



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 19: 8-20

Acts

“Power and Light”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in the book of Acts and if you are visiting or you haven't been here in some time, we're in Acts 19. We're going to look at verses 8-20. This is the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey, and in chapter 19, he arrives in the city of Ephesus. Paul's day, Ephesus was on the western coast of Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. It was a great city in that day. And he arrives there, and his typical practice, we read in verse 8: "He entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leapt on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced

magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, it is a great privilege to come together on a Sunday morning and open the Bible, your inerrant word, and read it together, and spend time considering its meaning. That's a great privilege and a necessary thing for us to do because we are nourished and fed by Your word. As we consider this text this morning, we realize the importance of it because as the word of God prevails, we are changed. We're made different people.

We're new people in Jesus Christ, but the change, the process of sanctification goes on and it's done by the Spirit of God, through the word of God, and we pray that as we, in this place, study together, that would take place in our lives, that You would change us, that You'd cause us to grow, that You'd cause us to see in our lives failures that are there, sins that are there, areas that need to be dealt with and changed. And by Your grace, through the power of the Spirit of God who lives within us, may those changes take place.

Our privilege is to have possession of the Bible and the opportunity to read it and study it, but we are equally blessed with the reality of You in our lives through the third person of the trinity, who has the seal upon our hearts, who protects us and guides us, and directs us, and teaches us, and we pray for that teaching ministry this morning.

We thank you for the opportunity to be together and to study. We pray You'd bless us spiritually. Bless us in the material things of life as well, Father. We are a needy people. We depend upon You for everything that we have. We live in a dry place and we're reminded by that that the very rain that falls is something that You give or You withhold. We pray for rain. We need it. We thank You for the downpour You gave a few days ago. We pray for more and we pray that You'd bless.

We pray for those who are in need of employment. We pray for those who are sick. We pray for those who are discouraged, that You might bless. You know our needs, Father, better than we do. We brought some of them before the congregation on the prayer list. We pray for those people who are sick and who are facing various difficulties of life, but many names are not on that list who have difficulties. You know

all of our circumstances of life. You know them better than we do and we have the great blessing of knowing that the second person of the trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, Your eternal son, sits enthroned at Your right hand and intercedes for us as our great high priest. We thank You for that reality.

We pray for those who are in need. We pray for ourselves as well. Bless us. Use the difficulties of life as a blessing in our lives to change us and make us more and more like Jesus Christ. We thank You for the time we have now to study about Him and about His grace. We thank You for the privilege we have of coming back again this evening and taking the Lord's Supper and remembering His death for us. We are urged to do that regularly, weekly.

And so, Father, as we do that this week, as we do that this evening, we pray You'd bless us. Bless those who participate tonight. Bless all of us who take the elements, that we would remember what He has done for us, and we would rejoice in that and remember that we do that until He comes, and He is coming again. That day may be soon in coming. May we live for that, not live for this present age, not live for this time, and these things that are passing away, but live for eternity. For us to have that perspective, we need a work of grace, and so, we pray, Father, You'd do that this morning in us as we study together. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for this time of worship and learning. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] It was the British historian Lord Acton who made the famous remark, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We've all heard that comment, but in spite of his warning, people still want power. That's reflected in some of the expressions that have been floating around for the past decade or two. We have power politics. Businessmen go to power lunches. Used to be stylish to wear power ties.

There's a focus today on power and that has also occurred in the church. Since the 1980s, we have heard about *Power Encounters*, and *Power Evangelism*, and *Power Healing*. All of those are titles of books. A lot of this enthusiasm for power comes out of charismatic circles, and is in my opinion, misguided. It borders on the mystical. It emphasizes experience over doctrine and undermines the authority and sufficiency of scripture, but that doesn't mean that Christians don't have power. We do and it should

be our experience, but we experience power, not when we focus on power, but when we look to Jesus Christ. Power is in Him and it comes to us by His spirit and through His word. The Gospel, Paul said, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

The power of God and the light of God go together, and the two were brilliantly displayed in the city of Ephesus when Paul returned in Acts 19. It was his second visit to the city of Ephesus. He had been there briefly at the end of his second missionary journey and established a relationship with the synagogue. He had promised to return if God willed it and Paul has made good on his promise.

