



Summary

What does it look like when the power of God collides with the darkness of the world? In Acts 19, we find ourselves in the heart of ancient Ephesus, a city of staggering wealth, pagan worship, and spiritual darkness, where the gospel of Jesus Christ began to shake the very foundations of a culture built on idolatry. Through Paul's remarkable ministry in the school of Tyrannus, we see what happens when the Word of God is taught faithfully and consistently over time. The ripple effects were extraordinary: healings, deliverance, and a sweeping movement of genuine repentance that led believers to publicly burn their occult books and magic arts, valued at fifty thousand days wages. This was not symbolic housecleaning. It was costly, visible, and total. Repentance, we are reminded, is not merely a change of words but a change of mind accompanied by the removal of whatever we are turning away from. This passage also confronts us with one of the most sobering statements Jesus ever made, found in Matthew 12, that there is no neutral ground in our relationship with him. We are either for him or against him. That truth cuts through the comfortable middle ground that so many of us quietly occupy, and it invites us to examine where we truly stand. The spiritual lessons here are as urgent and personal today as they were in first-century Ephesus.





Points

Title: The Power of the Word, the Danger of Idols, and the Call to Choose Christ

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts 19, this sermon examines Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus, a city dominated by pagan worship and commerce built around idolatry. Paul's bold teaching at the school of Tyrannus for two years resulted in widespread transformation, confirmed by miraculous healings and demonic spirits being driven out. The failed exorcism attempt by the seven sons of Sceva revealed that spiritual authority belongs exclusively to those in genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. The public burning of occult materials by new believers illustrated the true nature of repentance as a change of mind accompanied by the removal of sinful influences from one's life. The sermon draws sharp parallels between the idol-making industry of ancient Ephesus and modern institutions, including the entertainment industry, secular academia, pharmaceutical companies, and even the contemporary Christian music industry, all of which the pastor argues have financial and spiritual stakes in maintaining cultural idols. The central theological challenge of the sermon is Christ's declaration that there is no middle ground: one is either for Jesus or against him, and the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the persistent refusal to believe that truth. The sermon closes with a call to salvation and a transition into communion, framing the bread and cup as symbols of Christ's sacrifice rather than objects of worship.

Key Points:

- Paul's ministry in Ephesus included approximately 3,100 hours of expository teaching at the school of Tyrannus over two years, resulting in the gospel spreading throughout all of Asia
- Miraculous healings and deliverances followed Paul's teaching, with God confirming the message through signs, not preceding it
- The failed exorcism by the seven sons of Sceva demonstrated that the demonic realm has no respect for those without a genuine born-again relationship with Jesus Christ
- Demonic or familiar spirits observe human behavior and use that knowledge to craft targeted temptations, which is why God warns against engaging with mediums and occult practices



- True repentance involves both a change of mind and the active removal of sinful objects and influences from one's life, as illustrated by the burning of occult materials worth 50,000 days wages in Ephesus
- Jesus declared there is no safe middle ground between belief and unbelief; one is either for him or against him, and persistent unbelief in the face of the Holy Spirit's witness constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
- The contemporary Christian music industry has been significantly commercialized, with major licensing now controlled by secular corporate interests, raising concerns about the influence of profit-driven formulas on worship content
- Certain prominent church movements associated with well-known worship music are identified as theologically problematic, and their widespread influence is presented as a form of spiritual danger
- There is a meaningful distinction between a symbol, which points to Christ, and an idol, which is itself the object of worship; communion elements are symbols, not idols
- Demetrius and the silversmiths of Ephesus represent the pattern of those whose financial interests are tied to idolatry and who therefore resist the gospel with hostility, a pattern the pastor argues is visible in many modern industries

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 19:8-41, the primary passage, covering Paul's ministry at the school of Tyrannus, the sons of Sceva, the burning of occult books, and the riot of the silversmiths
- 1 Corinthians 16:5-9, in which Paul describes the great and effective door opened to him at Ephesus
- Matthew 12:22-32, in which Jesus addresses accusations that he casts out demons by Beelzebub and declares that one who is not with him is against him, and warns about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
- Leviticus 19:31, in which God commands his people to give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits
- Jude 5-11, which references fallen angels, the rebellion of Korah, and Michael the archangel's confrontation with Satan over the body of Moses
- 1 John 4:4, affirming that the one who is in believers is greater than the one who is in the world



- 2 Timothy 4:14-15 and 1 Timothy 1:18-20, referencing Alexander the coppersmith who greatly opposed Paul's ministry

Stories:

- The seven sons of Sceva attempted to cast out demons using Jesus' name as an incantation without personal faith, and the demonized man overpowered all seven, driving them out of the house naked and wounded, illustrating that spiritual authority cannot be borrowed or imitated
- New believers in Ephesus publicly burned their occult books and materials, with the total value reaching 50,000 days wages, serving as a vivid illustration of costly and genuine repentance
- The riot incited by Demetrius the silversmith filled the 25,000-seat theater in Ephesus, where the crowd chanted for two hours before the city clerk restored order, demonstrating how economic interests tied to idolatry will fiercely resist the advance of the gospel
- The pastor recounted a conversation on a flight to a conference with a former Bethel student and worship team member who reported that nearly everyone he knew from his time there had walked away from the Lord after graduating, illustrating the spiritual danger of environments where music and worship have become vehicles for idolatry and commerce
- The pastor referenced the Greek poet Antipater of Sidon's description of the Temple of Artemis as surpassing all other wonders of the ancient world, providing historical context for the cultural and religious significance of the idol worship Paul was confronting in Ephesus



Scripture

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

****Directly Referenced****

- Acts 19:1-7 (prior week's passage)
- Acts 19:8-41 (primary passage for the sermon)
- Acts 20:31 (Paul's three years at Ephesus)
- 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 (Paul's letter from Ephesus about an open door)
- Matthew 12:22-32 (Jesus casting out demons, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit)
- 1 John 4:4 (greater is he who is in you)
- Leviticus 19:31 (warning against mediums and familiar spirits)
- Jude 5-11 (fallen angels, Michael and the body of Moses, way of Cain)
- 2 Timothy 4:14-15 (Alexander the coppersmith)
- 1 Timothy 1:18-20 (Hymenaeus and Alexander delivered to Satan)

****Alluded To****

- John 14:6 (Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life)
- Romans 5:20 (where sin abounds, grace abounds much more)
- John 3:7 (you must be born again)
- Matthew 11:28-30 (come to me all who are weary)
- Genesis 4:1-16 (Cain and Abel)
- Numbers 16:1-35 (rebellion of Korah)
- Numbers 22-24 (error of Balaam)
- Deuteronomy 34:1-6 (death of Moses on Mount Nebo)
- Ephesians 6:10-18 (full armor of God)



Quotes

- The demonic realm has no respect for anyone who does not have a personal born-again relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- You are either for Jesus or against Jesus. There is no middle ground.
- Repentance is a change of mind accompanied by the removal from your life of the ingredients in your life which you repent of.
- Man must give power to idols. That's the only way they exist. You have to give power. You have to give your power to the idol. Jesus gives power to man.
- When you sell the items you're repenting of, you're tempting someone else into taking that up. And in their life, eventually they'll need to repent of it. You're tempting someone to sin when you sell that which you are repenting of.
- The Holy Spirit is testifying to you that you must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. That's the Holy Spirit. There's no other spirit that would say that.
- Satan has no greater allies than idol makers. Think about it. When anyone's entire living is made from creating idols, they will go to great lengths on Satan's behalf and they may not even be aware of it.
- A bottle of alcohol is opening a door to Satan, and many of you have experienced that and seen the damage that's done. Lighting up a joint is opening the door to Satan, having an affair. is opening the door to Satan.
- And that's a pretty friendly message, isn't it? I hope you think it is. Because, you know, if I don't warn you, who will? There's nobody out there that's gonna warn you about that.
- I don't lie awake thinking about that. I'm certain I'm going to heaven. I'm born again, man. And you can be born again too.



Discussion Questions

Paul taught for an estimated 3,100 hours at the school of Tyrannus over two years, resulting in the gospel spreading throughout all of Asia -- what does this tell us about the relationship between deep, consistent biblical instruction and the expansion of God's kingdom?

The sermon draws a sharp distinction between having a personal relationship with Jesus and merely using his name as a religious formula, as illustrated by the sons of Sceva -- in what ways might modern believers be tempted to treat faith as a formula rather than a living relationship?

Jesus declared in Matthew 12 that there is no neutral ground: one is either for him or against him -- how does this challenge the common cultural assumption that a person can live a morally decent life without making a definitive commitment to Christ?

The early believers at Ephesus demonstrated repentance by publicly burning their occult materials, valued at 50,000 days wages, at great personal cost -- what does this radical act reveal about the true nature of repentance, and what might genuine repentance look like in your own life today?

The sermon warns that familiar spirits observe our lives and use our known weaknesses to tempt us -- how should an awareness of this spiritual reality shape the way believers approach daily prayer, accountability, and the removal of temptation from their environments?

