

# The Spirit and the power

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[0:00] You look at pages of people and different scenery and you've got to spot this guy, Wally, wearing the red and white stripy top and hat.

And then you can turn the page and find him again. And then again, this morning in our passage, we're not spotting Wally, but I think we need to ask some important where questions.

Because there's a lot going on in that passage. I wonder if you found that as we read it. Before highlighting some of the things going on in the passage, we're in Ephesus in Acts chapter 19.

And there's a lot going on in the city itself. It's a city known for magical practices, occult practices. It's a city which contains one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

This temple built for the goddess Artemis. So there's lots of idol worship going on in the city of Ephesus too. And in our passage, as you may have spotted, there's lots of things going on.

[1:12] Some strange things as well. Some questions being asked. There's things going on with aprons and handkerchiefs. What's that about? Well, we'll see a little bit in a moment.

There's exorcisms going on. There's a fire and people are burning books. There's all sorts of strange things going on in the city of Ephesus.

And as we read it, we could sort of get lost in some of these details. But I want us to think about two big where questions. Firstly, where's the spirit?

And then where's the power? Where's the spirit and where's the power? We begin with where's the spirit because that's a question that we'll see in a moment.

Paul asks. He arrives into Ephesus. This is the beginning of his third missionary journey in the book of Acts. Although he does stay in Ephesus for quite a while.

[2:11] His journey has taken him. We see in verse 1 while Apollos was at Corinth. Paul took the road through the interior. That's the interior of Asia. So he probably passed through places like Galatia and strength.

And the church is there. And then he arrives at Ephesus where he sort of camps for two years. And the disciples that he stumbles across first strike him as a bit strange.

He feels like there's something different about them. The word disciples there in verse 1 is a tricky word in some ways. The rest of the book of Acts, if you see the word disciples, that's disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But here Paul thinks something's missing. See that in the question he asks in verse 2. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

He doesn't see any evidence of a change of heart, change of life. Doesn't see the Spirit at work in these believers. There's something missing.

[3:22] We don't know what. We're not told that in the passage. But there's something missing. And so he says, clearly he's been told they've been baptized.

And so he asks them about their baptism. Verse 3. So Paul asks them, what baptism did you receive? And things begin to make sense for Paul when they reply, John's baptism.

John's baptism. It's very possible that these people, these guys, have been learning from Apollos, who we saw in chapter 18.

Have a look at verse 24. It's almost like Apollos, as he was teaching some people in Ephesus.

And these disciples that Paul discovers, they're stuck and haven't quite gone forward into the new reality.

[4:43] Now Jesus has come and died for them and been raised to life.

They're stuck in John's baptism. Which Paul says in verse 4 is a baptism

of repentance.

He was preparing the way for the Lord. Be baptized. Be cleansed. Be ready to meet your God as he comes to you. But John's baptism wasn't the final baptism.

John, the Baptist, he was the forerunner. I like to describe him as the warm-up act. A few months ago, Becky and I went to see Milton Jones, the comedian at the Theatre Royal down in Brighton. And it was great to see him. But before he came on, a warm-up act came on. And I have to be honest, he wasn't very good. But the idea of a warm-up act is that they get the crowd ready, get them comfortable, get them laughing.

The issue we had with this particular one was his comedy was very different from Milton James. He was struggling with the crowd before him. So we're so glad we didn't stay there just to see the warm-up act.

[5:59] We got to see the final one, the one we came to see. For these disciples, they're stuck with the warm-up act. They're stuck and haven't quite come to see that the Lord Jesus is their Messiah and come to give them full salvation.

They're stuck at John the Baptist, that final Old Testament prophet. But John the Baptist was always intending to point people to Jesus.

That's what Paul said. Let's read verse 4. John's baptism was the baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him.

That is in Jesus. He was always pointing to the Lord Jesus. In whom people could be baptized completely.

