



## ACTS 19

Sometimes we only see what is in front of us. If there is a trick of the mind, what are we to do? The pictures we just looked at show us things we normally don't see. I think we are amazed because it's not what we expect. We read books that have unexpected endings. There are movies that turn out different than we thought. Sometimes it is intentional, and other times it's someone changing the outcome to fool us.

As Christians we should expect the unexpected. God does not live in a predictable box. Yes of course we know much about his traits and character, but God is not predictable. Did Moses expect 10 plagues to get pharaohs attention? David's Father Jesse probably didn't think David was the best choice for king. He didn't even bring him out until all the other brothers were rejected. I like the story of the boy turned messiah. The whole community of Nazareth rejected Jesus. They said "isn't this the carpenter's son"? All the people knew Jesus was born out of wedlock. That was scandal in those days. They asked "isn't this Mary's child"?

Who is the real father? God doesn't use things born out of sin does he? God could save them in many ways but not using that one. In all these cases something didn't look right in their eyes.

Philosophy has a way of messing with our minds. There are many ideas out there on what our existence looks like. Some say that we only see what is in front of our eyes. Anything else does not exist until we see it. Another is that we have been given preconceived ideas of things. Nothing around us is invented or thought of; the plans already exist in here. We just have to access them. It's mind blowing stuff really.

Frank Peretti (a writer of scary Christian books) I know that sound s weird. Wrote a book called "piercing the darkness." In it he goes on to describe what the earth really looks like in the spiritual world. Imagine seeing what the forces of darkness look like? What do angels do when we pray?

There is a chapter in this book that describes demons clinging to people as they live their lives. They are evil spirits of deception, abuse, lying and more. His theme was that it took a certain amount of prayer for the angels to come and fight the demons. Imagine a spiritual battle right among us. A fierce battle we don't see, but we are very much a part of. This life we live is not what it seems. In this day and age can we really conceive demons on us or spiritual warfare?

For many of us, we want to be in control of our world. We are told to plan, to pray, to ignore, to believe, and many other things. At times we are busy as termites and think we can control our surroundings. The problem is that we don't really see the whole picture. Ephesians 6:12 says **“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”** Things are not as they seem. In the scheme of things God is working, God is in control, and we don't really have a clue, do we.

Today is the fifth part in our energizing church series. We in the church have terms for everything. We have the saved, the lost, pastoral staff, congregation, and a little thing called the field. This field is on the outside of the church. It's the place where the mission happens. The lost live in the field. Sin is in the field. Believe it or not we live in the field, not in the church. Today we are going to take a spiritual look at the field. What does god think of this place? What does God do in the field? Maybe he does nothing, or maybe frank Peretti is right. There is a spiritual battle going on that we can't see, and can't control.

Would you please open your bibles to acts 19. This chapter is all about the mission field. Today I'd like to explore what we can do in this place called the field. If God is into everything and lets nothing slip through his hands, maybe we are participants, partners, or possibly pawns in the field. Are we used by spiritual

forces to gain ground? Satan wants to win, but God is ultimately in control. Where do we fit in the realm of things?

Acts 19 paints a great picture of the spiritual battle. This relates to energizing church because we need to understand our role in this world. We need to relate to God and relate to the world in a spiritual tug of war, and in many ways we are the rope between them. Satan has an ultimate goal and so does God. We always refer to this battle as Armageddon. We have given a title to this battle. World war 3: Armageddon. In reality Armageddon is a spiritual hotbed field. Many battles have been fought, and towns have been built there. Throughout time many people have fought to own this area. In our world and in the spiritual world wars are fought and won on the field.

Right now Quebec and Canada are in such a tug of war. The cool part is that many of us can't see it. Both sides want to see the country a certain way. Canada wants equality and multicultural growth. Quebec wants to preserve its French culture. It's debating passing a bill called the Quebec values. It steps on the things Canada wants. Canada also wants to uphold its multicultural values by letting people from poor countries come live in Quebec. It's a see saw battle and the new people to this country are the rope. Understanding the cultural differences might solve the problem but in some ways it might make it worst. Both sides are entrenched and want to win.