Demetrius and the craftsmen of Ephesus opposed the gospel primarily because it threatened their financial livelihood -- in what ways do economic interests today continue to drive opposition to biblical Christianity, and how should the church respond?

The sermon draws a parallel between the idol-making industry of ancient Ephesus and modern institutions such as entertainment, education, and the music industry -- do you find this parallel compelling, and how should believers navigate cultural engagement with these institutions?

The sermon raises concerns about the commercialization of contemporary Christian worship music and its potential drift toward idolatry -- how can a congregation discern whether its worship is genuinely God-centered or subtly shaped by emotional and commercial forces?

The city clerk of Ephesus quieted the riot but simultaneously affirmed the permanence and power of the city's idolatry, suggesting that legal and civic systems can be structured to protect false worship -- how does this challenge believers to think about the limits of political and legal solutions in advancing the kingdom of God?

The sermon concludes with the observation that idols require human beings to give them power, whereas Jesus gives his power to human beings -- how does this fundamental reversal shape the way you understand the invitation of the gospel and the nature of life lived in dependence on Christ?



Small Group Guide:

Small Group Guide

Based on Acts 19: Power, Idolatry, and True Repentance

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your group move from hearing the Word to living it. Work through the sections at a pace that fits your group. Not every question needs to be answered -- choose the ones that spark the most meaningful conversation.

OPENING QUESTION

Take a few minutes to get the conversation started before diving into the text.

- What is one thing from the sermon that stayed with you this week, and why do you think it stuck?
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BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Before discussing the passage, briefly review these key facts from the sermon to ground the group in the setting:

- Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman world, with a population exceeding 200,000 people.
 - It was home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and a 25,000-seat theater.
 - Paul taught daily in the school of Tyrannus for approximately two years, which the sermon estimated amounted to roughly 3,100 hours of instruction.
 - This was a city deeply embedded in pagan worship, occult practice, and idol-making as a major commercial industry.
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KEY PASSAGE

Acts 19:8-41

Read the passage aloud together as a group before beginning discussion.

SECTION ONE: THE POWER BEHIND THE MINISTRY

The sermon emphasized that the miracles God worked through Paul came after his teaching, not before it. The miracles confirmed and followed the Word, they did not replace it.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it matters that the miracles followed Paul's teaching rather than preceding it? What does that order communicate about how God works?
 2. The sermon noted that Paul's power came from his personal relationship with Jesus, not from a religious formula or incantation. What is the difference between those two things in practical, everyday terms?
 3. The sons of Sceva tried to use the name of Jesus as a kind of tool without having a relationship with him. In what ways might people today attempt to use Christian language, ritual, or association without genuine faith behind it?
 4. The demonic spirit asked, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" What does it tell us that the demonic realm recognized both Jesus and Paul? What made Paul known in that realm?
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SECTION TWO: FOR JESUS OR AGAINST HIM

The sermon drew heavily from Matthew 12, where Jesus declared that there is no neutral ground - a person is either for him or against him.

Discussion Questions

1. The sermon described what it called a "comfortable middle ground" where people attend church, try to be good, and avoid extremes in either direction. Have you ever occupied that space, or known someone who did? What does that look like from the inside?
2. Jesus said in Matthew 12 that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not. The sermon described this as the ongoing rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony that Jesus is Lord and that new birth is necessary. How would you explain this concept to someone who had never heard it before?



3. The sermon stated plainly: "You are either for Jesus or against him. There are no exceptions to that rule." How does that statement make you feel, and why do you think that reaction is worth paying attention to?
 4. What does it mean in your own life to actively gather with Jesus rather than scatter? What does gathering look like on an ordinary Tuesday?
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SECTION THREE: FAMILIAR SPIRITS AND OPEN DOORS

The sermon referenced Leviticus 19:31 and discussed the concept of familiar spirits -- demonic forces that observe a person's life and use that knowledge to tempt and deceive.

Discussion Questions

1. The sermon made the point that the enemy tempts us with things we are actually tempted by, not random things. How does understanding that reality change the way you think about temptation and spiritual defense?
 2. Leviticus 19:31 warns against seeking out mediums and familiar spirits. The sermon mentioned several modern equivalents -- certain entertainment, substances, pornography, and other practices -- as doors that can be opened to the demonic realm. How do you personally think through which habits or influences in your life might function as open doors?
 3. The sermon noted that a born-again believer cannot be demonically possessed because of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, referencing 1 John 4:4. However, it also acknowledged that believers can be oppressed. What is the difference between possession and oppression, and how should a believer respond to spiritual oppression?
 4. Jude 9 describes Michael the archangel refusing to bring a reviling accusation against Satan, instead saying, "The Lord rebuke you." What does it tell us about spiritual warfare that even an archangel did not rely on his own authority in that confrontation?
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SECTION FOUR: TRUE REPENTANCE

The sermon offered a clear definition worth writing down and returning to.