We know what baptism is. We saw one last week. We know that it's that picture of being united to the Lord Jesus and his death and resurrection. But there's something more with the Lord Jesus.

[7:08] When we put our trust in Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit come upon us. And so there's something more than just water.

There's a spiritual change as God comes to live in us. And not when we get baptized under the water, but when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that began, that new thing with the Spirit coming upon his people began earlier in the book of Acts.

In Acts chapter 2. And it seems that these people, as they sort of miss this, this has passed them by. They are catching up with the day of Pentecost.

John Stott commentates on this passage and says, Pentecost caught up with them. It's like they've missed some TV series episodes.

They've missed the Pentecost episode. They didn't know about it. But now they're catching up as Paul arrives. And so they get a taste.

[8:14] A little taste of that day of Pentecost. You see that as we read on. Verse 5. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them. And they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There are about 12 men in all.

The day of Pentecost catches up with them. The Spirit comes and lives within them. And they ended up speaking in tongues like on that day of Pentecost.

That is simply speaking in foreign languages. And prophesied. That is preaching. And notice there's 12 of them or about 12 of them. There's 12 disciples on the day of Pentecost doing just that.

It's a taste. It's a taste of what has happened in the past. It's important to note from these verses for us.

[9:20] That some churches would look at these verses that we've read. And teach us that there are sort of two levels of Christianity. They would look at these disciples and think.

Well that's what happens when we first put our faith in Jesus. We don't yet have the Spirit. We're just sort of average believers with no Spirit within us.

And then at some later point we're filled with the Holy Spirit. It's important we're aware of that.

Maybe some of us have been in churches where that's taught. But I don't think that's the case. I don't think that's what we should learn from this.

It creates a whole load of problems if we're sort of believing that. It creates dangers of pride.

[10:17] If you're in that top tier. If you've become a believer. And then after a time you believe you've been baptized with the Spirit. You can say to someone who hasn't. Oh I'm full of the Spirit.

Where's the Spirit in you? Or people in the lower tier sort of thinking. They're not good enough. They're insufficient. Perhaps they haven't got enough faith in the Lord.

We're aware of that. But let me assure you. That if you're trusting in Jesus this morning. The Spirit lives in you.

The Spirit is not a spirit of division. But of unity. There are no first and second class Christians in God's kingdom. Verse 2.

Paul says. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? That's a good translation. When you believed in the Lord Jesus. Did you receive the Spirit? And Paul makes this very clear.

[11:22] As he writes to the Christians in Ephesus. Some years later. He writes these words. In Ephesians 1 verse 13. And you also were included in Christ. When you heard the message of truth.

The gospel of your salvation. When you believed. Not sometime after you believed. But when you believed. You were marked in him with a seal.

The promised Holy Spirit. If you're trusting in Jesus as your Savior. You have the blessing of God. Living inside of you.

And these disciples now have caught up with that tea. The Spirit has come upon these people. And things begin to change in Ephesus.

But it does get odd. So be prepared. This is where we've got to get the. Kleenex tissues. And our aprons.

[12:21] Out. Verse 11 and 12. Because they seem pretty powerful. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. So that even handkerchiefs. And aprons that had touched him.

Were taken to those who were ill. And their illnesses were cured. And the evil spirits left them. And. We're asking. In the rest of the passage.

Where's the power here? Where's the power? Is it in the tissues and the aprons? Where's the power? Well some people look upon.

What's going on. In the tissues and the aprons. And in what Paul is doing. And they think. Oh well. There's something powerful at work here.

We want some of that. Have a look at verse 13. Some of the Jews. Who went around. Driving out evil spirits. Try to invoke. The name of the Lord Jesus.

[13:18] Over those who were demon possessed. They would say. In the name of Jesus. Whom Paul preaches. I command you to come out. Seven sons of Sceva. A Jewish chief priest.

Were doing this. These seven sons of Sceva. They're doing exorcisms. They're putting on shows. For the people of the city.

