

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent more than two years ministering the gospel in Ephesus. In the opening verses of chapter 19 we read that Paul reached out to a new people group, those who were disciples of John the Baptist. After Paul shared the gospel, twelve of them surrendered their lives in faith. The Holy Spirit confirmed to Paul, and the church, that God had included them by allowing them to speak in other languages, and to prophesy, as a result of the Spirit's presence in their lives. Such accounts appear to be one-time events, because nowhere in Acts do we read about believers speaking in tongues at later dates. It only happened with new people groups, and only when they first believed, and only as a sign to the church.

Paul followed his usual practice to teach to the Jews in their synagogue. He did so for three months, until those who had hearts to believe surrendered their lives in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. When the remaining Jews hardened their hearts, opposed Paul, and spoke ill of those who believed, Paul left the synagogue and preached the gospel in the hall of Tyrannus, where he could draw the greatest crowd of gentiles.

In tonight's passage we will read about how God blessed Paul's ministry, and how some who wanted to ride upon his coattails got into trouble. Let's see what principles we can learn by reading together Acts 19:11-20.

Parallel to what we read about Peter in chapter 5, God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Jesus performed miracles to validate that He was the Messiah. The Apostles performed miracles to validate the truth of the gospel, and to establish the early church. But when we think about miracle workers, other than Jesus, we must not elevate them too highly, or aspire to become miracle workers ourselves.

These were ordinary men that God used in extraordinary ways. The miracles were the work of the Holy Spirit, demonstrated to eyewitnesses in order that they might have faith, according to God's will. Today, I am suspicious of anyone who claims to have the ability to supernaturally heal, or to perform other miracles. God can do whatever He desires to do, and He can use anyone He chooses. As we approach the end of days, I suspect that we might see some miracles performed by God as a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel, just prior to the Lord's return. The sad truth is that there are charlatans today who claim to have a gift of God, but use their ministries to draw a following, and to line their pockets.

People get caught up in the excitement. They want desperately to believe that they might be healed at the touch of a man who claims to have a healing ministry. Many years ago we had some folks from this church that traveled to Orlando to attend a Benny Henn crusade, hoping that he could cure them of cancer. Never mind that they had the whole church family praying for them, along with many others in our community. Never mind that they sat Sunday after Sunday under the contextual teaching and preaching of God's word. In desperation they sought out a man who put on a good show on their television screen, but even the great Benny Henn could not cure their cancer.

If you watch Christian television you might see a preacher proclaim over the airwaves that the Spirit says that there is someone out there in TV land that has a health issue, and as he speaks the words, the Lord will heal them. Such vagueness is deception. There is no real way to validate the miracle. God does not get the glory, but viewers look instead to the power of the preacher who makes such claims. Send your money to my ministry, and God will make you rich. Support our ministry, and God will bless you in some way. Send your money, we will pray over this cloth, send it to you, and when you touch it you will be healed. Some preachers who

promoted this con job wound up in jail because of the fraud perpetrated on innocent and naive people. This is the proof text they use for their deception.

Robert Tilton was a televangelist of the prosperity gospel. In 1991 he was at his peak, drawing in \$80 million per year from his followers. He promised his viewers that if they would send in their prayer requests, along with their love offering, he would personally pray over a cloth, and when they received the cloth in the mail, they also received the answer to their prayer. I watched the night ABC's Primetime Live uncovered that Tilton's ministry threw away prayer requests without reading them, but keep the money in order to build personal wealth.

While Tilton was a fraud, Paul was the real deal. God supernaturally used items that touched Paul's skin in order to bring healing to the sick and infirmed. Paul did not have magical powers, but God used these tactics to rapidly spread the gospel in Ephesus. Through miracles, Paul became an authority figure in the eyes of the people, so that they listened to Paul's message of God's grace in salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul always pointed to Jesus, while false prophets ultimately draw attention to themselves.

We must take just a moment to ask, is God still in the miracle business today? Of course He is. We see it most profoundly in individuals when they are born again, and if you received God's grace when you first believed, you can testify that the miracle happened to you. We see it in every answered prayer. We see it as we observe the sovereign hand of our loving God in our lives and in our world. God is the miracle worker, not men.

In this passage Luke introduces us to the seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva. Luke refers to them as Jews, not believers. These familial brothers were itinerant exorcists. They made their living as they traveled from place to place to cast out demons. Apparently they thought they could ride Paul's coattails in order to have a successful ministry for themselves, but they quickly got in over their heads when they tried to elicit the names of Paul and Jesus in their exorcism.

