

Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, Christchurch. My name is Suzy Shin, and I'll be reading today's scripture from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 19, and Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

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. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

[1 : 24] Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas.

In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. After I have been there, he said, I must visit Rome also.

He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way.

A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said, You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business.

And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus, and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.

[2 : 27] But there is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together.

Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. The assembly was in confusion.

Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people.

But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. The city clerk quieted the crowd and said, Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her

image, which fell from heaven?

[3 : 39] Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. A reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Susie, for that reading. Let's go to the Lord in prayer as we open up this word. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would come.

[5 : 03] That you would convince us that apart from your son, we can do nothing. Would you show us our powerlessness and at the same time show us your great power that we've seen in the resurrection of Christ.

Help us to have a holy hunger for that power and for your glory. And would we see that here as a church community as we seek to be a people who go in the name of Jesus to love and serve this world.

So would you do that, Lord? Would you do that for us by your grace? In Christ's name we pray. Amen. All right. Well, next week, just to let you know, we're going to be at retreat, so don't come to church.

All right. Just wanted to get that out there. We'll say it a couple times today, just so you know. But this also marks kind of the end of our series in Paul. Today we're looking at this last episode in Paul's ministry.

We're looking at the origin story of the church in Ephesus. And I'm just going to just dive right in, tell you a little bit about this city, Ephesus. All right. I've got a map of Ephesus right up here. It's a prominent city in Asia Minor, Turkey as we call it today.

[6 : 17] And in Paul's day, it was the most populous city and the most prosperous and populated province in the Roman Empire. It wasn't like some small potatoes little town. It was a cosmopolitan center.

And not just politically, economically, and culturally, but also religiously. Ephesus was basically the epicenter of worship for the Greek and Roman gods. It was like the Mecca of the Greek and Roman world.

It was particularly known for its worship of this Greek goddess named Artemis. And in fact, the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was considered one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. Right up there with the great pyramid, it was a temple like four times the size of the Parthenon.

And so people all over the world, they came to Ephesus to worship Artemis, this goddess of fertility and childbirth and nature and wilderness. Which if you think about it, are all things that throughout history, humanity has struggled to get under our control.

So tons of people are coming, trying to get that under control by coming to worship Artemis. So again, this is not only a politically, economically, and culturally prominent city, but it's a religiously significant one in Paul's world.

[7 : 23] And it's even more accurate to say that this was a spiritually dynamic city. Ephesus was like a crossroads of every kind of religion. Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Jewish, now Christian with Paul coming in there, and even like local pagan cults.

Archaeologists have found tons of like inscriptions and talismans and various other ceremonial artifacts that indicate all sorts of worship and practice of magic and sorcery in Ephesus.

That's your little history lesson on Ephesus. Why am I starting the sermon with all these facts about Ephesus? Well, our text today, as Susie experienced, is quite long. We're not gonna be able to turn over every stone, but if I could identify one main theme from our passage today, I'd say that these texts that were read are about power.

I wanna talk about power today, what we're looking at today in the Ephesian episode in the book of Acts, and what Paul prays to God for as he later writes the church in Ephesus is a power encounter. All right, a power encounter. Now, for those of you who are immediately skeptical of this kind of a language, I hear you. Maybe speaking about a power encounter reminds you of those health and wealth, prosperity preachers on TV, and you rightly fear the abuses and excesses of charismatic Christianity.

[8 : 40] I get it, I hear you. Don't worry, we're not going there. I'm right there with you. And as we walk through this text, I think you'll see a distinction between the power encounter here and what happens, unfortunately, in so many churches, especially in America today.

Now, maybe there are others of you, though, here, and this idea of a power encounter, it just raises red flags, though. It makes you kind of roll your eyes because you're just not quite convinced of the invisible spiritual realm.

You prefer to live and operate within what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls the imminent frame, this disenchanted, simply natural, rational world without reference to the transcendent.

And if that is you this morning, I get it. And we want to be a church for you. And I totally understand why what you heard red this morning could sound like, you know, a bunch of just backwards, ancient, superstitious people arguing with each other about whose superstition was better.

