

Introduction

1. King Asa was one of the few good kings of Judah, and when he became king Azariah the prophet gave him the following advice (2 Chronicles 15:1-2): **"...Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."**
 - a. You will notice there are three promises here:
 - 1) The Lord is with you when you are with Him
 - 2) If you seek Him, He will let you find Him
 - 3) If you forsake Him, He will forsake you
 - b. This morning I want to focus on the second one because it is a principle we find throughout the Bible and gets at the heart of God the Father: if someone seeks Him, He will let them find Him:
 - 1) We find it repeated throughout the Old Testament:
 - a) Proverbs 8:17: **"I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me."**
 - b) 1 Chronicles 28:9b (David told Solomon): **"If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever."**
 - c) Isaiah 55:6: **"Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near."**
 - d) Jeremiah 29:13: **"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."**
 - 2) Jesus made a similar promise in the New Testament:
 - a) Matthew 7:8: **"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."**
 - b) Matthew 11:28-30: **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**- 2. In our culture, "finding God" is often nothing more than an idiom referring to becoming religious, but that's not at all what seeking and finding the Lord refers to in the Bible:
 - a. Rather, seeking the Lord involves a genuine desire to know the truth about Him, and then loving and serving Him with one's entire heart, soul, mind, and strength
 - b. It's not about religion, but rather about seeking to genuinely know and understand Him
 - c. Likewise, finding God Biblically refers to Him revealing more of Himself to us and entering into a personal relationship with the one who seeks Him
- 3. We are going to see an example of this in our passage today when we meet two groups of individuals:
 - a. The first group seeks the Lord and finds Him through Jesus
 - b. The second group refuses to seek the Lord and fails to find Him

A. The first group seeks the Lord and finds Him through Jesus (19:1-7)

1. When Paul arrives at Ephesus, he encounters some disciples; but as we'll see, they are not Christians yet (READ 19:1-3):
 - a. Luke calls these men "**disciples**" and normally that would mean Christians, but the rest of the passage brings that into question
 - b. Another possibility is that these men were disciples of John the Baptist, much like Apollos in our passage last week (READ 18:24-26):
 - 1) The word disciple simply means pupil or student, and the Bible uses it to refer to not only the followers of Jesus, but John the Baptist
 - 2) Prior to Christ's earthly ministry, John the Baptist began preaching in order to prepare the Jews for the coming of the Messiah, and his message focused on three things (READ Mark 1:1-8)
 - a) The first was repentance from sin as demonstrated through water baptism
 - b) The second was that the Messiah was coming after him
 - c) And the third was the Messiah would baptize His followers with (or in) the Holy Spirit
 - 3) Even after Jesus started His earthly ministry, John continued to preach the same message and did so until he was arrested and murdered (READ John 3:22-30)
 - 4) One thing we don't often think about is what happened to all of John's disciples after his death, and the death of Jesus:
 - a) It's likely that most simply went about their normal lives, some traveling to regions outside of Israel like we see here in Ephesus which was in Asia
 - b) Others, like Apollos (last week), even appear to have taken it upon themselves to become traveling preachers taking John's message with them to other regions
 - c. The context suggests these men were disciples of John and not yet saved:
 - 1) The first clue is the question Paul asks them (2): "**Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**"
 - a) With only two exceptions noted in the Scripture, those who believe in Jesus are given the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion:
 - One exception was those who believed in Jesus prior to His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (see John 7:37-39)
 - The second was the Samaritans in Acts 8 who didn't receive the Spirit until Peter came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:14-17)
 - b) Some interpret Paul's use of the word "**believed**" here to claim these men must have believed in Jesus, but based on the rest of the passage, it's more likely Paul was referring to when they believed the message preached by John the Baptist
 - c) This is supported by their response; '**No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit**' (2b):
 - This is the way most English translations render verse, but you may notice a marginal note in your Bible suggesting that another translation is "**No, we have not even heard whether the Holy Spirit has been given.**"
 - This alternative translation makes more sense because Jews were well aware of the Holy Spirit

