

MBC – 7/26/2020 – Pastor Doug Thompson
“Jesus vs. Satan in Ephesus”
 Acts 19:8-20

Last Lord’s Paul had arrived in Ephesus. He’s going to stay here longer than any other place he travelled to. But he’s going to encounter spiritual warfare in Ephesus like he’s never seen before—

- Acts 19:8–20 ⁸And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. ¹¹And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” ¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Prayer: Father, You’ve told us how we are to fight in this spiritual battle we face: “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

48 years ago, I was a brand new Christian, and one of the first books I read was by Hal Lindsey: “Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth!” Scared the be-jabbers outa me. But I’m glad that I learned early on that “Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth!” You can’t understand your Bible or the world around you unless you understand that we are literally surrounded by spiritual beings, holy, and evil, that affect and influence our lives, more than we know. We heard this passage earlier—

- Ephesians 6:12 ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but (we do wrestle) against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Those are ranks and orders of demons – how many of our struggles and trials involve these beings? And their ruler is – Satan)—

Peter said he “*prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.*” (1Pet.5.8). Paul said that he actively “*blinds the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*” Jesus said in—

- John 8:44 the devil . . . was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

He tempts to sin, he deceives, he perverts and obscures the Word of God, and his entire aim is to drag as many souls into hell as possible. He sought to do that with Adam and Eve, and he's doing it today, all over the world, as we speak. John said that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1Jn. 5.19), but he also said, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" 1 John 3:8.

And He *will*, and He *is*. Jesus has already defeated Satan and his demons at the cross, amen. The victory is won, but the battles are not over. This morning we're going to see Jesus displaying His power over the forces of darkness at Ephesus. And beloved, Jesus wins. He always wins. And if Satan is slapping you around right now, I want you to leave here this morning knowing, that through many dangers, toils, and snares, Jesus still wins. "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

I. Powerful proclamation in Ephesus.

Paul is now on his third missionary journey and he's in Ephesus in Asia Minor. Population, around ¼ of million people. Ephesus was an extremely important city in the first century: it was situated on a harbor, and was an international center of commerce. It was known for coliseums, libraries and beautiful buildings – but mostly for religion.

Ephesus had every variety of religion, philosophy, or cult that existed in the ancient world. It had a mix of Greek and Roman mythologies, Roman Emperor worship, Greek mystery religions, Eastern mysticism, magic and the occult – and some of these would even combine with Judaism, and later, Christianity to form strange syncretistic hybrids. ***It was a spiritual Disneyland!***

- But more than anything, Ephesus was the proud home of one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of the Greek goddess Artemis (the Romans called her Diana). I want you to get a picture in your mind of this amazing building: 425' long by 220' wide – much larger than a football field – with a bright white marble roof held up by 127 marble columns, each 62' high. Much larger than the White House. People came from all over the world to see this building—

And also to worship Artemis, the daughter of Zeus. She was the moon goddess – also called "the queen of heaven," (which is what Mary is called in Roman Catholicism). She was the goddess of the hunt and wild animals, but mainly, she was the goddess of all women. She protected the virginity of young women, she was the goddess of fertility and protected women in childbirth, and she came to the aid of all needy women. So this was a heavily woman-dominated, woman-led religion – which could be why Paul insists on women keeping their God-designed place in the home and church when he later writes to Timothy in Ephesus.

Artemis was worshiped through ritual prostitution, like a lot of religions in that day. So immorality infected the whole city. And this is fascinating: any criminal had amnesty within 200 yards of the Temple – it was an arrest-free zone. Maybe they had de-funded the police! And the Temple was big business. It served as the city's main bank – people entrusted their money to the workers at the Temple.

- The giant statue of Artemis in the temple was grotesque – I can't describe it – and the image of the statue was on all the coins, and souvenirs were a huge business: Tourists would come to the city, spend money, party down, visit the Temple, buy a little silver shrine of Artemis – we're going to see that next Lord's Day.

