

# Christ's Advancing Kingdom

We should not be surprised when we see tremendous blessing and great evil appearing side by side. As believers today, I think we often look at the spiritual condition of our country and the rest of the world and we're given to think that God's kingdom is not advancing as it should be.

The other day, I heard someone say that the apparent worsening of the world's condition is not the result of our lack of spiritual authority and influence. Rather, the rise in hostility toward Christianity is a response to the power of God making inroads into the devil's domain.

Reading 2 Corinthians 1 in a contemporary version really opened my understanding on this subject. Paul wrote: "We don't want you to be in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it.

"We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it we were forced to trust God totally—not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead! And he did it, rescued us from certain doom. And he'll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing" (vv. 1:8-10, The Message).

In Acts 19 we can read about the amazing breakthroughs Paul saw in Ephesus. Clearly God was with him, as signs, wonders and miracles attended his ministry there.

The people in Ephesus were turning to the Lord in astounding numbers. This activity cut into the enemy's ranks, and in a natural sense, it seriously affected the bottom line of the local businesses that profited from the people's idolatry.

Sometimes we forget that there is an economic impact of people coming to Christ and starting to live holy. Imagine the enormous fortunes that have been built on the demands of sinful lifestyles.

Paul had openly preached the gospel among the Ephesians and others in that region for almost three years, with great success. The enemy was not pleased. So he struck back at Paul, and he used a highly motivated merchant to spearhead the assault. Demetrius, a silversmith, made his living supplying the people with icons for their idol worship. He had a vested interest in seeing to it that the people remained sinful.

Demetrius persuaded a coalition of other craftsmen in related industries that this Christianity wasn't good for business and that something needed to be done about it. His ideological concerns regarding the falling numbers of those who worshiped the goddess Artemis was secondary (see Acts 19:27).

Demetrius fanned the fears and passions of his fellow merchants, who in turn incited others in the city to riot against Paul. We can clearly see the devil's agenda here. But was God's purpose?

Paul reasoned that the circumstances that caused him to despair of life (see 2 Cor. 1:8) were allowed by God to remind him never to trust in himself (vv. 1:9-10). I've gathered from this story that God must consider it a loathsome thing when we cease to rely on Him and begin to put our faith in our limited capabilities.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is advancing in our day because it is His will. Let this story serve as an inspiration to all of us to keep the focus on His ministry, His glory and His power, and not on ourselves. Indeed, it is His kingdom.

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