

1. The Road Ahead

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to our Bibles now for our morning Bible reading and we're going to be reading this morning in Acts chapter 19. Andy Gemmel is going to be sharing God's Word with us this morning and he's asked that we read this passage together.
- And you'll notice that his title is The Darker Side of Mission. And here's a chapter full of great realism about Christian mission and what it really means on the ground.
- Great things in the midst of riots. So let's read together Acts chapter 19. If you have one of our church Bibles, it's page 928. And the story picks up on Paul's missionary journeys.
- And he's in Corinth, one of those great cities of the ancient world, ancient Greece, right down on the Isthmus there, just opposite the Peloponnese.
- And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. And there he found some disciples. And he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?
- [1 : 2 2] And he said, no, we've not even heard there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, into what then were you baptized? He said, into John's baptism. And 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, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came to them and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.
- There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the synagogue. And for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.
- But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.
- And this continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick and their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.
- [2 : 3 9] Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.
- Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?
- And the man in whom the evil spirit was leapt on them, and mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks.
- And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came confessing and divulging their practices.

And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

[3 : 46] So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Now after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. But at that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but also in most of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

And there's danger, not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.

[5 : 04] When they heard this, they were enraged and were crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

When Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theatre. Some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them didn't know why they'd come together.

Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, wanting to make a defence to the crowd. But when they recognised he was a Jew, for about two hours, they all cried out with one voice, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

When the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky.

Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet, and do nothing rash. If you brought these men here, who are neither sacrilegious, nor blasphemers of our goddess.

[6 : 25] If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly, for we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.

When he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word.

Well now, let's pray together as we come to God's word. We thank you, gracious God, for the enormous privilege we have of your words in our own language, and of freedom to gather around your word.

And we pray today that as we do so, you would please speak to us. We pray that our time here this morning might not be wasted.

We pray that whatever our circumstances in life, you would please speak to us, help us, encourage us, give us confidence in you.

[7 : 51] Hear us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. My guess is that you are all now pretty used to the constant clamor of optimistic voices in the culture roundabout, urging you to believe that you too can change your life, be all that you can possibly be, live the dream.

Again and again on TV shows, bestseller lists, magazine front pages, we're bombarded with assurances that we too could get that look, that job, that car, that sex, that bargain, that break in life that would transform everything for us.

And we listen, or we watch, or we dream, until we, who sadly do not possess the X factor, in whom Britain's talent does not really reside, who do not have the voice, will never be a master chef, or build our very own grand design, or even a credible six pack, come back down to earth, and begin once again to embrace normality.

Normality is very different, from the daydreams that so often surround us, and clamor for our attention. I guess we are used now to the daydream industry, in the world around.

It is possible, that we are also beginning to get used to it, in the church. I came across a book title a little while ago, with this title, 365 Days to Realize Your Potential.

[9 : 36] The blurb went as follows, The author gives you a powerful jolt of encouragement, to become the best you can be. This unique devotional, and journal is organized, to keep you, focused on your goal, to develop your God-given destiny.

Decide now, to chart a new course, based on the principles, of the kingdom of God, that will harness, the intellectual resources, spiritual virtues, and economic industry, providing an incubator, that encourages, the maximization, of the potential, of this and future generations.

Take a breath. Everything God created, is equipped with the potential, or ability to fulfill, its God-given purpose. understand, release, and maximize, your potential, starting today.

Now, with that in mind, let me urge you, to open your Bible, Acts chapter 19. It will be a great relief, I think, because he will find, a picture of God's involvement, in life, which is quite different, from that.

Much more normal, and immensely reassuring. Over the next, couple of months, we're going to have, several opportunities, to dip in, to the later chapters, of the book of Acts.

[11 : 02] For most people, I guess, these chapters, are not all that familiar. There are a number of reasons, why we don't get, to these chapters, terribly often. Acts is a long book.

Sometimes people, run out of steam, before they get this far. There's the content, of these chapters. The early chapters, of Acts, have a kind of, action movie, quality about them.

