

“THE ORIGINAL INCONVENIENT TRUTH”**Acts 19****THEME: The gospel is disruptive****DATE: 09/30/07**

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I suppose you are all acquainted with Al Gore’s crusade to inform the world about a global warming crisis. His documentary film about climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*, won an Oscar last year. I didn’t see it. He maintains that the danger is real, and if we don’t reduce CO₂ emissions, life as we enjoy it is in jeopardy. But the remedies he proposes are allegedly inconvenient for individuals and for nations that don’t want to be disturbed. Hence the title: *An Inconvenient Truth*.

I don’t know whether to believe him or to ignore him. His work has been both ballyhooed as brilliant science and lampooned as political poppycock.

- Al Gore’s *Inconvenient Truth* is a convenient introduction to my message this morning.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is an inconvenient truth. It is the original inconvenient truth.

It confronts people with the truth about unimaginable calamity and offers a wonderful solution. But people are not willing to admit that they need the salvation offered.

The church exists to safeguard and spread the good news of Jesus Christ—the gospel. But the gospel of Jesus Christ doesn’t ease smoothly into the *status quo*.

I think it might have been the 19th century English churchman Henry Drummond who pointed out that ‘*The role of the church is to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable.*’

The gospel is supposed to make people uncomfortable.

The true gospel of Christ cannot be a mere convenience. It is life-changing, it is revolutionary.

Calling the gospel of Jesus Christ convenient would be like calling a heart transplant cosmetic surgery.

- The account of the birth of the church in Ephesus in the Book of Acts demonstrates that the true gospel of Jesus Christ is always a force to be reckoned with.

¹ *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples*

² *and 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."*

³ *So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.*

⁴ *Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."*

⁵ *On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*

⁶ *When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.*

⁷ *There were about twelve men in all.*

These were genuine believers, but they had not yet understood the nature of the church as the body of Christ energized by the Holy Spirit.

- This is the third and last time speaking in tongues is mentioned in the Book of Acts.

The act of speaking in tongues was a sensational sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence with believers in Christ, just as at Pentecost in Acts 2.

- All of this undoubtedly had the effect of making it perfectly clear to Paul that God intended to do something great in Ephesus.

In Acts 19 we will see some uncomfortable and inconvenient **effects** of the gospel.

I. THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES ESTABLISHED OPINION (19:8-10)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is always new and dynamic. It’s like what the Bible says about new wine—you can’t pour it into old wineskins. It will make them burst. It disturbs the *status quo*.

⁸ *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.*

⁹ *But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.*

The Christian fellowship is here called “The Way.”

You will find this same expression used in chapter 9 when Saul sought and gained permission from the high priest to pursue his crusade to stamp out this movement called “The Way”—the Christian faith.

- The lecture hall of Tyrannus was probably a Greek lecture hall.

Now that Paul’s ministry was no longer linked to the synagogue, Gentiles had an opportunity to come and hear the gospel as Paul presented it.

There is a notation in the Western Text of the Scriptures that Paul held these discussions from eleven to four o’clock every day. That’s when people took a siesta from work and business. Paul used the time set aside for relaxing to engage people in discussions about Jesus Christ and the gospel.

- When there is a strong opposition to God’s messenger that effectively closes one door, the Lord seems to open up another opportunity that is even more effective. This happened in Ephesus.

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.*

Paul’s teaching in Ephesus was largely responsible for the establishing of many churches in that area beside Ephesus, namely, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colossae, Hierapolis, and Troas.

It all spread out from his ministry at the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus.

- The gospel of Christ challenges established opinion. It disturbs the *status quo*—and it is supposed to do exactly that! That’s what opens up new opportunities.

[2nd inconvenient effect of the gospel]

II. THE GOSPEL EXPOSES UNGODLY DECEPTION (19:11-20)

The gospel of Christ is truth. In various ways it exposes lies.

¹¹ *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul,*

¹² *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.*

Miracles authenticated the gospel of Jesus Christ. A reasoned presentation of truth was accompanied by the evidence of divine power.

Should we expect the same combination today? Yes, but perhaps not in the same expression.

Not all evidences of divine power are physical phenomena. The miraculous changes in people’s lives should be so profound and so obvious that they cannot be credited to anything except divine power.

¹³ *Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."*

¹⁴ *Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.*

¹⁵ *One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"*

¹⁶ *Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.*

There were evidently religious charlatans who capitalized on some magic arts as a way of becoming wealthy. That’s what Sceva’s sons did.

- We find much the same thing going on today in the trickery of unscrupulous evangelists and preachers who manufacture some extraordinary phenomena in their religious services.

