**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Five Weeks till the Resurrection - April 4, 2021

 ***God Acts in a Spirit-Filled Life - Acts 19:11-22***

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

**From last week’s sermon, I received some questions.**

**One of those questions was:** When you say the “Church”, what does that mean?

Good question. It is easy for me to slip into using words that have a meaning to those of us who write all the time about Christianity. I use terms to shorten the message and ones that have an encompassing meaning. In seminary (30 years ago), I was trained to use the upper case “C” (Church) when talking about Christianity in an overall context. Thus, writing about one church, designated “the church in Houston”, a small case “c” is used.

The reference and context of last week’s sermon addressing the “**C**hurch” was aimed at the overall view that too many denominations and religious groups have been hesitant to preach or teach subjects involving “sin, hell, judgement” and the like. The view is that talking about such things makes people feel uncomfortable and therefore won’t come back. Thus, the donations go down and the church is financially challenged.

We should not miss the point that preaching the confession of sin is healing for the individual. Accepting our shortcomings and seeking reconciliation with God and our neighbor is healing both physically and spiritually.

Preaching sermons of prosperity without addressing sin is believed to be less offensive. If a pastor preaches “feel good’ sermons and promises that everyone who believes in Christ will be wealthy and healthy, then people will come back for more of those “feel good” sermons. These are some of the largest churches in the world. They have tens of thousands of members. One such church in Houston is reported to have 46 thousand members. Selling the prosperity gospel in the temporal world works.

We could try this approach and see if it works. It sounds something like this:

 God desires for all His children to be wealthy and healthy. All you have to do is ask Him. Scripture says that if you ask God anything in His name, He will give it to you. Why would God deny any of His children the life of luxury? God wants the best for His people and the best starts with you. To start, all you have to do is pray to God and make a donation to God’s ministry here for a “seed money” deposit. Your seed money will grow beyond any expectation you have. You cannot out-give God.

Wait, “God just gave me a revelation that someone here is in a great financial need, and God is directing that person to make a faith-seed-deposit of $1,000.00. If you are that person, you must respond to God right now. This opening from God’s Spirit will not last long. Do not deny God the opportunity to bless you beyond your dreams.

Speaking in tongues, “acouaoifeoewwwoiherenrelkrlnlkln“.

God will pay back your faith-seed-deposit one hundred-fold. You invest in God’s work, and He will invest in you. Your biggest dreams will come true.

The language of the charlatan preacher is predictable. Most cons work because people want to believe them. Most con-preachers depend upon the greed of their congregations, and it works.

We can identify three things the Church does that disqualifies itself. The “Church” has too many charlatan preachers, corrupted biblical teachings and too many “mediators”. **First**, we have just identified **charlatan preachers**.

**Second are the unbiblical mediators** (1 Timothy 2:5). Remember, a *mediator* is any *person* or *order* that places works or barriers between a person and God. These *mediating barriers* can come in many forms. Religious rites, rules and obligations are *mediators*. Anything that is positioned to be a prerequisite for a person to receive the forgiveness of sin from God is a *mediator*. Anything that requires a person to perform a work, to do something to gain a “right-standing” with God, is a mediating barrier. For salvation and the forgiveness of sin, God only asks us to pray to Him from a contrite heart (Palm 51:15-19). God asks Believers to go directly to Him in prayer. God is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:1-10). As a result of our prayer to God, we receive forgiveness of sin. We then become spiritually empowered to do good things. So, good works is produced **from** a right-standing with God.

**Third are the** **corrupt biblical teachings abounding within the Church.** One of the most common of our time is the surrendering to fallen humanities sinful desire to have unlimited sexual relationships. The ordination of homosexuals and lesbians to be ministers is a direct violation of the Word of God. Romans 1 is clear. There are many more passages we could site. Once this takes place, the organization that surrenders to Satan’s evil is not a biblical church any longer. They become “congregations of man”. These “congregations of man” are equivalent to the pagan cultic churches in the Old Testament which practiced child sacrifice. Congregations that abominate the ordination of ministers are known to support “abortion on-demand”, thus, child sacrifice. For the most part, abortion as practiced in America is the murder of life for the convenience of women and men. Women and men worship themselves at the cost of their babies lives. Children are sacrificed on the “altar of selfish convenience.” We all know there can be sound medical reasons leading to an abortion. However, as practiced in America, abortion is on-demand. This includes partial-birth abortion.

So, this is what I was referencing in last week’s sermon when I said…

It is my view that the Church is partially responsible for popular culture rejecting the idea that sin must be addressed. To some degree, the Church has been invaded by non-biblical teaching and has created their own religion. They still call themselves Christians but do not teach or preach biblical truth. Additionally, the Church has placed themselves as a mediator. Those of us who know Scripture know that God declares that there is only One Mediator, Jesus Christ.

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Many religious orders have placed themselves as the gatekeepers to forgiveness and heaven. This is not an attractive avenue to God. It is not personal but institutional.

Now let us look to see what else the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of the Apostles.