One amazing event, follows another. The big theological, developments, come thick and fast. But towards the end, well, it just seems to be, a trail of, one city, after another, after another.

Yet another page, on the lonely planet, guide, to the ancient world. And then there's, the feel of these chapters. Frankly, they don't have that, powerful, powerful jolt, of encouragement, to be the best, you can be, feel.

These are quite, dark chapters. Hence, the title of our series, The Darker Side, of Mission. Having said that, what we will find, in these chapters, is honesty, realism, normality.

[12 : 13] will find, the world, as it really is, and Christian life, as it really is. If you've been, in the Christian life, for some time, I think you'll find, these chapters, both profoundly reassuring, and realistically, challenging.

If you're new, to Christianity, this morning, just having a look in, from the outside, to see what it's all about, well, I think you will find, these chapters, delightfully lacking, in hype, and exaggeration.

Real Christianity, lived out, in the real world. Now let me bring you up, to speed with the journey, so far, in the book of Acts. It's been, an exciting journey.

It's a journey, concerned with, the exalted Lord Jesus. In the early chapters, of this book, the biggest change, the world has ever known, in terms of access, to God, is rolled out, onto the stage, of human history.

Jesus has died, and been raised, and ascended to heaven. And now, as the spirit is poured out, the gospel message, is spoken out.

[13 : 23] And as the gospel, moves out, the exalted Lord Jesus, extends his rule, over humanity. He goes to the world, through the gospel message.

It's a book, of gospel growth, therefore. It's dramatic, impressive, as one by one, ethnic, and religious, and geographical, boundaries, are just flattened out.

The temple, in Jerusalem, ceases to be the place, where you have to go, to meet with God. Jews, and non-Jews, are brought together, under the rule of Jesus, and the good news, spreads further, and further, and further afield.

But it's a book, with opposition. It comes from all directions, not least from a Jew, named Saul. But in a critical moment, in the book, he is turned, from being the fierce opponent, of the gospel, to being a servant, of Jesus.

And in many ways, the latter part of the book, is all concerned, with his work. As he, along with others, is sent into the world, by the spirit of Christ, with the message of Christ.

[14 : 36] Now, chapter 19, is a very important, climax, in the story of the book. Ephesus, is a big city. A key city, in Asia Minor.

Not only a big place, but a big center. Center of the worship, of Artemis, the great goddess, of the Ephesians. A big thing, in the religious scene, in the ancient world.

A number of cities, are described, in some detail, in the book of Acts. But Ephesus, gets more time, than any of the others. And Paul, spends more time, in Ephesus, than he does, anywhere else, in his missionary journeys.

More than two years. What we see here, is a work, first of great breadth. Look at 19:10. Paul reasons, daily in the hall, of Tyrannus.

This continued, for two years. So that all, the residents of Asia, heard the word, of the Lord, both Jews, and Greeks. It's a work, of breadth. Not only, does the city, hear about Jesus, but the whole region, is affected.

[15 : 43] It's a work, of great breadth. It's also, a work, of great depth. It's a powerful work, that goes on, in this great city. The background, culture in Ephesus, is obviously, one of, open contact, with the occult, with the spiritual world.

Let me read, from verse 18. Many of those, who were now believers, came, confessing, and divulging, their practices. And a number of those, who practiced magic arts, brought their books together, and burned them, in the sight of all.

And they counted, the value of them, and found that it came, to 50,000 pieces of silver. Now, 50,000 pieces of silver, is a great deal, of money.

50,000 days wages, for a day laborer. In modern day speak, about 2 million quid's worth, of magical books, is burned that day.

It's an extraordinary repentance. And so, it's not surprising, that at this point, in the story, we get one of the little, summary statements, that is so common, in the book of Acts.

[16 : 52] Verse 20, so the word, of the Lord, continued to increase, and prevail, mightily. This book, is a book, about the spread, of the word of the Lord.

