

Shining the Light to Darkened Minds **Ephesians 4:17-21, Acts 19:8-20**

Introduction:

1. The Apostle Paul was a man on a mission (**Ephesians 3:8**). He wanted all men (**Ephesians 3:9**) to see what God had done for them in Christ.
2. Paul realized that there was a great gap between lost mankind and God. You may ask, "What gap are you talking about?" **Ephesians 4:17-19** describes this gap.
 - A lack of understanding creates a gap between lost mankind and God. There is no spiritual life; because there is no spiritual understanding.
3. How do people's minds become darkened toward God?
 - Sin has darkened people's minds. vs. 19; **John 3:19**
 - Satan has darkened people's minds. vs. 27; **2 Corinthians 4:4**
 - False doctrine has darkened people's minds. vs. 14; **Titus 1:14-16**
4. This same gap exists today in countries and people groups all over the world. Do you remember when this lack of understanding existed in your life? Thank God somebody bridged the gap for you!
5. Our mission as a church is to bridge this gap for others. This is one of the primary reasons we exist. Think about it:
 - We know a gracious God with a divine plan for forgiveness and eternal life.
 - But, out there is lost mankind with their understanding darkened.
6. We have been called to bridge that gap for as many individuals, countries, and people groups that we possibly can. How can we bridge this gap of a lack of understanding?

It will take people who will stand in the gap.

1. God has no other plan to bridge this gap other than people. In **Ezekiel 22:30**, God said he sought for **a man** to stand in the gap. **cf. Romans 10:13-14**
2. We read the description of the Gentiles of Ephesus in 4:17-19, but yet look at 1:1. How did this happen? Because one day a man named Paul showed up in Ephesus. **Acts 19:1**
 - This wasn't Paul's home. He was from Antioch.
 - Why would he end up here? Because he was a man on a mission - he was a missionary!
 - He didn't know these people, but he knew they were sinful, wicked, and spiritually ignorant of the truth (as he once was). They needed understanding. He was willing to stand in the gap for the people of Ephesus.
3. Let me show you some pictures (missionaries for conference).
 - Why would they go to these foreign lands? Because there is a gap (multitudes with no spiritual understanding), and they have said, "We will stand in that gap."
 - Why would we help them? Because they are on the same mission we are. We can't go to Guyana, etc., but we can help them to be able to go and stand in the gap.

It will take the systematic teaching of God's Word.

1. Paul begins in the Jewish synagogue (**Acts 19:8**). He is disputing (to say thoroughly, discuss) and persuading (convince by argument) from God's Word.
2. The Jews would not believe the truth of God (religious pride), so Paul tried a different approach (verse 9). Paul set up shop in this school or lecture hall, and for two years the

people in this area heard the Word of God (verse 10), not just from Paul, but from the disciples he was training and teaching (verse 9).

3. Paul's message focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ (verse 10).
4. What was Paul doing? He was teaching God's truth, and thereby bridging that gap of a lack of understanding.
 - It is God's Word that brings light and understanding. **Psalms 19:7-8, 119:104, 130** (simple - foolish); **Ephesians 3:4**
5. Notice verse 20 states, "*So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*"
 - "Prevailed" means "to have or exercise force."
 - "Mightily" means "powerfully, vigorously."
6. God's Word is spiritual dynamite (**Romans 1:16**). It was a force in Ephesus. It pierces and penetrates (**Hebrews 4:12**) and brings enlightenment and understanding to darkened minds.
7. This is what our missionaries are doing, systematically teaching and explaining God's Word. They are bridging that gap, seeking to bring understanding to darkened minds.

It will take willing hearts to learn and believe God's Word.

1. God's Word was taught and Jesus was magnified (**Acts 19:17**), and many chose to believe (**Acts 19:18**). Their lives were radically changed by the spiritual truth Paul taught (**Acts 19:19**).
 - This is exactly what we read in **Ephesians 4:17-21**.
2. The Ephesians' understanding was once darkened and they were alienated from the life of God. They were spiritually ignorant and blind (**Ephesians 4:17-19**). But when Paul showed up teaching God's Word:
 - They heard the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:21**
 - They were taught the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:21**
 - They learned the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:20**
3. As our missionaries teach God's Word, there are inevitably people who will hear and learn God's Word. Do you know what these people then do? They come to Jesus (**John 6:45**), and their life is forever changed (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).
4. The missionary then forms this group into a local church. Like Paul, he teaches and trains leadership so that when he leaves, the teaching of God's Word continues. **Acts 20:27-28**
5. At that point the missionary can go to another place and stand in the gap, teaching God's Word, and bringing understanding to darkened minds.

In Conclusion:

1. This is the mission. This is why we exist. We are all about taking the truth of God to people who have no spiritual life and are spiritually ignorant. Why? So that they can come to an **understanding** of the truth. We must bridge the gap!
2. Paul says that we are ambassadors for Christ. We have been given a glorious message (**Colossians 1:27**). What should be our response? **Colossians 1:28-29** (Warning and teaching every man!)