Paul had a great interest in visiting Ephesus because of its strategic location and its strategic importance. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, which is the western province of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey, and it was a center of commerce, very much like the city of Corinth, which you remember, was a port city, and Ephesus also was a port city. Historically, it had a problem with its harbor. There were major efforts to dredge it because it would continually silt up. And so, on more than one occasion, they sought to clean out the harbor and keep it open for trade because it was the lifeline of the city. In the end, the sea won.

Today, Ephesus is a ghost town. You can walk down its streets and you can stand at its harbor where its once busy piers go out into a field three or four miles from the present coastline. But in Paul's day, it was a very active place. It was a rich city. Ephesus was called the treasure house of Asia and it was a religious city. Ephesus was the center of the Cult of Diana, as she was known to the Greeks, the goddess of the hunt. In the Orient, she was known as Artemis and was depicted as the multi-breasted goddess of fertility whose worship involved cult prostitution, which was common the pagan temples of that day. Her temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high. It was almost four times the size of the Parthenon at Athens. Its ceiling was held up by 127 marble pillar and it was elaborately decorated with inlaid gold and rare gems. It was a great attraction and its very presence was an implicit declaration that everything about it was truth. Everything about it represented what was right. And all of this meant money.

Religion is big business. It is in our day and it was in Paul's day. A whole industry grew up around the temple of Artemis, a guild of silversmiths who made

shrines to the goddess, which was an important part of the economy of Ephesus. All of these things – religion, money, sex – are powerful forces against the Gospel, and Paul had many enemies in that city. He would later write to the Corinthians, "I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus," and he said that he had many adversaries there. But he stayed there in Ephesus longer than he did in any other city, and through him God did a remarkable work, a work of power, supernatural power. We read in verse 10, "All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord." Paul, you remember, in the second missionary journey had attempted to enter into Asia. That's where he wanted to go. God had prevented that. The door had closed, so he ended up going north, and then, west to cross the Aegean into Macedonia, and then, down through Macedonia into Greece to Corinth. And now he's in Asia. God has his timing for things and that was not his time for Paul to go to Asia. This was, and the consequence was, all Asia now heard the word of the Lord, the Gospel spread.

Now, that was Paul's strategy in going to the major cities of the Roman empire, like Ephesus. From those centers, the word of God would go out into the surrounding regions, and Ephesus became a center of gentile missions. The success that the Gospel had in that place in that city is or should be a great encouragement to us because if God could do that in Ephesus, a pagan city, a city of spiritual darkness, then certainly he can do that in a city like this, like Dallas, which is a city of religion, money, and sex.

When Paul arrived there, he returned to the synagogue, that was his practice, the Jews had shown an interest in his teaching at his first visit. And so, when he returned, he picked up where he left off. Luke writes in verse 8 that he continued speaking out boldly, reasoning, and persuading them about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a great theme in the book of Acts in the preaching of Paul.

In fact, it's a theme all the way through the Bible, and it was an important message for the synagogue. Jesus was the rejected king. The Jewish people had said, we will not have this man to reign over us, but Paul explained that this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is Israel's promised king, and the cross was no mistake of history, and while it was a great sin of men, it was a sin of the Jewish people and the gentiles as well when they conspired against the son of God, nevertheless, all of that was in the plan of God and the cross was Christ's kingly work. It was necessary in order to establish the kingdom in righteousness. It could not come until sin had been dealt with.

We cannot enter that kingdom until sin has been removed from us if it's to be a righteous kingdom, and so, first of all, he had to die. And using scriptures, like Psalm 110, Paul would have explained that Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father, just as the Psalm had prophesied, and there he is enthroned in power, there he sits as the king of kings. He is now the absent king, but he will return one day in power, and then, the rejected king will rule over all of the earth and His kingdom will be revealed in full glory.

That is the hope of God's people. That is Israel's hope. It is the promise that was given to the nation. That promise still stands, but to be a citizen of the kingdom, a person must be born again. Jesus taught on that subject in John 3 when he had that night visit with Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel. And there, in John 3 in verse 5, Jesus told him, "Truly, truly I say to you unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." No one is a citizen of God's Kingdom by natural birth, but only by spiritual birth, through regeneration, by grace, through faith does one become a citizen of the Kingdom of God, by believing in Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, as the son of God, and the savior of men. And in the present time, God is calling sinners to Himself. He is calling them to faith and repentance, to recognize Christ as the king, to recognize the claims of His Kingdom.