So it was very much like San Francisco today: Tourists come in from all over the world to see the Golden Gate Bridge – and buy little souvenir replicas, but the city itself is a moral sewer. Ephesus was a dark, depressing place. People were in the grip of satanic worship, superstition, and every form of magic. And they couldn't free themselves! They were trapped. Listen to what Paul later wrote to the Christians who lived there—

- Ephesians 2:1–3 ¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ could set them free! It's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, amen? So it was Jesus vs. Satan in Ephesus – and the Gospel sparked some epic power encounters in that city. Let's look at it—

A. To the Jews.

- ⁸And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

Paul had already been to this synagogue in Ephesus for a short visit, back in 18:19. And his time there must have been positive because they asked to stay longer. When he left, Apollos came and preached powerfully at the *same* synagogue – so these Jews had already been exposed to the Gospel. Notice that Paul spoke *boldly* – he didn't cut any corners. He wasn't ashamed of the Gospel, but most of his speaking was reasoning and persuading – lit. *dialoging* with them: listening and answering their questions – which is what we should do most of the time in our evangelism.

If he did this for 3 months it must mean that many of those Jews believed his message. But the fact that some Jews believed the Gospel, angered others—

- ⁹But . . . some became stubborn (hardened) and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation.

Some Jews were actually standing up and trash-talking the Christians. Notice that they called them “The Way,” because these Christians lived like Jesus, who is The Way, the Truth, and the Life. But when it reached the point of “pearls before swine,” Paul said, “I'm outta here,” and went to the Gentiles—

B. To the Gentiles.

- he withdrew from them and took the disciples (those who had believed the Gospel) with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

So this “hall of Tyrannus” (Hall of the Tyrant), was a building used by Gk. philosophers and teachers in Ephesus for their classes. Paul and the Christians rented space in this building for evangelistic Bible studies! It reminds me of Stephen and Arpita's first church facility over in Pune, India: they rented a house owned by a Hindu man, who was happy to take their Christian rupees.

And this is interesting: some Gk. manuscripts add to v.9 that Paul taught there from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. Why this time slot? Because this was siesta time in Ephesus, and the hall was empty! Some of you

know that in parts of Mexico, and Spain, and other warm climate countries, people work in the morning, take a break for lunch which is the biggest meal of the day, then close down the shops, take a nap, and start working again late afternoon, into the evening. I kinda like that!

- One scholar I read said that there would have been more people sleeping in Ephesus at 1:00 in the afternoon than at 1:00 in the morning! You say, “Then isn’t that a bad time for a Bible study?” You do what you have to do, right? For several years we had Men’s Bible studies at 6:00 am so guys could come before work. I read about an Asian Christian who wanted to reach restaurant workers in Hong Kong, so he started a Bible study at 2:00 am, when they got off work!

And maybe Paul himself worked as a tentmaker in the morning, then went to the Hall of Tyrannus, and taught five hours a day, 6 days a week, for two years! I said the guy is a machine, but this was the result of his faithful, hard work—

- ¹⁰This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And many churches were planted: a man named Epaphras came to Ephesus, got saved listening to Paul, went back and planted a church in his home town of Colossae. Others who heard Paul started churches in the 6 other churches mentioned in Revelation, 2&3: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. All the result of Paul faithfully preaching Christ in Ephesus, day in, day out.

C. Confirmation by miracles.

- ¹¹And God was doing extraordinary miracles (lit. *out-of-the-ordinary miracles*) by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

This sounds strange, but remember earlier in Acts that sick people were healed when Peter’s shadow passed over them, and in the Gospels a woman was healed by just touching the hem of Jesus’ garment. It was all the power of God that healed, not the accessories, you understand. The *handkerchiefs* here were actually Paul’s sweat bands – his do-rags, and the aprons were towels he would hang around his waist while he was working. People were taking these to sick and demon possessed people, and they were really being healed.