Casting out demons. And they see the power at work. In Paul's ministry. And they think. Well we can copy that. We can have some of this ourselves.

He seems to talk about Jesus. So let's use Jesus' name. To do this. And so they try it. They invoke. The name of Jesus.

Believing demons. Will be cast out. We're all a bit weird. But something goes wrong. Verse 15.

[14:17] One day the evil spirit answered them. Jesus I know. And Paul I know about. But who are you? It's a bit comical. We see in the gospels.

Demons shudder. Demons leave. People when Jesus. Is at work. But these. These demons.

In this passage. Are like. I know Jesus. I know Paul. I know he believes. In the Lord Jesus. Of the Lord Jesus Paul. But you guys come on.

You can do better. You're rubbish. You don't believe Jesus is Lord. We're not going to listen to you. Well what these guys seem to be doing.

Is using Jesus. As some sort of. Lucky charm. Genie in the bottle type thing. Hoping he'll just help us out.

[15:16] A little bit with our lives. So the demons. They don't listen. It turns out.

What they're doing. With the name of Jesus. And with these evil spirits. Is dangerous. Have a look.

At. What happens to them. Verse 16. Then the man who had the evil spirit. Jumped on them. And overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating.

That they ran out of the house. Naked and bleeding. The power isn't in the sons of Sceva. It leaves them naked and bleeding.

It gets them nowhere. It's horrific what goes on. But we can learn some lessons from this.

[16:14] As we'll see in a moment. So where's the power? It's not in the sons of Sceva. Could it be in the handkerchiefs and tissues? No sorry.

Handkerchiefs and aprons I should say. Handkerchiefs and aprons. Should we at Calvary Church. Start selling handkerchiefs to people. For five pounds for this handkerchief.

It will heal you. Should we do that? Some churches do. Some preachers well known on the TV would have TV ads advertising you such things.

Should we do that? Well I think we shouldn't. It's a con. Power's not in the handkerchief.

The power isn't even Paul himself. Verse 11 makes it very clear. The power is God. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.

[17:14] The power we're told is God. And that word extraordinary is quite key here. We're thinking we should start a handkerchief ministry.

Extraordinary means out of the ordinary. This is an ordinary day for God's people. Rather God's work was being established in this city.

In this city where people were practicing exorcisms. Where people were dabbling in sort of occult practices. God was showing he is the higher power.

God was showing that what Paul was preaching was true and right. And you can trust in him. You can trust in the name of Jesus to save you.

More than you can trust in your magical practices. The power is in God's. It's his work.

[18:17] There is power in the name of Jesus. But he's not to be used for your own lucky charm. He's not just to be used on the side to try and make your life a little bit better.

No, we're to revere Jesus as the Lord of all. Trust that he has the power to save. And trust that he has the right to do as he pleases.

Not that we should just use him for our own ends. We see throughout the book of Acts that the power of the Lord Jesus to save.

Very early on. Remember Peter and John as they're going to the temple. They hear this chap calling out to them asking for help.

And they say to this beggar who's lame. Can't walk. They say silver or gold I do not have. But what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

[19:26] Rise up and walk. And he does. The Lord Jesus can heal people. Can transform people physically. But this was a sign that should point people to their greatest needs.

As Peter and John as they're questioned about what they've done. They say salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

The thing that we need most is the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus is to be fit.

We're to be in awe of him and see him as our great saviour and lord of our lives. And that's the reaction that many in this city of Ephesus have.

The sons of Sceva got it wrong. But it leads many to see that salvation truly is found in no one else. Have a look at verse 17.

[20:43] When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus. They were all seized with fear. And the name of Jesus was held in high honour.

They come to hold the name of Jesus in high honour. They don't hold the sons of Sceva in high honour. They aren't to be trusted.

Their work is flawed. But they've heard Paul and his message about Jesus.

And they see that he has power to save. He has power to transform. And look at how he transforms their lives here. Verse 18. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.