And maybe it's probably hard for you to appreciate how any of what was read today has relevance for you in the, you know, the 21st century. But listen, if this describes you, well, there are tons of conversations that we'd love to have with you in this church about that.

[9 : 55] We could talk about, you know, how the Western secular skepticism actually came as a byproduct of Christianity's successes and its success at dismantling, you know, ancient, pagan, medieval superstitions.

We could talk about how actually impossible it is to sustain a solid sense of meaning and purpose and morality just within the imminent frame and without any reference to the transcendent. But just for the sake of time, could I just ask all of us to have an open mind this morning to the spiritual? Because the truth is, if you're skeptical about spiritual powers outside the imminent frame, outside of nature, you're actually in the minority. And not just throughout human history, but even today, the spiritual realm is not so far-fetched to most people living in the world.

In the United States and even in more secular countries like France and Germany and Japan, the Pew Research surveys show that the majority of people believe that there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we cannot see it.

And I think this is because none of us can fully escape what Jesus and the Scriptures teach, that we're all imprinted with the image of God, which means deep down, we all know that reality is far more expansive than what meets the eye.

[11 : 09] And try as we might to answer life's biggest questions. Why do things happen the way they do? Why does it matter that I'm alive? What goals should we pursue with our lives?

We all know the answers to these questions cannot be found simply within the imminent frame where all that matters is matter. And I'm not saying this to belittle anyone here or to bully you and just try to guilt you for your skepticism, but really more than trying to win an argument or convert you to my team.

What our heart is here at Christ Church is for everyone here, Christian or not, religious or not, what we pray for as a staff, what your elders pray for, what we pray for downstairs at 9.30 every Sunday in the boiler room, every Sunday, over everyone who comes in through these doors, is that every single person who comes into this place to worship with us would have a power encounter with the living God.

It's like that's what this thing is here. This is not a lectern. This is a pulpit. I'm not here trying to share information with you today about Christianity, trying to make it sound more plausible.

I'm trying to communicate to you the fullness of what your maker and sustainer desires for you. And listen, it's so much more than His love.

[12 : 30] We love talking about His love here. It's wonderful. We focus tons on that, that there is a Father who loves you, who has sent His Son to bring you into His family and give you His inheritance, that this is a God who is personally interested and invested in you and your life.

We love the good news of God's love here. But guess what? There's even more good news. There's even more good news. Good news that this Father is also a king. And if He is your Father and King, if you are a royal child of God, then that means you don't just have the love of the Father. You have the authority and power of your Father and King in heaven. The good news I have for us this morning is that God doesn't just want you to know Him personally, He wants you to know Him powerfully. And you know, to make this more personal, just to give you a window into my own heart and my vision and prayer for my family and for myself and for our church in the season ahead.

You know, I've just completed seven years of ministry here at Christ Church. I get my sabbatical right after Easter. Looking forward to that. But I'll miss you, of course. But 2026 Easter is also when Christ Church East Bay turns 20 years old.

[13:42] 20 years old, 20 years of leading people into deeper relationships with Christ and His church through community and for the city. But you know, Jonathan and I and our elders as we've been praying and discerning together, thinking to ourselves, God, not thinking to ourselves, praying to God, God, what would you have for us in the next decade.

What I keep coming back to when we think about our mission statement that we exist to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ, I think what God keeps bringing back to me is the words deeper still.

Deeper still. And so, you know, what I've been praying for toward that end, what I've been praying for is God's power. Not just His wisdom, not just more strategic church practices, not even just that we'd be a church full of love, care, and compassion, I've been praying that we'd be a church full of the power and presence of God like we haven't yet seen in this church.

A power and presence that permeates our church family and radiates into the Bay Area cities around us and our communities just like what we see here in Acts chapter 19.

And now, maybe you've never thought of Christianity in these terms. Maybe for you, Christianity is about comfort and peace and identity. Maybe it's about salvation and eternal life or answers to life's big philosophical existential questions.

[15:07] But this morning, I want to invite you to consider the power that's offered to you in Jesus Christ. And I think this is particularly relevant in our present cultural moment, especially here in the Bay where in many ways we're feeling more powerful than we've ever been, right?

