

“Design For Success”
Acts 18:23 – 19:41
Series: Book of Acts [#23]
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Theme: **Only An Accurate And Complete Gospel Brings True Success.**

Introduction

The 2008 Beijing Olympics begin in less than two weeks. The mad rush to complete all the preparations has been underway for some time. Many details are now in place, such as the uniforms the athletes wear. Designers have competed to provide them.

The Hudson’s Bay Company unveiled the Canadian team’s uniform at the end of April. They are a fusion of Canadian and Chinese symbols made of super-light materials which are also eco-friendly with fabrics such as bamboo and organic cotton. Let’s look at some of them [3 slides].

Now, in the spirit of full disclosure, I thought we should also see some of the *unsuccessful* designs [6 slides].

- Parka. Appropriate for casual winter wear, but definitely not for a sprinter in summer heat. It’s easy to see why this design was not successful.
- Sumo suit. The only question I have for this one is, would it be faster running or rolling in it?
- Darth Vader. Not efficient and it is an old design.
- Survival suit. The design has low drag coefficient, but it is bulky and certainly doesn’t breathe. Besides, it’s more orange than Canadian red.
- Space suit. Beyond being *out of this world* this one has the wrong flag on it.
- Finally, Diving suit. He looks comfortable, but he would never win the 100 m. freestyle in this.

So much for some of the *unsuccessful* designs.

This morning we return to the series in the book of Acts and are thinking about “*Design For Success.*” Success not in terms of winning a contract or contest, but in spiritual terms. When Christians talk and write about success, frequently the focus is on methods and numbers. What we see from the events in this part of Acts is more basic. It goes down to the foundation of the faith, to the nature and content of the essentials of the faith. We see that *only an accurate and complete gospel brings true success.*

When I speak of accuracy and completeness I am not talking about the *distinctive* positions we hold, such as the schools of theology or organizational models we follow, but the basic, essential truths of the Christian faith. God gives us this picture and statement of

truth from a series of events, most of which took place in Ephesus, an important city where Paul preached the gospel, settled down and built up this new church for about three years, with it becoming a center of outreach to the region. 19:20 is the key verse in the section. Luke tells us, "...the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."

Evidence That Demonstrates The Need For An Accurate And Complete Gospel.

The first evidence we see here is that an inaccurate and incomplete gospel leads to faith and experience that are incomplete. There are two examples of this here. The first is the example of a preacher. Let's go to 18:24-28,

"Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

Apollos was eloquent and well versed in the Scriptures. He was bubbling over, enthusiastically living and speaking out Christ who was within him. He taught clearly, forcefully and effectively. *But*, verse 25 tells us, he was "acquainted only with the baptism of John"—i.e., not with the baptism of believers. There are varying views on what this means. To me it seems clear he was a true believer who was ministering effectively, but had not been taught all the basics of the faith. His understanding and experience were not complete, and, so, his message also was incomplete.

The second example is of a small group of men we meet in the opening verses of chapter 19. Paul arrived in Ephesus and "found some *disciples*" there. Their situation was quite different than that of Apollos. They had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized, but only "into John's baptism." Luke's description of Paul's calling them to believe in Jesus who came after John and to whom John pointed, indicates this group were not believers in Christ at this point. The group of about twelve men believed, were baptized and received the Holy Spirit.

While their situation was remarkably different than that of Apollos, it demonstrates the same point: *an inaccurate and incomplete gospel leads to faith and experience that are incomplete.*

Next we come to evidence demonstrating the need for an accurate and complete gospel of the challenge of counterfeits. Drop down to 19:13.

“But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.” [13-17]

The background to this was Paul’s preaching, teaching and that, verse 11, “God was performing extraordinary miracles” through him. Wherever God is working, some people and Satan’s forces will try to counterfeit that work to draw people to themselves and away from God and His truth.

We see counterfeiting all the time in every area of life. On June 30th a court in France ordered the internet auction site eBay to pay damages of almost \$61 M. for the sale of counterfeit and unauthorized luxury goods on their site. Some people may have bought the counterfeit items thinking they were genuine, while others may have suspected or even known the goods were counterfeit. But the price was great, and most people would think they owned a genuine article.