- Plus, as John’s disciples they would have been familiar with John’s promise that when the Messiah came, He would baptize with the Holy Spirit
 - So, their response to Paul’s question reveals that they had not received the Holy Spirit, but also that they were not even aware that John’s promise regarding the Messiah and His baptizing with the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled
- 2) This is why Paul then asks them about which baptism they had received, and their answer is the second clue that they were disciples of John, but not yet disciples of Christ (RE-READ 19:3):
- a) John’s baptism was a means of expressing repentance in expectation of the Messiah and made one a follower/disciple of John
 - b) Christian baptism was a means of expressing faith in Jesus Christ and become His follower/disciple
 - c) The fact that these men had only been baptized “**into John’s baptism**” clearly indicates that they never expressed faith in Jesus Christ nor were baptized in His name
2. That all changed, however, once Paul revealed to them that Jesus was the very one John had preached about (READ 19:4-7):
- a. All it took was for these men to believe in Jesus was for Paul to say (if you’ll allow me to paraphrase), “Jesus is the one John told you about!”
 - b. Upon hearing this, they responded immediately, were baptized in the name of Jesus, and received the Holy Spirit as evidence of their new found faith
 - c. Their response suggests they were genuinely seeking the Lord:
 - 1) They had accepted John’s message of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah
 - 2) They had even declared it publicly by being baptized either by John himself or some of his disciples
 - 3) As disciples of John, they were likely eagerly anticipating the Messiah, which might explain why it didn’t take much for Paul to convince them that Jesus was the One
 - 4) They didn’t hesitate to declare their new faith in Jesus through baptism
 - d. What we see hear is a perfect example of someone seeking the Lord and the Lord letting Himself be found
 - e. This is the complete opposite of what we see next

<p>B. The second group refuses to seek the Lord and fails to find Him (READ 19:8-10)</p>

1. As was Paul’s custom, he began teaching about Jesus in the synagogue
2. In the past, this didn’t seem to last too long because it didn’t take long for the Jews to rebel and run him out of the synagogue, and in some cases even the city
3. Here, we see that he spent three months “**speaking out boldly...reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God**” (8)
4. To spend that much time at the synagogue suggests that some of the Jews were initially open to the Gospel (and these may be the disciples Luke refers to in v. 9), but it didn’t take long before other Jews “**were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people**” (9):

- a. Most other translations translate v. 9 similar to the NIV which I believe gives the sense better than the NASB: **“some of them became obstinate (stubborn) and they refused to believe...”**
 - b. They not only refused to believe the Gospel, but they slandered in public those who did believe it: **“[they] publicly maligned (e.g. slandered) the Way”** (NIV)
 - c. What we see here is the direct opposite of seeking the Lord
5. As a result, the Lord did not allow them to find Him (RE-READ 19:9b-10):
- a. You may find it curious how I worded that—instead of saying they didn’t find Him, I said the Lord did not allow them to find Him
 - b. If you remember from my introduction, David said something very similar: **“And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”**; we can paraphrase this as, seek the Lord and He will let you find Him, but if you don’t seek Him, He will not let you find Him
 - c. In Mark 6:11, Jesus gave these instructions to His disciples: **“Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.”**—in other words, by leaving and taking the Gospel elsewhere, the Lord was removing a witness, and in essence not allowing them to find Him
 - d. We see Paul follow Jesus’ instructions at least twice when the Jews rejected the Gospel (see Acts 13:50-51 and 18:5-6)
 - e. We see Paul repeat that here, though less dramatically, by gathering up those who had accepted the Gospel, leaving the synagogue at Ephesus, and leaving those Jews who had rejected the Gospel without a witness
 - f. Instead, for the next two years he spent his time teaching those who were genuinely seeking the Lord at the school of Tyrannus so that they might find Him
 - g. A friend once remarked that often one of the signs of God’s judgment is that He goes silent:
 - 1) We saw that sometimes with the OT prophets
 - 2) We saw it with the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments
 - 3) We see it between the sixth and seventh seals in Revelation when there is 30 minutes of silence in heaven before God begins to pour out His wrath on the earth
 - 4) Paul even describes this in Romans 1 where he describes the progression of how God hands men over to their own sin and depravity as they continue to harden their heart against him—to the point where the last step is for God to hand them over to a depraved mind that can no longer reason or recognize truth

Conclusion

1. Both Matthew and Luke record that as Jesus was looking out over the crowds one day, He said to His disciples, **“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”**
2. The harvest is plentiful because there are people out there who are genuinely seeking the Lord; they simply need someone to point them to Jesus
3. When Jesus told His disciples to pray that the Lord would send laborers out into the harvest, He was talking about them; He was talking about us

Three opportunities in the past three weeks with co-workers