The word of the Lord, is the great hero, of the book of Acts. Breadth, depth, and a big turning point. Look at verse 21.

Now, after these events, Paul resolved, in the spirit, to pass through Macedonia, and Achaia, and go to Jerusalem, saying, after I've been there, I must, also see Rome.

Now, this is a major, turning point, in the book. Because, from this point, onwards, the whole, of the rest, of the book, is dominated, by Paul's, return to Jerusalem, and his journey, beyond that to Rome.

This, decision, sets the scene, for all of the rest, of the book. And what we have, in the rest, of chapter 19, is, well, a kind of taster, for the sorts, of things, that characterize, the rest, of this book.

[18 : 15] And we're, we're going to spend, the rest, of our morning together, looking at, the second half, of Acts chapter 19, and considering, the big ideas here. Because, these form, a platform, for the rest, of the book, as it unfolds.

What happens, in the second half, of Acts 19, characterizes, the rest, of the story, all the way, through to the end. The road ahead.

The road ahead, in this book, is marked, by four things. Here's the first. Opposition. Opposition, is a key word, in these later chapters, of the book of Acts.

Let me read, from verse 23. About that time, there arose, no little disturbance, concerning the way. For a man, named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines, of Artemis, brought no little business, to the craftsmen.

These, he gathered together, with the workmen, in similar trades, and said, men, you know, that from this business, we have our wealth. And you see in here, that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded, and turned away, a great many people, saying that, gods made with hands, are not gods.

[19 : 37] And there is danger, not only that this trade of ours, may come into disrepute, but also the temple, of the great goddess Artemis, may be counted as nothing. Opposition.

Let me just draw your attention, to three things, about the opposition. First, the opposition, is motivated, by money. The gospel, is starting to hit, the silver trade.

That's the issue here. Look at verse 26 again. You see in here, that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul, has persuaded, and turned away, a great many people, saying that, gods made with hands, are not gods.

It's a great confirmation, of verse 10, isn't it? Verse 10 says, that the whole of Asia, has heard the word, of the Lord. And here, is a silversmith, saying, the trades affected, not just here, but in the whole of Asia.

This bloke, Paul, is telling people, everywhere, that our things, aren't proper gods. That's what he's saying. Now, can I just make, the most elementary, of observations, that Paul, though he spent, huge amounts, of time, with people, from pagan backgrounds, working for their salvation, worked tirelessly, for them, and yet, clearly, made a big point, of not letting them think, that pagan gods, were real gods.

[21 : 08] It's obvious here, isn't it? The apostles message, has affected, the whole of the silver trade, through the whole of Asia. It's financially motivated.

Second, do you notice, that the opposition, is directed, against Paul. Now, as we'll see, in the moment, in this chapter, there's great confusion, about who's saying what, and what's going on, and all that kind of stuff.

But one thing, they do know, is that Paul, is the one, they're not pleased with. Paul, of course, is the messenger, of Jesus. It's Paul, and not Jesus, however, who gets the blame, and takes the hits.

And can I say, again, obviously, the same is true, in our own day. People cannot see, the Lord Jesus Christ. They can see, his messengers. And the human messenger, always has to bear, the hostility, that is actually, directed towards Jesus.

The way that people, reject the rule of Jesus, is by rejecting, people who speak, the message of Jesus. Friends, all over our world, right now, pastors of churches, are so often, the first to be targeted, when people are not happy, with the message of Jesus.

[22 : 32] And as our own culture, becomes gradually, more hostile, towards Jesus, religious, you can expect, you can expect, that our pastors, and Christian leaders, and outspoken elders, will be the first, to get it in the neck.

it's there in scripture, we can expect, to find it happening, around us. The opposition, is against Paul.

Third, do you notice, the opposition, wears religious clothes, even though, it's driven by money, and is fueled, by local loyalties. Look at verse 27.

There is danger, not only that this trade of ours, may come into disrepute, even more things, are important, but also, that temple of the great, goddess Artemis, may be counted as nothing, and that she may even, be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia, and the world worship.