The speaker stated: "Repentance is a change of mind accompanied by the removal from your life of the ingredients in your life which you repent of."

The believers at Ephesus burned their magic books and occult materials, valued at 50,000 days' wages, rather than selling them.



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the believers burned their materials rather than selling them? The sermon suggested that selling what you are repenting of tempts someone else into the same sin. Do you agree with that reasoning? Why or why not?
2. What is the difference between saying you repent of something and actually removing it from your life? Can you think of an example, without naming names, where you have seen genuine repentance that included real removal and real cost?
3. The sermon said, "Some of you people need to do that today. You still got some stuff in your house you need to get rid of." Take a moment of honest personal reflection. Is there something in your life that you have mentally acknowledged should go, but you have not yet removed? What is keeping it there?
4. The believers' repentance cost them the equivalent of 50,000 days' wages. What does the presence of real cost tell us about the authenticity of repentance? Is costless repentance possible?

SECTION FIVE: IDOLATRY THEN AND NOW

The sermon drew a direct line between the idol-making industry in Ephesus and various modern industries that have a financial stake in maintaining cultural idols, including the entertainment industry, public education, and even segments of the contemporary Christian music industry.

Discussion Questions

1. Demetrius rallied the craftsmen by pointing out that Paul's message threatened their livelihood. The sermon observed that people will go to great lengths to protect their idols, often without being fully aware they are doing so. Where do you see that pattern operating in culture today?
2. The sermon drew a distinction between a symbol and an idol: a symbol represents the one to be worshipped, while an idol is itself the object of worship. Using that definition, how would you evaluate some of the things that show up in modern church culture -- worship music, church branding, celebrity pastors, and so on?
3. The sermon stated: "Man must give power to idols. Jesus gives power to man." Sit with that contrast for a moment. What does it look like in your daily life when you are drawing from the power Jesus gives versus when you are pouring your energy into maintaining an idol?
4. The city clerk quieted the crowd but also affirmed that the power of Diana could never be overcome. He was wrong, of course. How do you hold onto faith that the idols of our own culture will ultimately not prevail, even when the systems around you seem designed to protect them?



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Use these summary statements to anchor your group's discussion and personal reflection.

1. Miracles follow the Word. God confirmed Paul's teaching with signs. The foundation is always the proclamation of Scripture.
2. There is no neutral ground. Jesus said you are either for him or against him. The comfortable middle is not a safe place -- it is simply an unacknowledged position against Christ.
3. The demonic realm is real, observant, and not to be trifled with. Believers are protected by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but open doors invite oppression.
4. True repentance has a cost. It is not merely a change of feeling or a verbal acknowledgment. It includes the active removal of whatever you are repenting of.
5. Idolatry is not ancient history. It takes new forms in every generation, including within the church. Spiritual discernment requires ongoing attention and honesty.
6. Jesus gives power to those who follow him. Idols require your power to survive. That contrast is at the heart of what it means to choose Christ.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or more of the following to work on individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Personal Inventory Set aside time this week for a quiet, honest audit of your home, your habits, and your media consumption. Ask the Holy Spirit to identify anything that functions as an open door or an idol. Write down what comes to mind and bring it before the Lord in prayer.

The Removal Step If the Holy Spirit has already been prompting you about something that needs to go, take the step this week. Do not sell it. Remove it. If it would help to have someone from your group hold you accountable to that step, ask them now.

Scripture Memory Memorize Matthew 12:30 this week. Let the weight of Jesus' words settle into your thinking throughout the day.

Evaluate What You Are Singing Pay attention this week to the worship music you listen to and sing. Ask honestly: Is this song about God, or is it primarily about me and my feelings? Does the lyric reflect sound theology? Discuss what you noticed at your next group meeting.



Pray for Someone in the Middle Think of one person in your life who seems to be living in that comfortable middle ground the sermon described -- attending church, being a decent person, but not yet born again. Commit to praying for them by name every day this week and ask God for an opportunity to have an honest conversation with them.

Communion Reflection Before your next time taking communion, spend a few minutes in personal reflection asking: What does this bread mean to me? What does this cup mean to me? Am I treating these as symbols pointing to Christ, or have they become routine and empty?