Now, that is when the deliverance that was accomplished on the cross becomes the reality of our lives and we are delivered from the devil's domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's son. That's what Paul says in Colossians 1:13. Now, Paul reasoned along these lines with the Jewish people for three months, Luke says, trying to persuade the men of the synagogue to own Christ as their king. Three months of teaching and discussing because that's evidently what happened. There was dialogue that went on in the synagogue. He would come to the front. Every Sabbath He would open the scrolls. He would read a Psalm or He'd read something out of Isaiah. He would develop a passage, and then, there would be some discussion between Him and the congregation, and He did this for three months, which is a long time considering that when He was in Thessalonica doing that He had two or three weeks to teach the congregation.

So there was some patience and there was some interest there in Ephesus, but eventually opposition to Paul's preaching began to mount, and finally, it reached a point

where the people began to harden their hearts against what Paul was saying and to speak evil of it. So Paul withdrew to a new location. That, as we have seen all through the book of Acts, was the pattern of Paul's ministry in the synagogue. People would listen for a time and some would believe, but then a hardness would set in and opposition to the Gospel would follow, and that was not only the pattern we see in the book of Acts, we see that all through the Bible. That is really the pattern of Jewish history.

I was reading the other day in the book of Zachariah. I'm reading through the Bible this year and came to Zachariah 7 and "The Lord speaks of the nation and how the people refuse to pay attention to the prophets. They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets," the Lord said. And so, then He deals with that, and He said, "I will scatter them with a storm wind among all the nations." That's the consequence of turning one's heart to flint against the word of God, and God did that; scattered the Jewish people, scattered the nation.

Jews aren't the only people to harden their hearts though. Gentiles do that. Christians can turn their hearts to flint when they refuse to believe parts of the Bible. There are parts of the Bible that people don't want to believe. They don't like what they read. They don't like what they hear. So they turn their hearts to flint against Him. That's very dangerous. God's word is true. God's word is God's word and we are to listen to it. We are to pay attention to it. We are to think deeply on the things of God's word and we are to believe and obey what he says. When people don't, the light that they have is taken from them. And in Ephesus, the great light that the synagogue enjoyed for three months was removed. Paul left the synagogue, but he didn't leave alone. The Lord had drawn people to Himself. Paul had made disciples, and these left with him, and went to the school of Tyrannus where Paul was teaching daily.

Luke doesn't identify Tyrannus for us, but it is usually assumed that he was a local Greek philosopher who regularly lectured in this particular hall, which Paul rented from him. Tyrannus means tyrant. Since it's not likely that his parents named him tyrant, though sometimes parents are probably tempted to name their children that, it's probably a nickname that his students gave him. He was the tyrant. Well, Paul shared the lecture hall with him. One of the old texts, and if you know anything about the

Greek text, you know that there are a number of old manuscripts and different families of manuscripts, manuscripts that came out of certain regions of the Middle East or the area around the Mediterranean. One of them is the Western Text and in it, Paul is said to have used the building from 11:00 in the morning till 4:00 in the afternoon.

Now, that's not in our version because it's probably not original, but it probably does represent what actually happened. Tyrannus lectured early in the morning. At 11:00, activity often came to a stop around the eastern rim of the Mediterranean in the areas of Greece, and Turkey, and Palestine, and North Africa, they would take off for a meal, and then, rest. Paul would do his tent making in the early hours of the morning, and then, he would devote the hot hours of the day to the more demanding business of teaching, and he would do that for four or five hours each day, and many of the people of the synagogue gave up their siesta to go and hear him teach the scriptures. This went on for two years with amazing results.

Luke writes in verse 10 "That all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Then Luke adds in verse 11 that "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." So Paul is God's agent of power and light in Ephesus. He did extraordinary miracles. Miracles and of themselves are extraordinary by definition, but this is something really beyond that. And Luke describes what took place in verse 12, at least some of the miracles that occurred, how people were being delivered of evil spirits and were being healed of diseases by contact with Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons. Those are a reference to the seat rags and aprons that he used during his work of making tents.

It's similar to Peter's experience back in Acts 5, you'll remember. The early days of the church, amazing things were happening in that city and it's said that Peter would walk down the street, and when his shadow would fall on people they would be healed. And so, if people could simply get into the shadow of Peter, miracles occurred. That's not magic and these rags and aprons weren't magical tools of the apostle. It was a clear way of demonstrating the power of God that was working through the apostle. He didn't even need to lay his hands on these people. A mere article of clothing could be taken and healing would take place. It showed great authority of God that was working in the apostle. These were what Paul later calls in 2 Corinthians 12:12 the signs of a true apostle, and they were done to authenticate his message and his ministry.