But why would God heal this way when it looks so much like the hocus-pocus baloney of the phony magicians in Ephesus?

- I think that’s the point: Ephesus was steeped in magic and the occult, and Jesus worked these strange miracles to say, “In your face, Satan! My power is greater than yours!” Just like Moses’ miracles were greater than the tricks Pharaoh’s magicians could do. Like Elijah’s God was greater than that of the prophets of Baal. Jesus beat Satan at his own game in Ephesus. And later, Paul wrote to the church there about the Lord Jesus—
- Ephesians 1:20–21 . . . [God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion [that’s referring to ranks of spiritual beings], and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

And don't forget what we've seen over and over in Acts: the purpose of miracles was always to point people to the Gospel. People would be amazed by the miracle, then hear the Gospel, and be saved! That was happening in Ephesus. But some people were just enamored with the power – like Simon the Magician in Samaria, back in ch.8 – remember him? He even offered money to the Apostles to buy the power to give people the Holy Spirit!

There were some men just like that in Ephesus. They saw what the name of Jesus could do, so they thought they would borrow it for their own tricks. I call this—

II. “How not to cast out a demon.”

- ¹³Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure (I order) you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.”
¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest (that should be chief priest) named Sceva were doing this.

So who were these guys? Well, they were hucksters. They went around *supposedly* casting out demons for money – just like palm-readers, or psychics or astrologers today. Phonies. There is no record of a chief priest named Sceva, so this was part of their bogus advertisements. Could they cast out demons at all? Good question, but I say, no. These men are unbelievers – they know about Jesus and want to use His name, but they haven't bowed to Him as Lord. Jesus said back in the Gospels that Satan doesn't cast out Satan. So they have zero power or authority over Satan and his demons. Now, demons might play along with the act at times, just to keep up the confusion and lead people astray—

- This explains how a psychic might get it right sometimes; or a medium knows secrets about your deceased loved one, that no one else could know. Demons could! They are extremely smart, and extremely old. They can *fake* being a ghost, or a dead relative. Paul said in 2 Cor. that they can *fake* being “angels of light!” I think demons might even explain UFO's. So they could certainly fake being cast out by phony witch-doctors, or phony Jewish exorcists.

Archaeologists have discovered papyri from this time period with magical spells and incantations. And one of the main features of magicians and exorcists was using names they considered to have power. So they would use random names and words that sounded exotic to Greeks and Romans, like Yahweh, or Sabbaoth. One spell reads “Hail, God of Abraham, hail, God of Isaac, hail, God of Jacob, Jesus Chrestus, Holy Spirit, Son of the Father!”

So these Jewish exorcists knew a good thing when they saw it: Paul used the name of Jesus and it packed a punch, so they tried the name of *Jesus* and even threw in *Paul* for a kicker—“*I order you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims!*” I picture them standing there with their arms crossed, like, “Yeah, drop the mic!”

Well what happens next shows that demons definitely have a sense of humor! Luke must have been cracking up writing this—

- Acts 19:15–16 ¹⁵But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Not their best day. Note to self: “Don't mess with the name of Jesus!” It's not a magical incantation or good luck charm. It's a precious, holy name that is never to be used lightly, irreverently, or pimped out for your own selfish desires – like dirty politicians who claim “Jesus” is on their side. I believe that the second command still applies—

- Exodus 20:7 ⁷“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

And I believe it applies to the name of Jesus. It’s not just about using His name as a swear word, it’s about throwing it around without giving it the weight and reverence it deserves. His name stands for His Person – all that He is, and all He has done. But what is the most common way we take Jesus’ name lightly?

- --When we tack it on to the end of our prayers like a divine “abracadabra” to open the doors of heaven so God will grant our requests! Seriously, isn’t there some truth to that? We can use it like a turbo boost right at the end to nudge it through the gates!

