

Series: **The Original Church Planter**
Today's Title: ***"The Reality of Spiritual Power"***

July 2, 2023 – Acts 19:11-20

Objective: To encourage people to know the reality of spiritual power and the supremacy the Spirit of God.

Opening Prayer

Our passage today is a difficult passage for our modern-day culture to believe.

The reason for this is due to the past several centuries and the drastic changes that have taken place in the Western world. I want to highlight 2 specific things which, I believe, makes it difficult for modern-day Americans to believe in miracles or the supernatural.

The first thing was ***The Enlightenment Period*** of the 17th and 18th centuries led to the rise of reason and science – which I think are wonderful things.

In fact, most of the intellectuals and scientists, until about the mid or late 20th century, were comprised of Christians.

The second thing which makes it difficult for the Western world to believe in miracles or the supernatural is what I call one of the '*children of the Enlightenment*' – ***Naturalism***.

Naturalism philosophy gained in popularity in the late 19th century – and into the 20th century.

In the West, it became – and still is – the dominant philosophy and worldview in the Western world.

To state it in a simple and a brief definition:

Naturalism is the belief that all beings and events in the universe...are natural.

Naturalism denies the existence of truly supernatural realities...

Naturalists simply assert that nature is reality, the whole of it. There is nothing beyond, nothing “*other than,*” no “*other world*” of being.

This belief system led to various segments of Christianity – mainly liberal mainline denominations – to begin denying certain parts of Scripture.

They started to dissect Scripture into the ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ passages – and they reject the ‘supernatural’ passages and accounts as myth, etc.

This means they deny any of the miracles in the Bible – even the miracles of Jesus.

The most extreme and heretical result of this belief (lack of belief) is a denial of the resurrection.

But the Spiritual realm / world is real – although largely unseen – and therefore dismissed by those in modern Western Culture.

Naturalism and it’s resulting philosophy form the cultural point of view in the West, and the result is we tend to discount the spiritual and supernatural world and its work.

This is why so many people – even some Christians – struggle to believe the Biblical passages that speak of supernatural events – miracles.

We are very scientific minded – Naturalism is our default belief.

We are empirically minded – we want evidence – scientific evidence.

No mystery allowed – and miracles are a mystery!

(Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy> - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-art> - <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>)

As you can see, Naturalism is not really compatible with Christianity and the testimony of the Bible.

Christianity doesn't deny natural forces and realities.

The Bible looks to nature – to the creation – to see evidence of God's existence, greatness, and power.

The creation points to its Creator!

But nature is subordinate to its Creator – God.

Miracles are when God acts in ways that go beyond nature.

Since God created nature – He can work around it – beyond it – since He is not part of nature – He is not limited by nature or the natural forces and systems He created.

Miracles are when God works in Super-natural ways.

In our passage today – we see both sides of the spirit world – the supernatural world:

The power of God...

The power of Satan and his demonic forces.

Turn to Acts 19:11-20 – p. 928

Last week we saw Paul arriving in the city of Ephesus – teaching in the synagogue – helping about 12 men get baptized in the name of Jesus and they receive the Holy Spirit – and Luke tells us Paul begins teaching in the Hall of Tyrannus – and he does this for about 2 years – and many people throughout Asia heard the good news about Jesus.

The fireworks will start in our passage today.

There is a spiritual reality – a supernatural reality at work in 1st century Ephesus.

The powers of darkness – evil / demonic spirits – have the run of the place.

The Temple of Artemis – (Roman god Diana) was one of the 7 wonders of the world – and this temple was the center of the demonic activity in the city.

But when Paul first arrived in Ephesus – along with Priscilla and Aquila and others on the church planting team – they brought with them the Spirit of God.

It's true that God is omnipresent – He is everywhere.

But His Spirit indwells believers, and when they live out the mission Jesus gave them, the Spirit of God is realized in a powerful way.

The reality of spiritual and supernatural power. vs. 11-12

Read vs. 11-12

vs. 11a - Notice that “God was doing extraordinary miracles...”

Luke says these are “extraordinary miracles”.

You might say, *‘Aren’t all miracles extraordinary?’*

I guess that is true.

But Luke is telling us that even for miracles – these are not normal miracles.

These are “extraordinary miracles”.

Ephesus was a city where magic was ingrained in the culture.

The worship at the great temple of Diana / Artemis included magic spells, among other occult practices.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul would write about the reality of the supernatural acts the people of Ephesus would be exposed to.

Ephesians 5:11

“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

6:12

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

The Bible is clear and straightforward.

The spiritual world – the supernatural world – is real – just as real as our physical world.

Just because we can't experience the spiritual / supernatural through our senses doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Back to vs. 11 - Paul doesn't have the power – but he is the conduit for God's healing power.

“...God was doing extraordinary miracles...”

“by the hands of Paul...”

If you've ever watched TV evangelists – or some of the goofy shows on Christian TV – you've probably seen them conning people out of their money in exchange for a 'prayer cloth'.

Nothing makes me want to throw a brick through my TV than some of these stupid Christian shows and TV evangelists.

Because of their stupidity – we get put into the same category as they are.

These “handkerchiefs or aprons” – were sweat rags – and you would blow your nose with them.

These “had touched his skin”. Gross!!!

But God chose to unleash His power through these things.

Why?

To endorse Paul and his teaching.

We believe miracles were used by God in the beginning of the Church – to validate the message of the Apostles. There was no N.T. – it wasn't written yet.

As the N.T. is written – miracles ceased for the most part.

After the N.T. was written, you validate a teacher / preacher by the N.T. text – by the written Word of God – not by miracles.

vs. 12 – Luke makes a distinction between being healed from disease / sickness – and exorcisms – the casting out of evil spirits / demons.