Demonstrate that, what was taking place in that wicked city, that evil city was the very power of God Almighty. The life of that city was played out literally in the shadow of that great pagan temple of Artemis. It was a city under the spell of the occult in the domain of the evil one, but God more than matched all of the magic, all of the superstition and the forces of evil that were there with real power, with positive power, with healing power, and deliverance. Some people think that the church should be doing these things today and they blame the absence of signs and wonders on Christians who are rationalistic.

In other words, Christians who don't believe in the supernatural as being for today or Christians who are close-minded to the idea of miracles occurring, and it's argued that that thwarts the will and the purpose of God. Well, that indicates a very weak view of God. He is not frustrated. We cannot thwart God by our weakness of faith. It is God who does what He wills to do, and if it is God's will to evangelize with miracles or so-called power encounters, that is, these conflicts with demons, if that is His will for this age, then He will do it. If that's how evangelism is to take place in the present, then we are not going to frustrate God by our inabilities and by our weakness of faith. He does whatever He pleases in heaven and earth. He's God Almighty. So such an idea that is foolish, but it is certainly possible for Christians to have weak faith and not enjoy all of the riches we have in Christ Jesus, and not experience His life in us fully.

Amy Carmichael commented on that. She was an unusual woman and a selfless missionary, first in Japan, and then, later in India where she spent the rest of her life, and spent her life spreading the Gospel and having a significant influence on society. She saved a number of young girls from temple prostitution and gave them a home, gave them an education, gave them a healthy life, and gave them, most importantly, spiritual lives or introduced them to the Gospel, and trained them up in the things of God. But she was less than impressed with what she saw on the mission field in a lot of missionaries. There was a lot of easy living and she wrote, "I don't wonder apostolic miracles have died. Apostolic living certainly has." Well, apostolic living won't revive apostolic miracles. They were for a particular time and purpose, and that purpose is satisfied. It is established and it was done by special people. It was done by the apostles. We don't have apostles today.

One of the qualifications of an apostle is to have seen Jesus. 1 Corinthians 9:1, and the eyewitnesses of Jesus passed with the first century. Still, her statement has a lot of merit. Apostolic has largely died out, and if it were revived, we would certainly see a lot more of God's hand than we do today. Apostolic living is trusting God for our needs daily, for our financial needs. It's trusting Him for our direction, to give us wisdom as we study the word of God and seek to know His will, and we follow it by faith. It's that. It's living by faith. It's trusting Him for the things of God. It's a sacrificial life. It's a devoted life. If you want to know what the apostolic life is, then read 2 Corinthians 4 where Paul writes of it. He speaks of being afflicted, crushed, persecuted, but not forsaken, not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

The essence of apostolic living is not going about doing great miracles. It is manifest in Christ in words and deeds sacrificially. That takes dedication. As I said, that takes faith. That takes trusting God, taking Him at His word, believing what is not seen, believing the promises of God, living by them, living for Him, living for Jesus Christ. That's what we were made for. We'll never be satisfied until we live for Him, and when we live for Him as the apostles did, as we do this apostolic living, then we will see the hand of God. If Christians would do that, they'd see far more prayers answered and lives changed, but that life takes sacrifice and if I can put it this way, it takes a sanctified spirit of adventure.

Now, most of us are not up for that kind of adventure. We like comfortable lives and I include myself in that as well. It's nice to be comfortable and it's satisfying in so many ways, but you don't win battles leisurely. Physical battles are won through sweat and blood, and it is true of spiritual battles as well. It takes sacrifice. It takes effort. It takes diligence. "Satan is so much more in earnest than we are," Amy Carmichael wrote. "He buys up the opportunity while we are wondering how much it will cost."

Paul didn't. He bought up the opportunity. He lived a life of complete trust in the Almighty God. He sacrificed time and body for the work of the cross. He supported himself by working in the mornings. He taught the word of God four or five hours a day in the middle hours of the day, and then, in the evenings, he didn't go home and rest. He went to the homes of the people and he taught them personally. He

instructed them. We know this because this is what he says later on Acts 20. He speaks of all the things that he did there in Ephesus and one of the key things that he says is "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."