It's a very clever appeal, that isn't it? The appeal is not mainly, to the fact, that we're losing our livelihood, though that's his big concern. No, the appeal, is mainly to the fact, that Artemis, our girl, is going to lose her fame, in the world, and we can't have that, going on, can we?

[23 : 51] The worry is financial, but the argument, is fueled by, all sorts of religious, and local loyalties. And that all makes, for a powerfully, emotive cocktail.

Worried about money, and influence, but the real way, to get support, is to tap into, local loyalties, and traditions. And what happens, of course, is a riot.

And rioting, and violence, is one of the recurring features, of the rest of this book. That's the first word then, the first key word, of this chapter, and indeed, of the rest of the book of Acts, opposition.

Second key word, constraint. Look at verse 29. The city was filled, with confusion. They rushed together, into the theater, dragging with them, Gaius, and Aristarchus, Macedonians, who were Paul's companions, and travel.

But when Paul, wished to go in, among the crowd, the disciples, wouldn't let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him, and were urging him, not to venture, into the theater. Now some cried out, one thing, some another, for the assembly, was in confusion, and most of them, didn't know, why they'd come together.

[25 : 04] Constraint. Constraint is a key feature, here, and in the rest of the book.

Not just that people, are held captive, but that things that happen, drive them, into courses of action, that they can't avoid. Captivity is one of the big ideas, in this last section of the book.

Here it's Paul's companions, as often as not, it's the apostle himself, who's in prison. Now, I've already said, that this is a book, in which the hero, is the word of God.

And not surprisingly, in a book, where the hero, is the word of God, much of the action, of this book, happens in the speeches, the wordy bits.

But it's very interesting, to notice, that 50%, of the apostle Paul's, speeches in this book, are not, evangelistic sermons. But rather, speeches in his own defense, in captivity, to one official, or another.

[26 : 17] Now, I don't imagine, that anybody, thinking about, Christian ministry, goes into it, because they imagine, enjoying a life, of defending themselves, in public.

Do you think? Do you think, that's why the guys, in the pastor's training course, are doing the pastor's training course? I can't think of anything, I'd like to do better, with my life, and defend myself, in front of hostile, hostile, people who are hostile, towards me.

Well, that's not why people, go into ministry, but it is, a reality in ministry. The apostle Paul, spends a lot of time, having to defend himself, against critics, while in captivity.

The work of the gospel, involves a lot of that, in various ways. Christian workers, under attack, having to defend themselves. And of course, the charges, are always charges, like, disloyalty to the culture, and our local traditions.

Not being very welcoming, to the pagans, saying that they're gods, and not gods. Not being respectful, to other traditions. That, of course, is happening already, in our own culture, is it not?

[27 : 31] Well, here it is, right in front of us, in the book of Acts. And let me say, that this constraint, and captivity, changes the whole dynamic, of the narrative, in these latter chapters of Acts.

And look at, chapter 24, verse 26, for an example. Just turn over to that. In these later chapters, of the book, everything, slows, right, down.

Paul is, imprisoned, by, the Roman authority, Felix. And Felix, verse 26, hopes that money, will be given him, by Paul.

So he sent for him, often, while he was in prison, and conversed with him, when two years, had elapsed, he was succeeded, by another guy.

There's a little, throwaway line, to think about. When two years, had elapsed, two years, in a few words, everything, slows down.

[28 : 39] Why does it slow down? Because now, we're in the hands, of politicians, and bureaucrats, and they've got, their own agenda, and it's usually, very slow.

And that, characterizes, the narrative, in these chapters of Acts. Everything gets slow. Often, when you hit, difficulty for the gospel, in church life, that difficulty, drags on, and on, and on.

Sometimes, because bureaucracy, and politics, become involved, and bureaucrats, and politicians, have a huge interest, in not hurrying things, waiting for the next guy, to come along, to make the decision, to do the difficult deed.