Missions: What's the Big Deal?

Romans 1 & 10

Introduction:

1. Next Sunday we will kick off our 13th Annual Missions Conference. We will have five missionary families on our property that we have invited as our honored guests.
 - We currently have 77 missionaries that we support on a regular basis.
 - A missionary is somebody who has dedicated his life to preaching the gospel of Christ to other lands and other peoples.
2. Every year we tell you that this is the most important event of the year for our church. We ask you to pray, give, attend, and we begin talking about it over a month before.
3. I have a suspicion that there are people who attend Crossroads and you're asking yourself, "What's the big deal?" "Why so much emphasis on missions?" "Is it really that important?" "Does it really matter if I'm involved?" "Why should I give to missions?"
4. Allow me to answer from the Bible the question, "What's the big deal about missions?" There are three key principles that will help us answer that question.

First, the nations stand guilty before God.

1. **Romans 1:21-23** describes the condition of the nations:
 - The nations of the world understood that there was a God, but they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful. What was the result? Their foolish hearts were darkened.
 - What does Satan do? He offers a substitute religion, idolatry. What does this system of idolatry produce? vs. 28-31
 - What position does this bring before God? - wrath (vs. 18), judgment, and death (vs. 32).
2. **Romans 3:19** teaches that they are guilty before God. They are alienated from God and enemies of God by wicked works (**Colossians 1:21**). This is all of us! If people die in this condemned state, they are guaranteed to incur a second death. **Revelation 20:14-15**

Second, the gospel of Christ is the answer to the guilt.

1. The word "gospel" means "good news." What is the good news of Christ? vs. 16
2. In this gospel is power to save from the guilt, the wrath, and the judgment of God. There is salvation (deliverance). **2 Timothy 1:10**
 - Christ did this by dying our death and taking our judgment on the cross. **Romans 5:6, 8**
 - Christ rose again so that He might impart His life to us. **Romans 5:10**
 - What is the gospel of Christ? Through the cross work of Jesus Christ, we can be reconciled to God. We can be made at peace with God. **Romans 5:9**
3. But here is the best part - you don't have to **do** anything to save yourself - you simply rest in what He has accomplished.
4. You believe that what **He** did was sufficient to save you. The moment you simply by faith trust Him completely to save you, you are justified before God. **Romans 5:1**
5. This good news is for anybody and everybody who will believe. **Romans 1:16; cf. 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9**

Third, God expects us to stand in the gap with the gospel.

1. If people in all nations stand guilty before God and we have the answer to the problem, there is a gap that exists. How do we bridge it?
2. There must be messengers who are willing to take (bridge the geographical gap) and teach (bridge the understanding gap) the answer (the gospel) to them (the nations).
Romans 1:15-16 (Paul was ready.)
3. Romans 10 is very insightful:
 - Notice the understanding gap - they are ignorant of God's righteousness. vs. 1-3
 - Notice the answer - an understanding faith in Jesus Christ. vs. 4, 9-13
 - Notice how the gap is bridged - messengers speaking the gospel. vs. 14-17
4. There are entire people groups with **no** gospel witness. People are dying one after another without Christ. Why is this? Because God didn't care for them as much as Americans? No, God loves the world, not certain people groups.
5. It is because nobody is teaching them and proclaiming to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nobody has bridged the gap. Satan is trying to widen that gap so that they won't even have a chance to hear it and consider it. Our job is to narrow and bridge that gap.
6. The gospel is spiritual dynamite. It is a force. It is the power God uses to reveal the truth about sin, about His Son, about His love for mankind. The gospel brings conviction to sinful souls, light to darkened minds, understanding to foolish hearts. It will bring forth fruit wherever it goes. **Romans 1:13**
7. But God is not going to get the gospel to the nations any other way than **through people**.
"...how shall they hear without a preacher?"

In Conclusion:

1. Now do you see why missions is a big deal? Missions is about getting the gospel to guilty and condemned souls that stand no chance without it.
2. And if you're still thinking, "So what?" then you reveal the coldness and callousness of your wicked heart. I would not want your heart beating in my chest.
 - **Illustration:** car wreck with man dying on side of road (Phil) - doctor drives by who could save his life, but says, "It's just one person - I'm late for my racquetball game."
 - **Illustration:** child is deathly sick, but instead of buying the medicine the child needs, the mother says, "I've got four other children. Anyway, I need a new outfit for church."
3. We are guilty of something far more heinous when we have the answer for souls that are dying and spending eternity in the lake of fire, and we won't pray, give, go, or do anything to get them the spiritual medicine they need and that can save them.
4. But on the other hand, we impact **eternity** in a positive way when we get involved in world-wide mission's outreach.