In other words, he taught them the whole of the Bible. He didn't say, "Well, I'm going to stay away from this area, or this doctrine, or this passage. It's a little bit difficult and it's controversial. We'll just stay here with the things that we can all agree on." No, he taught the whole counsel of God and if disturbed them, he taught it. He taught the hard things that they had to think about and ponder. He taught the whole purpose of God. He was a very busy man in the work of God and you can't help be a bit convicted.

Maybe I speak personally on this, as I think about the life of the apostle and all that he did with the time that he had and all of the disadvantages that he had – didn't have personal computers. Didn't have ballpoint pens and paper, like we have. Didn't have books the way we have. Didn't have any of these things. And he used his time. And I wonder, "What do I do with my time?" I don't know of any leisure time in the apostle's life. He gave his life to the ministry, to the service of the Lord with great effect, with a widespread influence. All Asia heard the Gospel and if people didn't believe what they heard, they were certainly impressed with what they heard, and some even tried to imitate Paul.

There was a family of exorcists in Ephesus that did that. They were seven sons of man named Sceva. They were Jewish. Sceva is described as a chief priest. There's no record of a high priest by that name, so what it means is he was a member of the high priestly family. Evidently he'd immigrated along the way to Ephesus and was doing some business there. And I imagine that he and his sons traded on that priestly connection to give credibility to their claim as an exorcist. That was their profession. They were professional exorcists. They were the original Ghostbusters. And when they learned of Paul's power to cast out demons, they thought, well, they could use his name and use the name of Jesus whom he preached as a kind of new incantation.

Well, as I say, they were businessmen. They were rather astute. They were always looking for ways to upgrade the business and to improve performance. And so, they developed a simple formula, a simple spell that they would use or try to use. "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." They didn't use the name of Christ in faith.

They weren't believers in Jesus Christ. They weren't followers of the apostle Paul. They were self-serving magicians and thought these names had power, like the charms that they believed in or the fetishes that they believed in. This was just another one of those. This was another spell, another incantation, but when they attempted to use the names over one patient, the whole thing blew up in their faces. The demon answered. It knew the name of Jesus. It knew who Paul was, but it asked, "Who are you?" Then it energized the man it possessed and Luke writes in verse 16 that he leapt upon them and overpowered them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Well, news of this incident spread quickly. Evidently these were well-known individuals. They'd made a name for themselves, and suddenly they're roughed up by this man, and the consequence of the news, the result of it was that it filled those who heard it with awe. The name that Paul preached, the name Jesus Christ was not a name to be played with. It's not a name to trade on. It's not a name to gain money from. And so, they were filled with awe, and Luke writes in verse 18 of the effect that this had on both the Christians and the non-Christians of the city. It had, first of all, a purifying effect on the church. Verse 18, "Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices." The word practices from the context suggests that these were practices of the occult. Spiritualistic practices. That's surprising, isn't it? Many Christian, those who had believed, we're told, were disclosing their practices.

Now, it's been said, I think rightfully so, that every man has a public life, a private life, and a secret life. And many Christians were coming forward and confessing their secret life in the occult, their secret life of sorcery. It illustrates that Christians don't always walk by the Spirit of God consistently. They sometimes walk according to the spirit of this age. Now, I say that's surprising, but really, it shouldn't surprise us if we read our Bibles from cover to cover because you find this thing in both the Old and the New Testament. We see it, for example, with that generation of Israelites that entered Canaan. This was the faithful generation. Their parents had been unfaithful. They'd died in the wilderness because they had not believed God. They'd worshipped the golden calf. Many of those people were children when that happened, but they could remember that. And so, this is the faithful generation that does trust the Lord. They enter the land. They conquer under the leadership of Joshua, their great

leader, in the type of Christ. But then, in Joshua's final address to the nation, Joshua 24:14, he told them "Fear the Lord, serve Him, and put away the gods your fathers served in Egypt."

In other words, those parents of theirs brought false gods, brought idols out of Egypt, and these children of theirs, this faithful generation kept those idols, kept them all through that period of conquest in Canaan. That was their secret life. Maybe secret to some men, but not secret to God. Nothing is a secret to Him. And He says, "Put such things away."

