ve seen from Scripture the kind of person the Lord blesses—will you be that kind of person in light of His grace?