Acts 19 tells two stories, and the people in the middle are the rope. One side is the field. This is not a place that is friendly to Christians. The lost live here and they live a certain way. It would be an insult to tell the people living in the field they are lost, they don't know that. The life they live is what they have. The field is complicated just like Canada is. Different sides wanting different things.

The other story being told is a spiritual one. God is at work and so is the devil. The Christians and the lost are the pawns in a great war. How is God working in the field? It looks at times like Satan is winning. What is our role in this spiritual battle? Is their one? Spiritually speaking we might fare better if we leave it to God.

In the first star wars c3po and r2d2 are playing a virtual chess game with Chewbacca the wookie. At one point r2d2 makes his move and kills one of chewy's creatures on the board. The wookie growls in anger and c3po tells him that it was a fair move you can't complain. They are reminded by the wookies best friend Han solo that it might be fair but wookies are known for pulling arms out of their sockets when they lose. C3po realizes in an instant his position and says r2 let the wookie win. Sometimes it's better to let God win so that we don't lose something in the process. Spiritual war is hell quite frankly.

So let's look at the field in acts 19. What is God's word telling us today about the place we live: the field? **“While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some**

**disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 altogether there were about twelve of them."**

Paul has encountered people that don't know the whole story. They are disciples of John the Baptist. I am amazed how many people believe what they see in this world. We hear about scientists saying there is global warming. Governments have knee jerk reactions and poured millions into fixing the climate. Who are these scientists? Recently these scientists in the UN are scrambling to explain 12 years of cooling on the earth. What we see in one part of the world is not what we see in another. These disciples were like our scientists, they only know John's side of the story.

The men Paul met only know what they have been told or what they see. I find that they only received the first part of the answer, and you know that is ok, don't you. Everyone has to start somewhere. These men know God and they know about

repentance from sin. That is a pretty good starting point. I knew a lady about my age that asked me what this Jesus thing is. She said “who is he”? A white female North American bread girl does not even know who Jesus is? To me that is shocking and scary. If I was to introduce Jesus to her, where would I start? You start with what she sees and what she knows. The kicker is I have to be interested in where she is before I can give her something I know.

In the first part of our chapter the people don't know the whole story. The field is that way. Most people we meet don't know the whole story of God they only have part of the answer. It's important to have Christians in the field, but it's more important to have Christians in the field that know the whole story. If I had a dime for every Christian I met that only knew part of the story I'd be a very very rich man. The message to the unknowing world is not getting completely out.

Recently I have had several conversations with some good Christian men about loving like Jesus. They always tell me first “we are to love like Jesus.” When pressed to explain this love they usually say we accept them for who they are. We are kind, tolerant, and loving towards them. I never hear them say we challenge their faith, or warn them about sin. As Christians we have a twisted view of Love. Our view is based on 1 Corinthians 13 **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices**

**with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

That is love and I get it, but that is not the whole story. How does that love compare with John 3:16 **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** It appears God loved us that much but he certainly didn't love his son enough to spare him. So Jesus gets hate and we get love? God loves us more than his son? I'm just trying to open your mind to the unseen things of love. Love can be sacrifice; love can be a fight; love can be the truth about you, and love can care when it seems you're not very accommodating.

Imagine letting your kids stay out to all hours of the night. They want alcohol, drugs, sex, and the car keys. It's what they want so lovingly give it to them. According to 1 Corinthians 13 we should give them what they want to make them happy right, or we don't love them. Could it be love to warn them, tell them no, refuse to give in, is that love if your children don't get what they want? That is the field we live in. They are into other stuff, they don't know God, and they want it their way. What kind of love do they need, warm love or tough love?

Back to our chapter. Paul doesn't just let these disciples go. He challenges them to go deeper in their spiritual walk. **“He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even**



**heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus."**

Paul is a Christian who wants believers to know the truth, to know who Jesus is, and walk the good path. The field does not know, but Paul takes the time to understand where they are and offer them a bridge based on what they know. I believe Paul loves them, but does he want them to just see it his way? No, he wants them to see it God's way. He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Listen to verse 9-10 **"When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.** Paul doesn't give up. For over two years he argued with his friends and co-horts in God about Jesus. Why, because Paul knows that the field matters to God, and it matters to Paul as well. The gospel is worth fighting for.

