

The Great Stories of the Early Church
70-Paul to Ephesus 05
The Powerful Work of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus
Acts 19:1-20

- 1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
- 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
- 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
- 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
- 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.
- 7 And all the men were about twelve.
- 8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.
- 9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.
- 10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.
- 11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:
- 12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.
- 13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.
- 14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.
- 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?
- 16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.
- 17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.
- 18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.
- 19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.
- 20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. KJV

Introduction:

We continue this morning asking questions of the text. If you recall, we asked several questions as we opened the text several weeks ago.

Some of the questions that are raised:

When should a baptized person ever consider being baptized again?

What was this work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these men and should we expect the same?

What about these cloths being taken from Paul to the sick?

When does one decide that potential believers are 'hardened' and withdraw from them?

Is demon-possession a real thing? What does it take to cast one out?

Is it ever right to lead people to burn books?

Do we realize that the mighty working of God for which we say we are praying would be as disruptive to our culture as it was to Ephesus?

I want you to notice something about the text before us that will help you with your Bible reading and study. Look, please, at v.10.

10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Here Luke gave a sort of a summary of the whole episode of Paul's work in Asia. Then, in verses 11-20 he backed up and gave a somewhat detailed account of how that happened, describing a triggering event and the outworking of it.

This is a style of writing that we do not see in our literature. It is unfamiliar to us so we tend to misread it when we see it. Take Gen. 1:1 for example.

Gen 1:1

1 In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth. KJV

It has confused some people that this statement was followed by what is said in v.2.

Gen 1:2

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. KJV

All kind of explanations have been offered but the simple reality is that Moses stated the entire picture in v.1 and then backed up to describe how that came to be, as if he were giving the summary first. This is not uncommon at all in scripture and if you know that there are passages that will be easier to decipher.... such as the one before us today.

We looked last week at the reality of demonic possession and the utter failure of the seven sons of Sceva to secure the removal of a demon from a man. But it was that event which became the initial occurrence which resulted in the spread of the gospel throughout the entire region.

John Calvin suggested that these men were hucksters, false pretenders as exorcists but one must remember that Jesus had acknowledged there were successful exorcists in Judea among the Jewish people.

Matt 12:24-27

- 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.
- 25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:
- 26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?
- 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. KJV

We will reference this text again a little later but the point to be made here is that there were Jewish exorcists who were having some success. How could this be? How could people who apparently did not have the power of Christ upon them have any success at all against demons? I confess that I do not know but I have read a number of accounts of people having some success when I am pretty sure they were not operating in the same manner of in the same power as Paul.

I have suspected that such things were charades carried out by the demons to further deceive the false exorcist as well as the victim as well as all who would hear about it. Often these stories do not follow the events all the way to the end because many of those possessed and then 'delivered' suffer horrible recurrences.

Luke identified these seven sons as "exorcists" which means this was not their first attempt at exorcism. It was, however, apparently the first time they had invoked the names of Jesus and Paul. The aftermath, however, is really instructive for all of those interested in how God the Holy Spirit really works.

- 17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

It is the method of God to initiate great movements through triggering events.

What is needed?

- A man, called, filled with the Spirit, and on target (in the place where God would have him)
- The Presence and Blessing of the Holy Spirit.
- He, The Spirit, creates an event.
 - Sometimes it is the conversion of a single soul,
 - Sometimes many souls simultaneously,
 - Sometimes it is a miraculous or unusual work,
 - Here the 'trigger' was literally a manifestation of Satan. (Oh yes, God can use that too!)

How does it start? "Fear fell on them all" seeming the Orthodox as well as the Hellenized Jews.

- 17 And **this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus**; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

If you know the history of the First Great Awakening in the United States, fear fell on many in the Evangelical Churches of the country because of the introduction of the doctrine of Arminianism into New England.

Spiritual fear is a great tool of the Holy Spirit. A man seeks conversion when he becomes appropriately terrified concerning the state of his own soul. God often sends Revival when His people become fearful of the state of their community or their country. Spiritual lukewarmness is the loss of the fear of God.

The genuine fear of God, when it falls upon men, is an amazing thing. All false bravado and counterfeit courage dissipates. Moses prophesied concerning the fear that was going to fall on the enemies of Israel when they heard about what had happened at the Red Sea. It is contained in the great Song of Moses.