Fashion designer Ralph Lauren once commented that in our time “the crux of a person’s identity ... resides in the trappings, not in the person himself. There are short cuts. ... One needn’t be well read so long as one surrounds himself with books. One needn’t play the piano, as long as one has a piano. In short, one can be whoever one wants to be. Or, more accurately, one can *seem* to be whoever one wants to be.”

Yes, counterfeiting is all around. There will always be spiritual counterfeits. People trying to get in on the popularity, power and money. News services this morning are carrying another story about one of these counterfeits, who continues to gain acceptance by unsuspecting believers.

Then there are Satan’s forces trying to keep people in darkness, away from God; trying to get believers off-track. To spot the many counterfeits today we need an accurate and complete gospel.

One further evidence for the need of an accurate and complete gospel is the obstruction of opposition. Again, we have two examples.

Example #1: some religious people.

“And [Paul] entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.”

Obstructive opposition from religious people.

Example #2: some pagan people. Paul’s extended stay in Ephesus had extended results —many became believers, turned from their pagan ways and grew in the faith. Look at verses 18-19, “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

But some of those who did not believe were not in the least bit pleased with all of this. The riot of the silversmiths, which we see starting at verse 23, was an economic, not religious matter. While the riot did not bring physical harm to Paul and the believers, we read in 20:1 that after the initial firestorm calmed down, Paul left for Macedonia.

Opposition and obstruction to the gospel come from both pagan and religious people. We need an accurate and complete gospel to spot and deal with it.

Now let’s move from looking at the *need* of an accurate and complete gospel to its *value*.

Evidence That Demonstrates The Value Of An Accurate And Complete Gospel.

There is great value because an accurate and complete gospel corrects deficiencies. Let’s return to Apollos to see this. Go back up to 18:27-28.

“And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

Apollos had great natural and spiritual abilities. His ministry was so effective that many people identified with him as their leader. In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, he called them to task because of their quarrels and divisions. He wrote, “... each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I am of *Apollos*,’ and ‘I am of [Peter],’ and ‘I am of Christ’” (1:12).

For many Apollos was on the same level as Paul and Peter. But here, early in his ministry, his knowledge and understanding of the gospel had some deficiencies. How were they corrected? Look at verse 26. “... when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him

aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” This need was met with an accurate and complete gospel. The manner of this is both an example of God’s grace and of how we should relate in similar situations. Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside.” Quietly and privately they explained what he needed to know, corrected his deficiencies in the gospel.

We see the great value again in Paul’s dealing with the twelve or so men in Ephesus. He started where they were—knowing only John the Baptist’s message of repentance and that a savior was coming. Then he walked them through the reality of the fulfillment in Jesus. An accurate and complete gospel had a great, everlasting value as it corrected their deficiencies.

The value is the same today. Think of a few common misconceptions:

- We are saved by God’s grace, *but* there are some things we must do or must not do to be saved or to keep our salvation.
- Or, when we become a Christian God will solve and keep us free from all problems.
- And, following God means saying goodbye to fun, goodbye to enjoyment in anything and everything that is not *spiritual*.

And, of course, these don’t even get into the broader range of misconceptions such as “It really doesn’t matter what you believe, which religion you follow, as long as you are sincere and dedicated.”

Only an accurate and complete gospel brings true success—the *success* of people being truly and forever forgiven and united with Christ; the *success* of believers having a firm foundation for growth, fellowship and service.

Secondly, there is great value because an accurate and complete gospel strengthens believers, all believers. Go to verse 23 in chapter 18 again. “And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”

I love this brief and yet expansive description. Paul went back to the churches he had planted, back to many believers he had personally led to faith in Christ. These people had been given an accurate and complete gospel—there is no doubt about that. But here, using *the gospel* in its broadest sense of the full revelation of God’s truth, we see that it helps believers grow, develop, become and stay strong in the faith.

Let’s move to our day. Why is it that many people who profess faith in Christ are basically mirroring the character of our culture rather than the character of Christ? Why is it that many are not actively involved in ministry in and through a local church? Why are many believers not passionate about reaching others for Christ?

Some who have come to know the power of the gospel to salvation are weak, struggling, floating downstream with the currents of the day because they have not been strengthened by an accurate and complete gospel day by day, week by week, year by year. This is so

critical.

