

# When God Does the Extraordinary: Lessons from Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

Paul's third missionary journey takes us to Ephesus, where we witness some of the most remarkable displays of God's power in the New Testament. Acts 19 reveals not just miraculous healings and spiritual encounters, but also the very human challenges of ministry and the inevitable opposition that comes when God's kingdom advances.

## What Does It Mean to Receive the Holy Spirit?

Paul's first encounter in Ephesus begins with a fascinating question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" This wasn't just casual conversation - it reveals something crucial about the Christian life that we often overlook today.

### Two Distinct Experiences

Looking back at Acts 1, we see Jesus making a clear distinction between salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The disciples had already believed in the risen Jesus and received salvation, but Jesus specifically told them to wait for something more - the baptism of the Holy Spirit that would give them power for ministry.

Paul understood this distinction. When he met these twelve men who had only received John's baptism, he recognized they were missing the empowerment needed for effective Christian living. After they were baptized in Jesus' name and received the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

This raises an important question for us today: Are we living in the fullness of what God has made available to us?

## How Should We Respond When People Reject the Gospel?

Paul's approach to ministry in Ephesus demonstrates remarkable wisdom about when to persist and when to move on. He spent three months in the synagogue, reasoning and persuading about the Kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and spoke evil of "the Way," Paul made a strategic decision.

### Knowing When to Move Forward

Rather than wasting time on hardened hearts, Paul withdrew and took his disciples to the hall of Tyrannus. This wasn't giving up - it was recognizing that God had called him to plant seeds, not to force growth where the soil wasn't ready.

This continued for two years, and the result was extraordinary: "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Sometimes the most effective ministry happens when we're willing to leave unfruitful situations and invest our energy where God is already working.

## Why Does God Still Do Miracles Today?

The miracles in Ephesus were so extraordinary that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's skin carried healing power to the sick. This might seem strange to our Western, scientific minds, but it reveals something important about God's nature.

## **God Is Greater Than Natural Laws**

We understand photosynthesis, medicine, and countless other natural processes. But here's the key: God spoke all these laws into existence. He created the very systems we've learned to understand. Why couldn't He also transcend them when He chooses?

The story of Elisha's bones in 2 Kings 13 provides another example - a dead man came back to life simply by touching the prophet's bones. These accounts aren't meant to confuse us but to remind us that God is sovereign over everything He has created.

Sometimes God uses physical objects not because they have power in themselves, but because they help us anchor our faith in something tangible while trusting in His invisible power.

## **What Happens When People Try to Use God's Power for Their Own Purposes?**

The story of the seven sons of Sceva provides a sobering warning about trying to manipulate spiritual power. These Jewish exorcists saw Paul's success and decided to add Jesus' name to their toolkit, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."

### **The Difference Between Authentic Faith and Religious Manipulation**

The evil spirit's response was telling: "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" The result was disastrous - the demon-possessed man overpowered all seven men, leaving them naked and wounded.

This incident reveals an important truth: when something authentic and powerful emerges, counterfeits always follow. The fact that people were trying to copy Paul's ministry actually demonstrated how effective it had become.

## **How Do We Know When Our Faith Is Authentic?**

The contrast between the sons of Sceva and the magicians who burned their books is striking. When the magicians encountered the real power of Jesus, they didn't try to add it to their existing practices - they completely abandoned their old ways.

### **True Conversion Leads to Complete Surrender**

These former practitioners of magic arts brought books worth 50,000 pieces of silver (equivalent to millions of dollars today) and burned them publicly. They recognized that what they had been doing was powerless compared to Jesus.

This is the mark of authentic faith: not trying to use Jesus as another tool in our toolkit, but surrendering everything to Him. True encounter with Jesus leads to genuine submission and humility, not attempts to leverage His power for our own purposes.

## **Why Will the World Always Oppose the Gospel?**

The riot in Ephesus, instigated by Demetrius the silversmith, sounds remarkably modern. His concern wasn't theological - it was economic. Paul's preaching was hurting the idol-making business.

### **Following Jesus Threatens Worldly Systems**

Demetrius gathered the craftsmen and essentially held a business meeting: "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth... Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods."

This story feels like it could happen today because the same spiritual forces that opposed Jesus then are still active now. Every generation faces the same choice between following Christ and maintaining systems that benefit from people's spiritual emptiness.

The resulting chaos - with people shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for two hours without even knowing why they were there - demonstrates how easily crowds can be manipulated when spiritual and economic interests align against the Gospel.

## **How Should We Respond to Opposition?**

Paul's response to the riot reveals important principles for handling opposition. When he wanted to address the crowd directly, his disciples and friends prevented him, recognizing the danger. Sometimes wisdom means stepping back rather than confronting every challenge head-on.

### **Our Responsibility Is Obedience, Not Results**

As Paul later wrote to the Philippians, some people preach Christ from wrong motives, but "what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."

Our calling is to walk in obedience to what God asks us to do. Other people's responses aren't our responsibility. We're not called to control outcomes, but to faithfully plant seeds and trust God with the harvest.

## **Life Application**

The extraordinary events in Ephesus challenge us to examine our own faith and expectations. Are we living in the fullness of what God has made available to us, or are we limiting Him based on our understanding of how things "normally" work?

This week, consider these questions: Where might you be shutting the door on what God wants to do because it seems unusual or unfamiliar? Are you trying to add Jesus to your existing life, or are you willing to surrender everything to Him like the magicians who burned their books? When you face opposition or rejection, do you respond with wisdom like Paul, knowing when to persist and when to move forward?

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us today. The question isn't whether God can do extraordinary things - it's whether we're willing to step out in faith and let Him work through us, even when it doesn't fit our expectations of how things should happen.