****What it means to pray in Jesus’ name—***

Jesus told us to pray in His name! He wants us to do that, but He wants us to know what it means. So quickly, let me give you three ways to pray biblically “In Jesus’ name.” It means—

- 1.) To ask so that Jesus will be glorified. That His name would be great, and lifted up and honored.
- 2.) To ask according to His will. If I am coming in His name, am I confident that this is what Jesus would want? And Jesus’ will is found in His Word – so are your requests, biblical?
- 3.) To ask on the basis of His atoning work on the cross. I.e., What gives us the right to come to God at all? To call Him “Father,” and make requests of Him? We can only do that because Jesus’ death tore down the barrier that sin put between us and God. When you pray “in Jesus’ name,” You are saying Father, I come to you in Jesus’ name, remembering your promise that . . . *you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” (Ephesians 2:13)

When you come to God this way, in Jesus’ name, you can come boldly before the throne of grace!

Back to these bruised, bloodied and naked Jewish exorcists – everyone was talking about this. You can imagine! And it wasn’t just a funny story, the Holy Spirit used this to move powerfully in Ephesus—

- Acts 19:17 ¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And *fear* fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was *extolled*.

What was the talk on the streets of Ephesus? “This Jesus is greater than Satan, and all our idols, and our magic.” And look what Jesus did—

III. Jesus’ power over magic.

- Acts 19:18–19 ¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Who was it that came forward and confessed that they were playing around with magic and occult? “*those who were now believers*” – Christians! This says that our sanctification doesn’t happen all at once,

right? It's a process, but Jesus keeps working on the hearts of His beloved, changing us from the inside out. Paul said that he had heard reports about the Thessalonians—

- 1 Thessalonians 1:9 . . . how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

And these Ephesian Christians still had some skeletons in their closets. But Jesus graciously showed them that He was more powerful than any of their old tarot cards, Ouija boards, or astrology charts. And look at v.18: They “divulged” their practices – they disclosed their spells and magic formulas. I.e., they told all their secrets – that was a big deal: can you imagine how that infuriated the other magicians and con-artists in Ephesus?

- Jesus is making waves in this city, and it's about to explode – we'll see this next week. But I want you to notice that these new creatures in Christ put their money where their mouths were: they brought out their magic books, probably also all their magic paraphernalia, and had a bonfire. These books were incredibly expensive – all books were expensive in those days when all books were handwritten – but especially magic books with their secret spells and formulas!

Luke says they were worth 50,000 pieces of silver – so someone was counting! – that's equal to 50,000 days' wages. That's a fortune! They could have been easily sold – but instead they burned them. They were worthless now! They had Jesus.

- Maybe you're shocked that Christians could still have magic books, but some of you can remember hanging on to some of your sins for quite awhile before you finally gave into the Spirit's conviction and repented and gave them up. Took a little while to get rid of your Black Sabbath albums – then Lynyrd Skynyrd – and finally for you super saints: even the Carpenters went on the bonfire! Glory!

Jesus is powerful, and alive, and working in His people to bring them to Christlikeness. And He's not done with you or me either! And the final statement in this section, we've heard it from Luke before—

- Acts 19:20 ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Satan gave it his best shot: opposition and persecution, demons and magic. But the Lord Jesus prevailed through His Spirit and His Word. But please don't miss this: one of the reasons “*the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily,*” is that it was confirmed by the radically changed lives of Jesus' followers! They *believed* the Gospel and then they *followed* Jesus.

- Beloved, our world desperately needs to see followers of Jesus – people who have been radically changed by the new birth. I just read that 68% of people polled in this country since the pandemic, said they are Bible curious! What an opportunity, but it's not enough for us just to tell them what Jesus has done, we need to show them what Jesus is doing. In us!

I want to close by reading a vision that John received when he was on the Island of Patmos. It describes something that started long ago, in the past, and it will conclude one day, in the future. But it's also happening right now, in the present. And it explains a lot about your life and mine—

- Revelation 12:7–11 ⁷Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the

earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.