Repented of their sin. A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls.

[21:44] It came to about 50,000 drachmas. See they were before trusting in magical powers and forces.

But now they've come to find Jesus. They see that this has no part of their lives anymore. And so they burn their magic books.

And this is a huge thing. You see how much this cost them? 50,000 drachmas. Perhaps there's a note in the bottom of your Bible that says a drachma is a silver coin worth about a day's wages. And some have calculated this to be maybe about 6 million pounds in our money. That was huge. You might think, well why didn't they sell them and have money for the church and its activities? Well they thought, no we must not have anything to do with this. And neither must anyone else. God to be worshipped.

[22:57] This is going to harm us but God saves us. And so it was worth the costly sacrifice for them because they've come to find Jesus as their greatest treasure.

When Paul writes to them sometime later. He reminds them that they really truly do have everything in Jesus.

They have every spiritual blessing in Christ. And so in Christ they are rich beyond our imagination. Rich beyond what this world can give. And so they can gladly just burn these books.

Burn these things from their old way of life. Two things I'd love to say from this bonfire. Firstly, don't dabble with evil things.

[23:55] Evil powers are real. It's not a game. Don't dabble with them. God is the greatest and highest power.

We want to worship and trust in Him alone. And then secondly, this is a picture of true repentance. Repentance. What is repentance? It is a decisive turning round from our old way of life to our new way of life. And this is a great picture of this.

Of what repentance is. That they're literally burning their old way of life. And saying, I'm not having this anymore. I'm following Jesus.

And so it's good for us just to think. Is there something maybe that we're trusting in alongside Jesus? Something that has no part in the Christian life?

[24:56] Is there something we need to repent of and say, I'm going to have nothing to do with this. I'm following you. And you alone. For Jesus is the greatest treasure we could ever know.

He's not some lucky charm. Not some genie in the bottle. He can be your saviour and your lord. Where's the power here? Well, it's in God. It's doing extraordinary. It's in Jesus' power to save. And in the Lord Jesus, we find words of wonderful life.

In the Gospels, Jesus did many miraculous signs. Perhaps one of his more famous ones is as he takes a boy's pat lunch. A few pieces of bread and some fish.

And he makes it into a meal for thousands. And it's extraordinary. And when he does that in John's Gospel, many crowds follow him.

[26:17] Crowds of people who were told just wanting to have their fill. Have their hunger, physical hunger satisfied. But Jesus says to them, turn to me. I am the bread of life.

Turn to me and I will satisfy your spiritual longings. And after that teaching, many in the crowds deserted him.

Wandered away. They weren't getting what they wanted from Jesus. And so they turned away. And then he turned to his 12 disciples and he asked them, Do you want to leave as well?

And Peter said, no. Lord, to whom else would we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe you are the Holy One of God. In Jesus are words of eternal life. And we see as God does extraordinary things in this city, in the people of this city, it's because his word is at work.

[27:26] See that in verse 10 and 20. This went on for two years. So that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

And then verse 20. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

The word of the Lord is what's powerful here. And that's what we've seen throughout the book of Acts. God does his work through his words. And here is another case of that.

Perhaps we like the sound in church life of fancy gimmicks, like handkerchiefs that heal people and demons being cast out. Perhaps we like the sound of the dramatic.

Perhaps we'd love it if we finally got lights and smoke machines and had a full band playing. You know what? That's not going to change someone's life.

[28:34] We have all that we need here, right in front of us.

This book contains life-giving, life-changing, life-transforming words that can bring people from death to life, that can bring people to true repentance.

The power is found in the word of God. And as the word of God does its work, so does the spirit, who is alive and with us if we're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and who is the one who comes and opens blind eyes as his word is proclaimed.

So where's the spirit? He comes to live in those who trust in Jesus as Savior. And where's the power here?

The power is in God, who works through his servants, through his life-giving words. I thank God for that now.

[29:57] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much.