CLOSING PRAYER POINTS

Close your group time by praying together over these specific concerns drawn from the sermon.

- Pray for clarity and discernment to recognize idolatry in your own life before it takes root.
- Pray for genuine, costly repentance where it is needed -- not just in feeling, but in action.
- Pray for anyone in your group or in your circles of relationship who has not yet made a clear, positive confession of faith in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for protection against spiritual oppression and for the full armor of God to be active in each member's daily life.
- Pray for the church broadly -- that it would have the wisdom to distinguish between symbols that point to Christ and idols that replace him.

This guide is based on a sermon preached through Acts 19. For the full sermon, visit the church website or YouTube and Facebook channels.



5-Day Devotional:

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on Acts 19 and Supporting Themes

Day 1: The Bold Proclamation of the Kingdom

Reading: Acts 19:8-10 — Paul speaks boldly in the synagogue for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God, then moves to the school of Tyrannus for two years of daily teaching.

Devotional: Bold faith is not accidental. It is the fruit of sustained time in God's Word. Paul did not simply preach and move on — he committed to years of daily, disciplined instruction. The result was that an entire region heard the gospel. Consider how much of your own spiritual life is shaped by consistency rather than occasional inspiration. God honors the faithful, steady investment of time in His Word. Ask yourself today: am I approaching Scripture with the boldness and regularity that genuine spiritual growth requires? The kingdom of God advances through people who refuse to be silenced and refuse to be lazy.

Day 2: The Power Behind the Name

Reading: Acts 19:13-17 — Seven sons attempt to use the name of Jesus as a formula without a personal relationship with Him, with disastrous results. The demonic realm recognizes Jesus and Paul but dismisses those with no genuine connection to Christ.

Devotional: The name of Jesus is not an incantation. It is a relationship. The sons of Sceva discovered that spiritual authority cannot be borrowed, performed, or faked. The demonic realm asked a devastating question: "Who are you?" It is a question every person must answer honestly before God. Religious activity, church attendance, and borrowed language cannot substitute for a living, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. As 1 John 4:4 affirms, the One who lives in the born-again believer is greater than the one who operates in the world. Is Christ truly living in you, or are you operating on borrowed spiritual credentials?

Day 3: True Repentance and the Removal of Idols

Reading: Acts 19:18-20 — Believers at Ephesus bring their books of magic arts together and burn them publicly. The total value reaches fifty thousand pieces of silver — fifty thousand days of wages — and the Word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails.



Devotional: Repentance that costs nothing changes nothing. The believers at Ephesus did not merely feel sorry for their involvement in the dark arts — they destroyed what they had valued. They refused to sell what they repented of, understanding that passing sin to another person is not repentance but transfer of harm. True repentance is a change of mind accompanied by the removal from your life of whatever you are repenting of. What remains in your possession today that continues to call your name? The Word of God does not grow and prevail in a life cluttered with unconfessed, unremoved idolatry. Genuine repentance clears the ground for genuine revival.

Day 4: You Are Either For Him or Against Him

Reading: Matthew 12:22-30 — Jesus heals a demon-possessed man, is accused by the Pharisees of operating through Beelzebub, and declares that every kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, concluding that whoever is not with Him is against Him.

Devotional: Jesus leaves no comfortable middle ground. The Pharisees imagined they could remain neutral — religious enough to feel secure, yet unwilling to confess Christ. Jesus dismantled that illusion entirely. He who is not with Christ is against Him. He who does not gather with Christ scatters. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, as the sermon makes clear, is the persistent refusal to believe what the Holy Spirit testifies — that you must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. That testimony can be rejected until your last breath, but not one moment beyond it. Today, examine where you truly stand. Neutrality before God is not safety. It is opposition.

Day 5: Idols Demand Your Power — Jesus Gives His

Reading: 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 and Leviticus 19:31 — Paul describes a great and effective door opened to him at Ephesus despite many adversaries, while God's ancient command warns His people to give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits, for He alone is Lord.

Devotional: Every idol in your life requires something from you. Idols demand your time, your money, your loyalty, your identity, and ultimately your worship. They take and take and never satisfy. Jesus operates on an entirely different principle — He gives. He gives His righteousness, His peace, His Spirit, His power, and His eternal life to those who come to Him empty-handed. The great and effective door Paul described was not opened by Paul's cleverness or reputation. It was opened by God. Whatever adversaries stand before you today, whatever doors seem permanently closed, bring them to the One who holds the keys. He is not asking for your power. He is offering His.