This makes it clear that all disease or sickness is not caused by demonic possession or demonic power.

It also helps us realize that the power of God was healing people – as well as having the authority and power to exorcise evil / demonic spirits from people.

Aside from horrible Christian TV and TV evangelists, this passage reminds me of the woman in **Luke 8** who was hemorrhaging for 12 years – and when she touched the “fringe” of Jesus' garment – she was immediately healed.

Be aware of counterfeit preachers. *vs. 13-16*

- *Discernment.*
- *Wisdom.*

- *Being able to think critically.*

These things seem to be in short supply these days.

One of the most difficult things for Christians to do is to find a good church.

Last week I mentioned the 2 primary things to look for when you are looking for a church.

1. A high view of the Bible as God's inspired, authoritative Word.
2. A high view of Jesus – as God incarnate – the only Savior who has atoned for sin and can take your sin on Himself.

That's not always an easy process – because what some churches state on their website or in their promotional material is not always the reality of how they operate.

It takes wisdom – critical thinking – a discerning mind to evaluate a church.

Of course, one of the obvious focal points of this discernment process is the pastor.

How can you know him and if he is faithful in life?

Jesus said, in **Matthew 7:15-18**

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.”

In the 1st century, there were many false teachers – claiming to teach about Jesus – but they were just in it for themselves, and their motives were money, fame, or to take advantage of people’s trust.

Once again...we end up talking about TV evangelists!!

Such is the case here – in Ephesus.

We see a group – actually a family – claiming to have the power of God – but they don’t.

They’re fake.

They’re counterfeit – just trying to take advantage of an opportunity to advance themselves.

Read vs. 13-15

Here’s a question for you.

Are you known in Hell?

Does Satan and his demons know who you are?

Do you live your faith – in the power of God – so that you’re actually a threat to evil spirits?

I guess there’s no way to know if you’re known in Hell – but it’s an interesting question.

There are 2 different Greek words used here for “know” and “recognize” – which is why the translators use 2 different English words in the translation.

The evil spirits “know” Jesus.

This is consistent with what we read in the Gospel accounts.

Mark 1:23-26

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.

And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”
And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

Demons / evil spirits knew who Jesus was.

They knew Jesus from the moment they were created – before the foundation of the world!

Before creation – they knew God.

The evil spirits knew Jesus – and they recognized Paul. Their knowledge of Jesus was deep – through personal experience.

Their knowledge of Paul was through Jesus.

They knew Paul – because of his work on behalf of Jesus.

When the sons of Sceva use the name of Jesus and Paul to cast out this evil spirit, they are exposed by these evil spirits!

Read vs. 16

Why didn't the name of Jesus and the power of the name fail to work?

Because the sons of Sceva were using it as a formula – a kind of spell.

They weren't casting out this spirit from a position of faith.

They were selfish – doing this for their own glory – not for the glory of God.

When people believe in Christ, they repent. *vs. 17-20*

Repentance is a natural / supernatural result of faith in Jesus as your Savior.

Repentance isn't what saves you – it is the result and evidence of your salvation.

For those who aren't believers in Christ, fear is the result of knowing about God and witnessing His power.

Read vs. 17

Why? Because they saw – and some of them heard the reality of the spirit world / supernatural world – when the evil spirit spoke and gave testimony to the power of Jesus and Paul.

These people in **vs. 17** are not believers in Jesus – but they are witnesses to the testimony of these demons about Jesus and Paul.

Read vs. 18-20

Luke is telling us response of the Christians in Ephesus to the reality of the spiritual powers.

vs. 18 - “divulging their practices” – I mentioned earlier that magic was a popular and common practice in Ephesus. This phrase means they were telling their secret spells and formulas.

According to magic theory, aside from demonic power, the power in magic is in the secrecy of the spells and formulas.

“divulging” them destroys their power.

But that wasn't enough.

vs. 19 – they brought their books – books of spells, etc. – and burned them.

No turning back.

They were all in!!!

Luke tells us 2 things about this act of repentance.

1. This burning went on for some time. The verb is in the imperfect tense – which translates “...and they were burning the books...”

This was not some quick fire – it lasted for some time due to the number of books being burned.

Also – due to our current culture let me clarify – this was not a book ban and a burning of unapproved books.

This was individual followers of Jesus – realizing their practice of magic and playing with / using spiritual forces of darkness for their own pleasure, entertainment, or profit was not appropriate for those following Jesus – so they got rid of them.

They weren't forcing others to get rid of them – they were making the choice to clean the sin out of their life!

2. “Fifty thousand pieces of silver...” - The value of these books – in today's dollar – was probably several million dollars - \$4-5 million?

The result: When the people of God – devote themselves to God – when they fully commit to God and strive to live in obedience to His commands – the power of God will be on display – and more and more people will hear about Jesus and believe in Jesus – and lives will be changed.

Apply it...

1. Spiritual power / supernatural power is real.

Don't ignore it – downplay it – or deny it.

Embrace the power of God in Christ – through His Word and His Spirit.

Reject and run from the powers of darkness / evil – avoid exposure to these powers which the occult embraces.

2. Be alert for false teachers / false messages.

Colossians 2:4, 7-8

“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments... rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Paul told the Ephesian elders – in some verses we looked at last week (Acts 20) to be alert – on guard for false teachers who would rise up from their own ranks!

This is still important in our day – maybe more important given how much we’re bombarded by information in today’s world.

3. Faith in Christ leads to a changed life / repentance.

In his letter to the Ephesian believers, Paul writes about this change – the application of their faith in Christ to how they live.

Ephesians 4:25-32

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Close in prayer