**Acts 19 - Evil Spirits Recognize Paul’s Godly Authority**

 11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,

 12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

(See Acts 5:15 Peter’s shadow and healing and Luke 8:43-48 Woman touches Jesus’ robe)

**Evil Spirits do not Respect Non-believers**

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."

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

 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them,

"I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

16 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.

17 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.

 This is an unusual account. Without making assumptions about miracles, we can derive a few sound biblical teachings.

1. Events took place outside the understanding of people.
2. Non-Believers attempted to use God’s power.
3. Evil spirits recognize God. We see this in James 2:19.

 *You believe that God is one. You do well;*

*the demons also believe, and shudder.*

1. Evil spirits can subdue and overpower those who do not belong to God.
2. The general population was paying attention and heard more about Jesus.
3. There is evil in the world.
4. There is a greater power than evil in the world, which is God’s good.

**Magicians Converted to Jesus**

**Magicians confess**

**Book-burning worth 50,000 Pieces of Silver**

 18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

 19 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.

 20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

**Paul Makes Plans for Rome**

**But Stays in Asia for a While**

 21 Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

 22 And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

**Spirit Battles**

 From verses 11-22, we see evil spirits active in non-believers but subdued by God’s Spirit working through Paul. We see magicians burn their sorcery books and surrender to God. We see God’s Spirit working through Paul and directing his travels.

 One of the best witnesses we have in the New Testament concerning the power of God’s Spirit being greater than evil and the law of sin and death is in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

**Romans 8:1** Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

**Humility to God Achieves Victory in Our Lives**

**God Does Not Call Us to Be on the Sidelines**

All of this would not take place unless Paul and others humbled their lives to God. We see many people today on the sidelines cheering for Christians who are in the midst of the battle against evil. We need more Believers stepping onto the field of battle between good and evil, between God and Satan. A person cannot be afraid of getting their feelings hurt or being told that they have hurt someone else’s feelings. We speak in love.

 We have seen God defeat evil directly through His incarnation, lived-out in Matthew 4 in the Test in the Wilderness and at the Cross. Both events highlighted the “apparent” superiority of Satan, and, at the same time, that God was victorious. Evil can make a grand show but will never prevail in the long run. We have read the end of the account of God’s creation in the book of Revelation. All of Satan’s efforts fail and are judged.

 We remember that our struggle in not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual principalities. I know many of us can quote this verse. We need to share God’s Word with others who are not familiar with the power of God that is available to them.

**Ephesians 6:10-13**

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

 Believers always have victory with God. When Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) that means that our ultimate goals will not be achieved in this life. We are all maturing towards our eternal lives with the Lord. In this truth, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Fallen temporal political leaders cannot control what is in our hearts and minds. God resides in our hearts. Fallen humanity cannot remove God from our hearts.

**Romans 8:33-39**

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Miracles**

 Throughout the Bible, we see miracles. These few verses in Acts 19 also account for miraculous things happening. These events concern spiritual beings and healings. They are all to do with God’s Holy Spirit interacting through His servants.

 We know that the Humanistic, Atheistic, Secularist (H.A.S.) community has invaded and, to some extent, engulfed government, academia, entertainment and the Church. The H.A.S. community rejects God, and therefore, biblical miracles are out of the question and rejected as a superstition originating from fables.

 However, the H.A.S. community accepts the Darwinian origin of life hypothesis which calls for all reason to be thrown in the ditch. Many of us are familiar with the Darwinian origin of life teaching which presents that life on earth began in a small water-based primordial soup. The hypothesis postulates that the basic building blocks of life, consisting of four fundamental macromolecular components: nucleic acids (including DNA and RNA), proteins, lipids and glycans came together, heated up, and were electrified resulting in the first cellular life form. All of this life forming biology and chemistry was random, without purpose or meaning.

 There has never been any scientific experiment to duplicate this hypothesis. Scientists have only been able to produce a few of the elements in a lab. However, even if a scientist were able to manufacture some building blocks of life, these building blocks would have to be arranged in an order to produce life, function as a life form and be able to duplicate life.

Other scientists have proven that the odds of a random undirected process would take a long time. They have proven there is not enough time from the beginning of the universe for a random undirected process to produce life and mutate into new species. How long and what are the odds? In Dr. Douglas Axe’s book, “*Undeniable*”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC9Hx3WpsCk> (video presentation), he proves that it would take 1074 random opportunities to produce one functional protein (Page 57). Again, even if these building blocks were present, they would have to be ordered to produce and replicate life. This ordering requires more design. This ordering requires a Designer.

What takes more faith – that life started by Darwinian’s undirected, meaningless, random processes without purpose, or, “The” Creator-Designer and Author of life, God did it. Both require faith.

In the book, “*I don't have enough faith to be an atheist*”, Frank Turek and Norman Geisler argue that Christianity requires the least faith of all worldviews, because it is the most reasonable.

**Summation**

So, Acts19 brings to light relevant issues of the 1st century Church and at the same time highlights our ongoing discussion about miracles (who’s behind them) and the Spirit-led life directed by God.

**Ephesians 5:15-21**

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with

the Spirit,

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

to God, even the Father;

 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

**AMEN**