We go to the New Testament, we find the same thing with the church in Corinth. This is a church that Paul begins by addressing as saints, holy ones. But yet, in chapter 3, he calls them fleshly. King James translates it carnal. They weren't walking by the spirit, not consistently. They were living according to their appetites. They were fleshly people. They couldn't receive solid food, Paul says. They hadn't advanced beyond the basics of the Christian life. They weren't growing in maturity. Their lives resembled that of the world. You could look at a Corinthian Christian and say, "Well, what's the difference between him and this fellow over here who's a pagan?" They were living like that. And so, as Paul goes on in that letter in chapter 7, he says, "Clean out the old leaven." In other words, put away the sin that's in your lives. And then, in chapter 10, he says, "Flee from idolatry." They didn't have tangible idols, I don't think, like those Israelites did, but they had idols in their heart. They were conforming to the world.

Dr. Johnson preached on that this morning on the radio. Romans 12:1 and 2 where Paul warns not to be conformed to the world. Why does he warn the Romans of that? Why does he warn us of that? Because that is the danger we faced. The world has a strong influence and it tries to bring us into conformity with itself, but the church will never be very effective, if effective at all, in this world until it stops living like the world. Fortunately God is patient. He was certainly patient with that generation of Israelites that brought the idols into the land. He was patient with the Corinthians. He's patient with us. And He deals with the sins and the secrets of our lives. He exposes them. The Holy Spirit convicts us of them. He did that here. Great fear came upon the church and these believers knew that they had to make a clean break with their past lives. And so, they came. They came confessing their secret habits and sins.

Well, we are all, as I said, influenced by the age in which we live, and those influences are very strong, really stronger than our own strength personally. So it's a supernatural battle that we fight. It's a supernatural life that we live, but we are to be responsible. We are to be on the alert. We're to guard our hearts from the world's intrusions into our lives. And God made these Christians aware of the world's influence in their lives, made them sensitive to it, and they responded. That's the work of sanctification. That's the work that God does within us. Through the ministry of the word of God, our minds are illuminated. They're enlightened. We understand what's right and wrong and we understand what's right and wrong with ourselves, and what to do.

So they responded, but the effect of this great fear that came over the city was so great that it not only affected the Christians, but also the pagans. And many magicians, many of the sorcerers believes, we read in verse 19, "And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

F.F. Bruce wrote that what Luke describes in these verses is very consistent with the reputation that Ephesus had in antiquity as a center of black magic and the black arts. A number of magical scrolls have survived that were known in that time as Ephesian letters. So the Ephesians were well-known for this kind of thing, for practicing the occult, and these scrolls are filled with spells and names that were believed to have great spiritual powers over the spiritual influences, and in the ancient world, they believed in demons and that kind of activity filling the air, filling the atmosphere, much as we believe in viruses and bacteria filling the air. And so, their medicine against all of that was incantations, and rabbit's feet, and amulets, and scrolls such as this. And so, because this was medicine for them, these things were sold at a very high price. They were very expensive, very valuable. And here, the total value is given as 50,000 pieces of silver.

Now, a piece of silver, or as it's also translated, a drachma, was usually a daily wage for a worker in the ancient world. And so, some have estimated that the value placed on these scrolls in today's currency, calculating a day's wage at about \$100.00, as making this figure of 50,000 pieces of silver equaling something like \$5 million

dollars. Now, if that seems incredible, remember, this is the power of God that is at work. The effect of the Gospel is so great that it can make people willingly give up their valuable magic scrolls to the flames. Verse 20 gives a summary statement of Paul's ministry there. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing, prevailing over evil, rolling back the powers of darkness.

The word of God is alive and powerful. It is mighty, as Luke says. If you want power, and you should want power, we should all want power, but if you want power, it is here. Find it in the right place. It is in the word of God. It changes lives. It is the means by which God quickens lives, gives life to the dead in regeneration through the preaching of the Gospel as the Spirit uses that to quicken dead souls and bring them to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a process that continues because through the word of God, the Spirit strengthens us, and cleanses us, and makes us whole, and changes us, transforms us, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, from glory to glory. That's the process of sanctification. It's God's light that the Holy Spirit shines in the dark corners of our hearts to expose ugly secrets and bring conviction of sin that leads to repentance and confession.

Well, maybe we need to do that in this congregation. Some of you may be in need of confessing some dark sins and of literally committing books and magazines to the flames, or getting off the Internet, or turning off the television. There are many vices that can be enslaving and enter the lives of Christians and get ahold. We are to be pure and put away these things. In our first hymn, a hymn that I like to sing and I enjoy, we sang that line, "Now I've given to Jesus everything." I wish I could sing that honestly, but the reality is we spend the rest of our lives giving to Jesus everything. That's the process of sanctification. That goes on and on, and that happens through the study of the word of God. If we're not in the word of God, if we're not studying it, that's where the power of God is. If we're not in that word, we're not applying ourselves to it. We won't be giving things to the Lord, and we don't be growing, and we won't be effective at all, and we don't have the fullness of life that is ours. We won't be what we are to be.