The worst part of this sort of deception is that it attracts people, not to the Lord or to the truth of the gospel, but to a sensational experience.

It emphasizes some strange experiences that are declared to be signs of God’s presence and power. But there is no biblical basis for them. They marginalize the truth of God’s word.

And when all the sensationalism is over, people are left with nothing of lasting, biblical substance to nourish their souls.

Gullible people flock to hear religious showmen who are only after their money.

- The seven sons of Sceva were doing this (14)

They were just using the name of Jesus to get rich.

One day the evil spirit that they confronted in the name of Jesus, resisted them: , *"Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"* (15).

- These sons of Sceva pretended to have some connection with Jesus, but it wasn’t real.

Jesus told us how this will all be exposed at the judgment: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"* (Matthew 7:21-23)

The truth will come out, either in this life, or in the judgment.

¹⁷ *When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.*

The news spread like wildfire.

It was on everybody's lips: *'Did you hear about the thrashing Sceva's sons got from a man with an evil spirit?'*

The numbers must have swelled in Paul's classes at the hall of Tyrannus after this.

- I wonder what it would take for the name of the Lord Jesus to be held in high honor like that in our church and in our community.

¹⁸ *Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.*

¹⁹ *A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.*

It appears that some in the church still had the paraphernalia of their old heathen practices.

These magical scrolls were worth fantastic sums of money in that day—an amount equal to the total annual salaries of 160-190 people (8-10 million dollars).

They burned their bridges behind them. They would not return to the old way of life.

²⁰ *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

The Christian faith became a force to reckon with.

People didn't just say they repented. Their turning away from evil was compelling and complete.

- I think we have become entirely too comfortable with the practice of confessions of faith in Christ without any clear confession of repentance of sin.

There are people who think they are Christians because they simply added faith in Jesus to their chosen way of life. They have never repudiated their old sinful ways.

But faith apart from sincere repentance is not authentic faith.

- The church in Ephesus was born out of authoritative preaching of the gospel of Christ and unmistakable evidence of God's power. People gave visible evidence of genuine repentance. Those who did not have sincere faith in the Lord Jesus were exposed by evil spirits as frauds.
- I think we should pray that the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ will expose anything done in the name of Christ that is false. The Gospel exposes ungodly deception.

[3rd inconvenient effect of the gospel]

III. THE GOSPEL PROVOKES BITTER OPPOSITION (19:21-41)

The gospel of Christ calls for the most comprehensive change in life.

Unless you repent of your sin and put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior you will surely perish. That is an essential part of the gospel.

Proud people find this offensive. They oppose it, just as people did at Ephesus.

- Paul's time of service in Ephesus was now drawing to a close. It was time to move on.

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."*

²² *He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.*

²³ *About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.*

²⁴ *A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.*

²⁵ *He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business.*

²⁶ *And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.*

²⁷ *There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."*

When the Christian way confronts a godless, decadent society, there will be resistance—even intense and bitter opposition.

In Ephesus it was a threat to the comfortable way of life of those who made their living by selling silver images of Artemis.

As people turned to faith in Christ, they turned away from idols.

When people repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ, a secular culture will feel the impact.

²⁸ *When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"*

²⁹ *Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.*

³⁰ *Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.*

³¹ *Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.*

³² *The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.*

³³ *The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people.*

³⁴ *But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"*

- This was a two-hour riot.

Most of the people didn't even know what it was about. They were just ready to rumble for any reason.

- Paul wanted to go and speak to the mob.

But when people have made up their minds that they don't like somebody, trying to reason with them is a waste of time. Besides, it would have been dangerous for him.

³⁵ *The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?"*

³⁶ *Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash.*

³⁷ *You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.*

³⁸ *If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges.*

³⁹ *If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.*

⁴⁰ *As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it."*

⁴¹ *After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.*

This city clerk (41) was probably the liaison officer between the administration of Ephesus and the Roman provincial administrators.

The Romans did not take kindly to riots in the Empire. There would be serious consequences if the mob did not disperse.

- These events in Ephesus underscore the truth that when people are saved by the power of the gospel, there is eventually opposition of some sort.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is always a threat to the *status quo*. It provokes bitter opposition, in America and around the world.

Something is wrong if the gospel fits comfortably into people's lifestyles.

The good news of Jesus Christ and a fallen, sinful culture do not mix.

- Has the real gospel of Jesus Christ had in impact on your life? Did you feel its power?
- Have you been deceived in some way by religious practices and teachings? The good news of Jesus Christ is clear and straightforward. Please ask God to help you grasp it and feel the power of the gospel today.