Ex 15:14-18

- 14 The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.
- 15 Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.
- 16 Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.
- 17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.
- 18 The LORD shall reign for ever and ever. KJV

You will recall that Rahab conveyed to the spies that came to Jericho how terrified the inhabitants of the city were when they heard of what God had done for Israel against those who fought with them.

Josh 2:8-11

- 8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;
- 9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.
- 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.
- 11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. KJV

This was often true when Israel fought with God on their side for their enemies knew what men today have forgotten, a universal and profound principle.

Heb 10:28-31

- 28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:
29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?
30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.
31 ***It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*** KJV

That will never stop being true. It is the same fear that will seize the unbelieving on the Day of Judgment as the realization comes over them that this One against Whom they have rebelled is indeed the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Judge of the Whole Earth.

This is the fear that must also seize the soul seeking after God at some point, the realization of his lost and undone condition and the terror of what will become of him/her if God does not have mercy. Leave that out and you leave out the Gospel itself.

Look at what this fear did in the province of Asia.

Acts 19:18-20

- 18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.
19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.
20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. KJV

And, what was it that made these Jews afraid?

- The ineffectiveness of their own exorcists against the demonic spirit and the spirit's affirmation that he recognized the authority of Jesus and Paul.

Of course, the Holy Spirit was provoking, instigating and directing this fear to send these people to Christ in repentance and faith. The Spirit uses the sinful state of man, his violations of the Law of God to terrify him and bring him to a state of brokenness that he might be saved.

Gal 3:24

- 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. KJV

(Have you ever noticed how much effort modern 'Christianity' invests in steering people away from fear? Yet the Lord Jesus promoted the idea.)

Jer 32:40

40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. KJV

Matt 10:28

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. KJV

Notice the correlation between fear falling on those people and the Name of the Lord Jesus being ‘Magnified.’

The word ‘magnified’ means what it appears to mean, ‘to make great - to elevate to high esteem.’ Now, obviously, the Name of the Lord is great on its own and men cannot make it either less or more than it naturally is. But what Luke is saying is that they came to *esteem* His Name as great. Luke could only have recorded this if men were *seeing and honoring Him* for Who He claimed to be, the Holy One come down from heaven.

This is what happens when the Kingdom of Heaven comes in power to a place or an area such as was happening here in Asia. More on that a little later.

First of all, they *believed* with true and saving faith.

They *came* to the saints, to the church. I do not doubt but that the inference here is that they submitted to Christian baptism.

This contradicts the false notion that many have in our day that one can believe and be a Christian and be all right with God apart from the church, away from the preaching of the Word, and without the communion of the saints. That idea is contradictory to the biblical pattern from start to finish. Those who come to the faith in a genuine way also join themselves to the people of God.

They *confessed*, freely, openly, and honestly. What did they confess? Their sins! We are to assume they confessed them first to God and then to the assembly of the saints. They *shewed their deeds*, what they had been doing that was contrary to the Law of God. What, you think the Law of God had no place in the preaching of the gospel?

This is one of the clearest practical records of the outworkings of Repentance ever. The words indicated that this was an acknowledgment, in full, of the wickedness these people had been practicing. There is no reason to believe that it was anything but voluntary, free, and complete, no doubt detailed. There is also nothing to indicate that this was forced upon them but was the natural course of events for one upon whom the Spirit of God had moved in saving grace.

This is what arises out of a repentant soul when the environment is safe. I say that because there are places where such confession is neither safe nor wise. “Do not cast your pearls before swine,” the Savior said.

Even today in places outside of the church, full reckoning of sins is seen as not only proper but necessary for healing. If you have ever studied or gone through the 12 Step program that was originally put together for the recovery of alcoholics, you know that in the final stages of the program the recovering one is required to make a list of people he has wronged and wrongs he has done and make things right if he can. It is healthy for alcoholics, but the Church no longer thinks it needful for sinners.... strange.

The Roman Catholic confessional literally is a perversion of the practice of the early church in which people confessed their sins and made right things they had done wrong as they entered the church and took up the life of a Christian. Those who had stolen were required to make good what they had taken. Those who had lied and sworn falsely against people were required to confess their lies and ask the forgiveness of the one they had sinned against. Those who had sinned against others in different ways were required to make right, so much as they could, what they had done. Pretty amazing, is it not?