We know that Jesus Christ has ultimate victory over the occult. We also know that God used Paul to help defeat Satan in people's lives, but God did not use these men in the same way that he used Paul, and they did not have the authority to use Jesus name in their efforts to support themselves. In our culture, there is an unhealthy fascination with the occult. Unfortunately, Halloween fosters focus on the occult among innocent children. That is why we offer a Halloween alternative to the community in our Jesus Jamboree. Ghosts, witches, and goblins represent the spiritual forces of darkness, and once a year, many encourage their children to pretend that they are one these spirits for a night. Hollywood draws in large crowds, and makes huge sums of money, with the release of every new horror film. Satan and the spiritual forces of darkness use every opportunity to enthrall people to open spiritual doors that ought not to be opened

Flee from the occult. Don't play around with mind-altering drugs. Don't play around with Ouija boards. Don't let your curiosity drive you to depend upon horoscopes. Don't seek the council of palm readers or fortunetellers. Do not fill your mind with the things of the occult, rather set your mind on things above, lest you give the devil a foothold.

When I was in seminary I knew a man who claimed that he was an exorcist. Indeed, he had experience with a number of people. One night, in the dorm where I stayed, a student, who was preparing to become a pastor, had a demonic episode. He spoke blasphemous things in a gravely voice. He convulsed and behaved like people we might see in a horror film. The other students recognized the demonic force and called for the man who had experience to come and help, and at the end of the night, he was able to calm the man down.

Although I did not see any of this, and the seminary tried desperately not to let it be known, it all happened just down the hall from my room, and I heard many eyewitness accounts of what happened from fellow students. I tried to talk to a couple of my seminary professors about the episode, and I could see that they were scared to death, and had been instructed not to talk about it. One of my professors who came in the middle of the night to see what was going on said that he had never seen anything like it.

That is not the end of the story, because I watched the spiritual forces of darkness overcome, and destroy, the life of the man who was the exorcist. He went from being confident to despondent. While studying for ministry, he started drinking. In our private conversations he said things that no Christian ought to say. Soon he dropped out of seminary, and his marriage dissolved. I lost all contact with him after that, but I watched him life self-destruct.

Please, don't get in over your head. Don't develop a fascination for the occult. Don't play around with spiritual darkness that you do not understand. Stay focused on being the salt and the light, so that the evil spirits do not leave you naked and wounded.

This encounter quickly became known throughout Ephesus. Two things happened: fear fell on them all, and the name of Jesus was extolled. When the dark power of the occult is on display, and we observe the devastation it brings in people's lives that should strike fear in our hearts. The spiritual forces of darkness are real and the fear of what could happen us, and our families, should drive us to find shelter in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us victory over spiritual darkness.

Paul demonstrated that Jesus drives out demons. The people saw what the demons did to the seven sons of Sceva. The harsh reality of the demonic, and a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power and victory over the demonic, led people to trust Jesus, so that they might be delivered from the power of Satan. This event gives us insight into why Paul later wrote in his letter to the Ephesians that our battle is not against flesh and blood, and instructed his readers to put on the full armor of God, so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes.

Among those who trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord were people who confessed their involvement in the occult. They demonstrated their repentance by getting everything out of their lives that had anything to do with spiritual forces of darkness. Some of them, in the past, practiced magic arts, but they realized that such things could have no place in their lives now that they belonged to Jesus. Some brought books filled with the secrets of the occult and they burned them as a witness to the world that everything that has to do with the occult was evil.

The bible places the value of these books at 50,000 drachmas. We cannot say what the total value of that would be in today's dollars, but a drachma was roughly a day's wages. If a laborer worked seven days a week for 139 years he or she could earn that amount of money. It represented a tremendous sacrifice if you consider how much money they stood to raise if they sold the books to someone else. They didn't think about how much they had invested, or about how much money they could make. They just realized that those books contained evil, and they must be destroyed. Because of their repentance backed by action, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

I believe that the preservation of this account in the inspired word of God is a call to God's people to clean house. It forces us to ask what is there in my life that may give the devil a foothold. What is there in my house that honors Satan rather than Christ? How do I need to change in order to be the man or woman that the Lord wants me to be?

From the presidential election, to the unrest on our streets, from the rise of radical Islam, to the perversions thrust upon our culture by government, from the most public demonstrations

of evil, to the secret areas of our lives, the demonic realm and the spiritual forces of evil are on display. If we are to be the people of God, we must not have anything to do with evil. Our faith, our hope is in Jesus Christ. He is our victory, and our shield. We belong to Him. We represent Him to the world. We proclaim His salvation to people in darkness, for He won victory for everyone who will trust Him with his or her life.

The bible promises that if we confess and repent of our sins, He is faithful to forgive us and cleans us from all righteousness. If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. We worship Him, and serve Him with our lives in order to shine the light of God into the world, and to offer the hope of salvation to the lost. If there is anyone here who feels the stirring of the Holy Spirit in your heart, and God is calling you to come to Him to be saved, please do not leave this place without talking with me or to someone sitting close to you about how you can receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, so that you can be saved from your sins and inherit eternal life.