We (the church) have not engaged the field in this country. I read an article at-least once a month about a denomination failing. The field is Jesus stomping

ground. If we don't work in the field like Jesus and Paul did, our Christian faith is in trouble. Stories like Paul in acts 19 show us that we need to be in the field because if we don't who will? Satan maybe?

Paul is in Ephesus because he himself wants to engage the field. So what happens when we do that? I believe it's like spiritual warfare. It's our Armageddon. Basically all hell breaks loose. Let's skip down to verse 23 thru 31

**About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. 24 A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. 25 These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, "Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. 26 You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. 27 And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her." 28 When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions. 30**

**Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; 31 even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater.**

Oh boy had Paul caused quite a stir. Idol worship was big business. The temple of Artimus was like the Calgary tower or the pyramids in Egypt. Calgary or Cairo is known for the monuments they have. Ephesus was known for this temple. It was big, and it was theirs. It was also called the temple of Dianna. At one point the roman emperor offered to rebuild it after an earthquake but the people refused. They would only use their own money. It was sacred to them and personal to them. When Paul came in and offered something different to worship the people freaked out.

History in the mission field has learned the same thing. Missionaries have been killed, eaten, and exiled. Our history of spreading the gospel in the field is not a great one. We have tried to make other people like us. We feel we are the best example of Christianity. That goes for our culture too. The problem is that God does not work that way. He presented the gospel in the form we could understand. I believe that if he gave it to us in his understanding, it would have flopped. Jesus came down to us, to be like us. To speak to us in our language. He talked about fishing, carpentry, old scriptures, and more. The song “what if God was one of us” is really yes he was one of us.

My caution within the church is simple. We need to be Christian, but we need to be one of them. One of whom? The lost in the field? Yes, not like then but one of them. Do you see it? Jesus went to their parties and homes. He ate their food, and healed their problems. We need to be involved in their lives. I guarantee that the church would be energized if we took the time to be like Emanuel which means “God is with us.” Each Christian should be in the lives of the lost as if God is with them.

These days we are only preaching love and it’s a joke. We love them with ministry; we love them with money, and we love them in giving things. What if love looks different than we think? Maybe love is sacrificing ourselves to be with the lost. Isn’t that exactly what Jesus did? He came down and dwelt among us. The people knew who he was because he was there. The religious people around Jesus said God wouldn’t do that. They put God in a box and that is exactly why they were failing.

Today the field knows something about God. They have idols and worship stuff just like they did in Ephesus. What would happen if rich people turned to God and took their money away from 300 dollar flames tickets and poured it into the people outside the saddle dome? The flames would be mad at Gods people for turning them away. Maybe it’s about being God at the flames game. Be kind, be generous, and love those around you. Be there where they are. Yes we should give

to the poor and serve the church. Life still goes on and the lost are still waiting for God. The field is not inside the church.

I suppose the field is what we can do for God. However, what is God's role in all this? Does he just train us and send us on our way? I don't think so and acts 19 the writer Luke gives us some great examples of God's role. This is a spiritual battle. Just because we can't see spirit does not mean spirit is not there. Gravity is invisible. Air is invisible yet we feel them both. Love is invisible yet we feel. In philosophy there is what is called metaphysics. It's the discussion about the term "being as such." In English it means the study between what is and what we think. Decatre says "I think therefore I am." Another says God exists because we have a picture or understanding of him in our minds. The age old question has been the relationship between the flesh (our body) and our mind. How do solid objects relate to our consciousness? Where are they attached: in the mind or the heart.

There is a story of a two men that were killed. One lost his body and the other lost his head. The scientists put the two together. The question is: which man survived? Is the soul in our heart or in our brain? When he woke up whom would he be? That is where we are today in the spiritual battle. We are here and we are solid. God is out there with Satan and they are spirit. What is that relationship? How do they mix together?