Many.... ***brought their books and burned them.*** These books were very expensive and the combined worth of them was very great. Why did they not sell them (as Judas would have suggested)? Because they wanted them destroyed and no one else to be damaged by the contents of them.

There was a movement in our country some years ago that was a part of the great shift away from God for our culture. The idea was that no book should be off limits, that they were all works of art and, as such, should be included in all libraries, even school libraries. There was even a movie made which was very popular, ***Fahrenheit 451***, I think the name of it was, and it told of this awful totalitarian government that censored and burned books it deemed inappropriate. The idea grew and took hold until very awful books were not only available to children and young people but even became required reading in some places.

But today, that same movement, it calls itself Progressive, wants to forbid some books from school campuses. The Bible and good books written to explain and defend it, books that tell the true story of the founding and birth of our country, that detail the reasons for our beginnings and the thoughts of those men who organized us into a country, books that explain and defend our constitution, such books are being relegated to the dust bins of history. They are considered no longer useful nor helpful, even as we descend down the spiral toward moral anarchy.

Some books should be burned! They are the products of immoral and degenerate minds, the products of Hell itself and they endanger every soul that opens them up and exposes itself to their perverse views of God, of man, of spiritual things, and of eternity. The world would be far better off if they did not exist. Now, I do not favor the government censoring such for it cannot do it rightly. (Can it do anything rightly?) But those books which mock God and His Word should disappear from view because no one is interested in such and those who find them on their shelves should destroy them rather than passing them on to damage another soul.

They made a bold, public, determined stance against evil, against the evil of their generation. This, of course, is condemned by much of what considers itself Christian in our day. (Do we

need to find another name for ourselves?)

Through repentance they had come to have an utter revulsion for what was in those books and for the practices that they taught, practices in complete rebellion against God and His Word. They determined to destroy them so that no one else would ever be influenced by them.

What was in those books anyway?

Then, look at verse 20, ***So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.***

So, in this way, by this means...

Mightily grew, not by bits and pieces, here a little and there a little, but by a mighty wave washing over the whole territory of Asia, the truths proclaimed by Jesus Christ and His apostles increased greatly in influence.

And prevailed, the gospel overwhelmed the false religion of the area in power and in influence. Not that all false worship was destroyed but the gospel became the predominant force directing the thoughts and minds of great numbers of people. ***There was an Awakening!***

There are other words which describe the events that were happening here in Asia. ***The Kingdom of God had come!***

Jesus made reference to this at one point in his ministry. We have already referenced part of this text.

Matt 12:24-28

- 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.
- 25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:
- 26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?
- 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.
- 28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. KJV

The manifest Presence and Power of God in any place is the open evidence that His Kingdom has come to that place, is in that place, and that His rulership is open and obvious.

Let me ask you a question, ***when you, in the Model Prayer, say, “Thy kingdom come,” what is it that you are asking for?***

I say that because some people think about heaven, the New Earth, and the Kingdom of God in eternity. That certainly will be His Kingdom come then but do the words mean anything for now? Is there a way for that prayer to be answered while you are still living this life? Is there a

way for the Kingdom to come today?

Others think about a 1000 year kingdom on earth ruled over by Jesus Himself. That, too, if it were to happen would be the Kingdom but, again, most of those who think about that believe that we must either die and be resurrected or else be caught up to the Lord in some way before that can occur. The Kingdom in that sense has no real meaning for today. It cannot come in that way today and in our daily life.

Can the Kingdom come? Can that prayer be answered? Well, I think it came to Asia in the days of Paul. It came to Europe in the centuries that followed through the ministry of the Waldenses and other faithful Anabaptists. It came to the Moravians in Germany and to many other people through them. It came in some places during the Reformation and later to America through the Great Awakenings. So, yes, the Kingdom can come in just the way it came to Asia through the ministry of Paul.

When the proper fear of God takes hold of the hearts of men, this is evidence that the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of His Dear Son, has taken hold upon that place and those men. Such people flee from the wrath of God to the Savior He has provided. Fear brought them both to faith and to repentance.

One of the men who were crucified with Jesus had an interesting question for the other, a question that every human being should consider.

Luke 23:39-43

- 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.
- 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?
- 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.
- 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.
- 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. KJV

One of those men feared God and one did not. One went out into eternity without God and one went into a place called 'paradise.'

Do you fear God?

Have you believed on Him with your whole heart?

Have you repented of your sins?

Have you magnified His name?