Dr. Earl Radmacher was the president of the seminary I attended. In one course he underscored this truth as he talked about a friend of his who led a large and successful ministry committed to reaching people for Christ. He had observed that the ministry's approach was to witness diligently and effectively, but that they were not diligently and effectively strengthening or discipling the new believers they had reached. Dr. Radmacher encouraged his friend to pay attention to this. His friend and the ministry did and became effective not only in reaching people with the gospel, but also building them up in the gospel.

An accurate and complete gospel strengthens believers, all believers.

Finally, there is great value because an accurate and complete gospel prevails in power. Let's go back once more to the example of Apollos. 18:27-28.

“And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

Then review Paul's example. As he settled down in Ephesus the gospel went out so that, 19:10 says, “all in Asia heard the word of the Lord.” God also worked “extraordinary miracles” through him at this time (19:11). People kept hearing the gospel and believing, forsaking their former way of life, even at great personal, social and economic costs. The key verse of this section, again, is 19:20, “... the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

An accurate and complete gospel is valuable because it prevails in power. This truth has not changed. The specific ways in which the gospel prevails in power change, but its prevailing power will never change. For example, this was an exceptional period in Paul's ministry. We don't read of another time quite like this.

Sometimes people jump to focus on a specific way the gospel has prevailed in power, or a way they think it should prevail, rather than having a simple and solid expectation that it will prevail, in God's way. Yes, there often are long seasons of planting and watering before the harvest comes. And then it often comes in unexpected ways. Yes, there are difficult people and places. Let's make sure we don't allow our own, sometimes inaccurate perceptions to keep us from moving forward relying on the gospel to prevail in power.

A little boy was given a Superman cape on his third birthday. Now, we know the idea of the cape is to engage in a bit of fantasy, to have fun. The boy was ecstatic when he saw it and quickly darted out to the yard where he ran around as fast as he could. But soon he went back into the house and threw the Superman cape on the floor proclaiming, “This thing doesn't work!”

The cape could work, it could fulfill its purpose of providing a lot of fun. But it could never fulfill his wish to actually fly through the air. His choice was to either align his expectations to reality or to chuck the cape.

Christians sometimes decide to *chuck the cape*, to give up on the hope of God's power prevailing through the gospel to save people they know and love because God doesn't do it in a certain time frame or way. Or, to give up on God's prevailing power to help them grow and overcome struggles because it has not come in a time frame or way they expect.

God's power prevails through a gospel which is accurate and complete.

Conclusion.

Listen to this edited version of an article titled [Carrots Will Kill You.](#)

Every carrot you eat brings you nearer to death. While the daucus carota is a delicious vegetable, most fail to grasp the terrifying significance of the phrase "sure it helps your night vision, but what does it do to your liver?"

Carrots are associated with all the major diseases of the body. They can be related to most airline tragedies. Auto accidents are caused by carrots. For example:

- Nearly all sick people have eaten carrots. The effects obviously are accumulative.
- 99.9% of all people who die from cancer have eaten carrots.
- 99.7% of all people involved in air and auto accidents ate carrots within 60 days preceding the accidents.

Evidence points to the long-term effects of carrot-eating.

- There has been a 100% mortality rate of people born in 1880 who dined on carrots.
- All carrot-eaters born between 1895 and 1915 have wrinkled skin, have lost some or most of their teeth, have brittle bones and failing eyesight, if the ills of eating carrots have not already caused their death.

Even more convincing is the report of a noted team of medical specialists: rats force-fed 20 pounds of carrots per day for 30 days developed bulging abdomens. Their appetites for wholesome food were destroyed.

The only way to avoid the deleterious effects of carrot-eating is

to change your eating habits. Eat orchid petal soup. Practically no one has had any problems from eating orchid petal soup.

Inaccurate? Silly? Ridiculous? *Yes!* All of that and more. But it is no more inaccurate, silly and ridiculous than when people of God who have been saved through the gospel do not devote themselves to, and continue to grow in an accurate and complete gospel.

Take the next few moments to reflect on this truth with God. Respond to what the Holy Spirit has been saying to you. The most basic point is to make sure you really have experience being transformed, cleansed, forgiven, given new everlasting life through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For those of us who know this, who know we are God's children forever in Jesus, let us ask ourselves:

- In addition to my growing love for Christ, do I have a growing knowledge of Him and His truth, of *the gospel*?
- Do I let God's word correct my thoughts, or do I interpret and shape the Bible to conform to my thoughts?
- Do I know and recognize a growing strength and power from God through knowing and living His word?

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