Let's try to answer that with three examples from this chapter. All of them are related to the field. Let's begin with what I call the spirit within us. When we enter the field do we bring our spirit into the battle or the spirit of God? Let's read verses 11 and 12. **“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.”** Paul is infected with the Holy Spirit. Paul is not special like Jesus but he is engaged with the spirit. I believe he has bought the whole package.

Jesus touched him on the Damascus road. His heart turned from his own understanding to God's understanding. Paul was seeing his world a different way. I believe he was in a special period of time where the effects of Christ were still there. Some disciples healed and spiritually things were hot. Paul was hot for God and I think that resonated all around him. Inside Paul was hot with the spirit. He got it. He wanted the gospel to work. We wanted God kingdom to come. The spirit of God was flowing and alive in him.

Let's go on and read beginning at verse 13 (I love this story) **“Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I**

**know; but who are you?" 16 Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded."**

With these boys the spirit was not within. They want to be like Jesus and be like Paul. They were not really interested in healing or spiritual warfare, but rather they wanted the power. They did not have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. It's all in the want. We at church say everything in the name of Jesus. In many ways it makes me sick. We mouth the words but where is the heartfelt passion like Paul? Why is the church failing these days? Where are revival, healing, and miracles? Some men explain it away because we are removed from Jesus days gone by. Maybe we are unplugged from the spirit? There is no spirit within? Just saying in the name of Jesus might get you killed if the real spirit is not with you. Just because you command the spirit to jump doesn't mean it's obligated to.

The second part of the spiritual in the field is what happens. We can call it the fruit. Those boys wanted the fruit of the spirit but they did not have the spirit. It says again "**But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"**" when we have the spirit of God we are so much more. We are powerful? No, no, no don't keep saying that. It's not about us or the power. It's about those around us in the field. It's like we don't exist. Do you recall dying

to Christ? Paul wrote it is not I that live but Christ within me. Paul got it. The seven brothers did not. It's God that works not you that works. We are the way God chooses to work.

The spirit within us will cause people to listen, demons to flee, and pain to go away. When God enters a room people will notice. However, when we enter without the heart of the spirit. The demons will kick the tar out of us. Church is unplugged because deep down we don't have the spirit within. We say we do, we believe we do, but the proof is in the pudding. I just read an article about the Anglican Church dying. They said there was deep division. Does that seem like God's work to you? It looks more like the demons kicking the tar out of what's left. It looks like what's left is trying to kick the tar out of what's left.

This leads me to the last part of this spiritual battle in the field. This is God's to win. So many denominations claim it is theirs to win. They want to be more holy, they want to be more missional, and on and on they go. Yet the kingdom is advancing painfully slow. These same people say that God is patient and slow some times. I believe God is not slow, but people's faith gets in the way. The real mission of God in the field is active and powerful. That's why we recall revivals and miracles. They are tremendously faster than us.

Verse 11 tells us everything. It says **“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.”** It does not say by Paul but through Paul. God is on the move



doing spiritual stuff in the field. Verses 17- 20 **“When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. 18 Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices. 19 A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”**

When God arrives boom here comes the chaos. That’s how it works. Ask Moses, ask David, ask Paul. Ask the seven brothers as they are licking their wounds. Funny how right after that story amazing things happen not by their hands. Idols are smashed and satanic books are burned. Where is the fight of Satan in these stories? It’s not there because God will win.

The last part of this chapter tells us another story of a crowd wanting the Christians to leave. A town clerk. Possibly the mayor. Comes in like a holy man and calms the crowd and tells them to seek justice in an orderly fashion. I think this is God at work. He is moving behind the scenes. The Jewish leader is rejected by the people but a secular man is used by God to calm things down. God does not need us to get his work done. We need to know that. It is humbling. The positive out of this is God wants to use us. We are his choice. Still it is God moving people,

God using his power through us. God within us moving our hearts towards the field.

The battle is won as God does, not we do. Acts 19 shows the power and the failure of Christians. The field is ours to win but we can only do that with the spirit, through Gods power, and letting God go forth and control the battle. Are we willing to be a pawn for the sake of Christ?