Opposition, constraint. Third word, confusion. Turn back, to chapter 19. Acts chapter 19, is stuffed, with confusion.

Verse 32 again. Some cried out, one thing, some another. The assembly, was in confusion. Most of them, didn't know, why they'd come together. Some of the crowd, prompted Alexander, whom the Jews, had put forward.

[29 : 59] Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense, to the crowd. But when they saw, that he was a Jew, for about two hours, they all cried out, with one voice. Great is Artemis, of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis, of the Ephesians.

There's a lot of shouting, and yelling. Nobody knows, why they're there. Apart from the fact, that we want to yell, about how great, Artemis of the Ephesians is. There's no reasoned argument, going on here, is there?

At least not, for these two hours. And let me say, again and again, as we see this book, unfolding, we have examples, of the same sort, of mob, based opposition, confusion, and lack of clarity.

On the ground, most of the time, nobody knows, what's going on. Now, as a reader, of the book of Acts, you can step back, and have the big view.

You get selected highlights, and you get editorial comment, and all that kind of thing. But on the ground, where it's happening, there's enormous, lack of clarity.

[31 : 05] And can I say, that can be very difficult, to deal with. It's often the case, when ministry, runs into difficulty, that there is tremendous, lack of clarity, on the ground.

It can be very difficult, to deal with, if you're trying to deal with it, as a Christian leader. You spend such a long time, thinking about, what you might say, and then you get no chance, to say it.

Careful, reasoned argument, and then, well, everybody just shouts, and yells. Nobody wants to listen. Listen, very difficult, to deal with that, on the ground, don't you think?

Do you think, that God is aware of that? Well, of course he is. The opposition here, the human opposition, is not interested, in clarity, but in winning.

It was ever thus. It was with Jesus, at his trial, wasn't it? Who among Jesus accusers, was interested, in him getting, a fair hearing?

[32 : 09] Just the same here. Nobody's interested, in the Christian message, getting a fair hearing here. Nobody's interested, certainly not among, the silversmiths, on a reasoned argument.

No, they want action. They want to be rid, of all this stuff, so that they can get on, with making their silver shrines. Confusion, confusion, often dominates, when the gospel, is under pressure.

Fourth word, politics, verse 35. Verse 35, we have the intervention, of the town clerk, and actually, he manages to get things, back on an even keel.

He's listened to, after, perhaps they've just run out of steam, after shouting about, dying over the Ephesians, for two hours. Who knows, they may just have had enough. Anyway, he's listened to, and he's helpful, and things come back, on an even keel, by the end of the chapter.

But he doesn't even know, what he's talking about. Look at verse 36. Seeing then, that these things, cannot be denied. Namely, that the temple, this is the place, where the great Artemis is, and of the sacred stone, that fell from the sky.

[33 : 20] You ought to be quiet, and do nothing rash. He doesn't have a clue, what's going on. This is precisely, what Paul has been denying. That Artemis, is not really a goddess, at all. And all this stuff, about the stone falling, in the sky, is just mumbo jumbo.

That's the kind of thing, that Paul has been saying. He hasn't got a clue, what he's talking about. Paul's ministry, has threatened, the reputation, of the silversmiths, and of Artemis.

The assessment, in 1927, is in many ways, much more accurate. Let me read that again. There is danger, that the great goddess Artemis, may be counted as nothing, and even be deposed, for her magnificence.

Now, politics, is a big feature, in this book. Here, thankfully, the politician, helps. But he doesn't know, what he's talking about.

And it would be, a great mistake, wouldn't it, to come out of Acts, chapter 19, thinking, that politics, is on the whole, going to be helpful, for the gospel. I mean, the politician, doesn't have a clue, what he's talking about.

[34 : 30] It's so often the case, isn't it? Paul uses politics, in this book, where he can. For example, you'll find Paul, later on, using his Roman citizenship, to gain political leverage, and to gain, a platform, for argument.