C.S. Lewis's book *The Great Divorce* is an imaginary tale of a ride, a bus ride from hell to heaven. He gives in it the story of a man, or as he describes him, a ghost, who had a little red lizard that lived on his shoulder. I've told this story before. You've

probably heard me tell it or maybe you've even read it in his book, but it illustrates a truth. The lizard would whisper in his ear and the man couldn't make it shut up. It was embarrassing to him, but it had a control over his life and he always yielded to it. A great angel met him and offered to kill it, but the man resisted. He made all kinds of excuses. He wanted to be rid of it, but he didn't want to be rid of it, and so, he put it off. But finally, through the angel's gentle but persistent persuasion the man did yield. He gave up the lizard. It was hard. He shrieked in pain as the angel seized the lizard and he broke its back, but then this transformation occurred. The lizard turned into a great stallion and the man was changed, made new. He mounted the horse and he rode swiftly up the mountains to heaven.

It's a picture of what happens when we repent. It's not easy. It's painful. Old habits die hard. They have roots that go deep into our soul and it's hard to get them out. In fact, we can't get them out ourselves, but it's possible to remove that. It's possible to change. In fact, it's probable. It's certain if we read the word of God, if we respond to the word of God in faith. God transforms us in that way. That is the power of the gospel. The effect and the process of studying God's word and obeying it. There is no greater power than that. This is what Paul describes as resurrection power, life-giving power. We are in Christ and Christ is truly alive. He is the resurrected savior. He sits at the right hand and through his Holy Spirit who is literally alive within the hearts of every believer, the third person of the trinity, God Almighty within us, changes us, transforms us.

There is great power in that, life-giving power. The church at Ephesus responded to God's light. The people, they didn't harden their hearts and a great work happened in them and through them, and yet, that's not the end of the story. You turn your Bibles forward a number of pages to the book of Revelation and go forward in history 40 or so years, John wrote to this church in Revelation 2. And through His words, the Lord Jesus praised the church for their ministry, for their defense of the faith. They were well-grounded in the Bible. This church had more instruction from the apostle Paul than any other church. He stayed longer than any other city. There was much to praise them for, but Christ said, "I have this against you, you have left your first love."

We can do that. We can be well taught, well-grounded in the word of God and

we can take our eyes off Christ. We can get distracted by the world, by the things of the world, still do church work, but without love for Christ. We've left Him. He hasn't left us. He'll never leave us or forsake us, but we've left Him.

What is essential to the Christian life, to living an apostolic life is love for Christ. When we love Him, we obey Him. When we love Him, we suffer gladly for Him and serve Him earnestly, like Paul did. And then, we see great things happen in our lives and those around us. Do you want to see that? Do you want to experience that? Well, may God kindle in your heart, in my heart, a fresh love for Jesus Christ, a desire to know Him better, and fellowship with Him in prayer daily, and walk with Him. How does that happen? Read the word of God. Study the scriptures. Pray to Him daily. Seek that from Him. God answers those prayers. Fixing your eyes on Christ, the author and perfecter of faith; that's how we live our lives, but if you're here without Christ, if you have not believed in Him as God's son and man's savior, then that's what you must do, and I invite you to believe in Him. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in the place of sinners. He bore the penalty of sin on the cross so that all who believe in Him might have forgiveness at that moment, complete and eternal forgiveness and life everlasting.

Look to Jesus Christ, trust in Him, and God will save you at that moment. May God help you to do that and help all of us, to live a life that's pleasing to Him, a life of obedience, a life of walking with the Lord daily. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness, and your mercy, and your greatness. We see that in the effects of the apostle's ministry. What a amazing ministry he had in that dark city of Ephesus. If you did a great work in that city, you can do a great work in this city. If you did a great work in the lives of those magicians, you can do it in the lives of each one of us here. You're doing that. We have the assurance that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. You have begun a work in us who have put our faith in Christ and You won't stop working us. We praise You and thank You for that. May we live lives that please You and bring honor to the name of Jesus Christ, our savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.