Yes, he uses it, where he can, but nothing, in this book, and nothing, in the Bible, suggests, that winning the battle, in the political arena, safeguards the message, or the messengers.

Now, of course, this applies, both to secular, and religious institutions, doesn't it? Winning the political battle, does not safeguard, the message, or the messengers.

I've worked in England, in ministry, for quite a long time. I've got a number of friends, in ministry, in the Church of England. Since 1960s, Bible believing Christians, in the Church of England, have pursued a strategy, of get in, influence the institution, from the inside, gain positions, of authority, and try and turn it around, so that we can, safeguard the gospel.

There are many, excellent, Bible believing ministries, going on, in the Church of England, today. Lots of good people there, many more, evangelicals, than they used to be, but the structures, are utterly resistant, to safeguarding, the gospel.

[36 : 01] Winning the institution, never safeguards, the gospel. No, the safeguarding, of the gospel, is all to do, with the persuasion, of individuals, not political tweaking.

Four words then, opposition, constraint, confusion, and politics. These four words, characterize the second half, of this chapter, and the rest of this book.

And can I say, they are normal, in Christian life, and ministry. Now you can see, why these chapters, aren't preached on much, can you?

Can't you? Not terribly, not terribly encouraging, at face value, that is it. The key moves, from the major, to the minor. The pace of the book, changes from fast, and grabby, to slow, and stodgy.

The work, having been dramatic, up to this point, becomes much more, ordinary, and everyday. Up to this point, the gospel, has been breaking, new ground, after new ground, after new ground.

[37 : 12] One city, after another. From this point onwards, the horizons, get closer, and the walls, draw in. The greatest, part of the narrative, in these later chapters, is about Paul, the prisoner.

Nearly all, Paul's speeches, in this section, are speeches, in his defense, against accusation. Much of Paul's activity, involves political maneuvering, to escape his own death, and to gain a hearing.

Not a single conversion, is recorded, from this point on, in the book. Of course, it doesn't mean, they didn't happen. It's just that the writer, is making the point, that ministry, can become very slow, and difficult.

You can understand, can't you, why it's not preached on much. It doesn't seem, to be playing the tune, we choose to hear, if we had the choice. Opposition, constraint, confusion, politics.

How many times, do we think, that those are, the enemies, of fruitfulness? Don't we often think, that the blessed life, and the fruitful life, is the easy looking, and successful looking life?

[38 : 43] Don't we think, that if the gospel, was going well, in the world, the work, would be characterized, by the opposites, of those things, peace, freedom, clarity, absence of political conflict.

Those are the things, we long to see, and don't we naturally, look for leaders, who will deliver, those sorts of things, peace, freedom, clarity, political harmony.

I mentioned earlier on, the book, 365 Days to Realize, Your Potential. This is what the book says, about its author. He is a, multi-gifted, international, motivational speaker, best-selling author, and business consultant, addressing critical issues, affecting every aspect, of human, social, and spiritual development.

In 1999, he received, approximately, 600 invitations, to speak, in 55 nations. His warm personality, and love for all humans, attracts him, to people, of diverse backgrounds, and he is, always invited, to return many times, to address, the same audiences.

He is a gifted artist, a talented, concert pianist, master of the guitar, and worship leader. He believes, a true leader, is a model, for his followers.

[40 : 13] And as Jesus led, so does he, breaking barriers, to help all mankind, in the discovery, of destiny, purpose, potential, and leadership.

Now, let me ask you, how does the apostle, Paul compare with that? best selling author, and business consultant? Well, he writes a few letters.

He does a bit of, jobbing tent repair work, when he needs the cash. Receives hundreds, of invitations, to speak, always invited, to return many times, to address, the same audiences.

Well, he occasionally, gets invited, to address the synagogue, but he is likely, to cause a riot. More often than not, he goes in the door, only to end up, coming out the window. He has to be smuggled, out of town, to avoid being killed.

He is not usually, invited back. Artist, concert pianist, guitar maestro, worship leader, well, I'm not sure, if singing hymns, in prison in Philippi, qualifies as, worship leading, but yes, if it does, then you can do it.

[41 : 25] Leads as Jesus did, by helping mankind, in the discovery, of destiny, purpose, potential, and leadership. Well, leads as Jesus did, by provoking, so much hostility, that people are regularly, trying to kill him.

Leads as Jesus did, by spending, so much time, in prison, appearing before, governors, defending himself, against four accusations, leads as Jesus did, by walking, steadfastly, into suffering, so that other people, are saved.

Paul does not compare, well, with that model, of ministry, does he? The only thing is, his pattern, is normal, and that pattern, is daydreaming.

In these chapters of Acts, you get a true picture, of Christian life, and gospel work. And though you may not, find these chapters, a powerful jolt, of encouragement, to be the best, that you can be, I am pretty sure, you will find them, realistic, and very encouraging.

Acts 19, is in many ways, abnormal. We are not all, apostles. We do not all, minister in places, like Ephesus, where the occult, is so much, to the fore of it.

[43 : 04] However, in nearly every respect, this chapter, is normal. Normal, is a very, very reassuring word. I wonder, if you have ever, been to your doctor, with something, you are worried about.

You know, you become worried, about it enough, worried enough, about it, after a few weeks, to pluck up courage, to go. And, you make the appointment, and it is a few days ahead, and for those days, you can't think about, anything else, apart from the appointment.

You are so worried. And you walk in eventually, and you sit down, and you are so nervous, and you talk about it, and you show the doctor, the thing you are so worried about. And the doctor, stands back and says, ah, don't worry about that, it's normal.

And you go out, a new person. It is so wonderfully reassuring, to know that you're normal, isn't it? Opposition, constraint, confusion, political difficulty, these things, brothers and sisters, are normal.

They're normal in individual life, they're normal in corporate, church life, they are normal in ministry, in this age, and in every age, that has followed.

[44 : 21] If you find yourself, as you will do from time to time, that in life, you feel constrained, hemmed in, not able to do those things, you'd like to do, driven by circumstances, that you'd rather not have to face, on the receiving end, of unjust criticisms, engaged, in arguments, in which you'll never win, and probably won't even get a hearing.

as your horizons, draw nearer in life, and as your walls, close in, you can find, that even a constrained life, a misunderstood life, a life opposed, can be very fruitful, in God's hands.

This is normal. And can I say, that this is the same, is true at a corporate level. If as a church, you find your work, opposed, if you find yourselves, having to deal with circumstances, you'd far rather not deal with, engaging in arguments, that you'd far rather, not be engaging with, and in which you worry, that you won't get a proper hearing, having to deal with, grindingly slow bureaucracy, and the political agendas of others, that is normal.

It doesn't mean, you're doing it wrong. It's the way, gospel work goes in this world. It's difficult to deal with, but it is well known to God.

Indeed, he tells us it's like that, in his word, so that we will know, it's normal. And you don't have to look, successful and brilliant, because the hero, of the whole enterprise, is not the Christians, and not the churches, but the word of God.

[46 : 24] And the Christians, and the churches, may feel, opposed, and constrained, and the victims of confusion, but the word of God, is not constrained.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. We thank you so much, Heavenly Father, for this very reassuring chapter.

It's realistic description, of opposition, and captivity, of confusion, of political involvement. These things so often, characterize our own lives, as individuals, and our life as a church.

We thank you, for the reassurance, that these things, are not abnormal. Far from it. We thank you, for the encouragement, that despite the fact, that we have to deal, with these difficult things, day by day, week by week, year by year, we thank you, that your word, is not banned, not constrained, not in difficulty.

Please help us together, to give ourselves, to your word, and to its proclamation. And to be confident, that whatever happens to us, in our individual, or our corporate life, you are well able, to do whatever you intend, and to bring people, to salvation through it.

[48 : 12] Hear us we pray, in Jesus name. Amen.