We carry these little supercomputers in our pockets that connect us instantly to the whole world, right? And put oceans of knowledge at our fingertips. AI promises us unprecedented efficiency and productivity.

Biotech is pushing the boundaries of human life itself. And yet, at the same time, many of us probably also feel more powerless than ever, right? At the very same time. More connection means more exposure to the world's pain.

More knowledge means more responsibility and higher expectations we can never meet. More efficiency just means the bar keeps rising and with every new solution, new unforeseen challenges and problems emerge.

So sure, technology can extend life, but it cannot tell us what life is for. It can give us information, but it cannot give us wisdom. It can connect us, but it cannot heal us, which is why we need a different kind of power.

[16:17] Not just the power to hit deadlines and meet quotas, but the power to live as we were created to live. The power to resist evil, the power to persevere in suffering, to be healed and renewed, the power to see the broken made whole.

We need a higher power. And see, that's the kind of power Acts 19 puts on display for us. That's the kind of power that Paul prays for the church in Ephesus to encounter the power of Christ's resurrection at work, in us, in the world.

All right, so sorry for that long windup, but let's take a look at this origin story now of the church of Ephesus. So remember, this is a city full of political, economic, cultural, and religious power, and its people are extremely spiritual, which basically means they were seeking even more power.

Like sure, they were living in this upscale, cosmopolitan city as Ephesian citizens. Even the silversmiths and the craftsmen and the clergy were getting paid, but they were a society still always seeking more.

Like what secret spell, what incantation, what practice can I add to my life to level up, to be healthier, to be more prosperous, to be more successful, this was the climate that Paul was

stepping into in Ephesus.

[17 : 31] Now, verses two through seven, they aren't printed in your liturgy for the sake of time, but basically what happens is Paul enters Ephesus and he meets some people who heard and accepted the preaching of John the Baptist many years before, but they hadn't yet heard about Jesus, which means that they were living lives of repentance, they were living lives of turning away from sin, but they didn't exactly know who or what to turn to.

So Paul tells them and they get baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and boom, power encounter. They are baptized in the Holy Spirit. They're empowered to speak in tongues and to prophesy, indicating that they are now children of God who speak with and commune with the living God and who also hear from Him and share that word with others.

So basically, the Holy Spirit's power falls upon people immediately as Paul enters this incredibly spiritually dynamic place and this is just the beginning. As was Paul's practice, he also goes into the synagogues first.

He goes into the synagogues where he always went to find the spiritually interested and verse 8 says he spoke boldly there, persuasively making a case about the kingdom of God. Basically, showing the Jewish people of Ephesus how Jesus was the fulfillment of their scriptures and announcing to them that His kingdom had come and that it was a kingdom better than and radically other than any other kingdom.

But apparently, the reception was mixed there. Some were persuaded and others refused to believe and verse 9 says some publicly malign the way which is what they called Christianity back then, Jesus' way.

[18 : 58] And so Paul leaves them and he starts lecturing and holding daily discussions in a public space called the Hall of Tyrannus which by the way should encourage us to see Christianity as not a private religion only but as a viable public faith to be shared and to be in dialogue with the public.

That's what I love about being here in Berkeley just two blocks from Cal. That's what I love about our Cal Scholar Series. You PhD students, so many of you PhD students coming here and integrating your academic disciplines with your commitment to Christ.

I love that. That's what we need to be about at Christ Church. And the hope and prayer is that God will bless and use our church as He did in Ephesus. Verse 10 says, Paul lectured and held daily discussions for two years and then everyone in all the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. That is how powerfully God was working through Paul's ministry in Ephesus. Can you imagine that? The whole province of Asia had heard the word of the Lord. Can you imagine because of the teaching here that all of California hears about who Jesus is?

I want to pull up the map again and basically when it's saying that the word of the Lord went through all the province of Asia, like, you know all those churches that you read about in Revelation?

[20 : 14] That's what happened. Those were church plants that resulted from this powerful work of God in Ephesus. Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea. This is a result of what God is doing through Paul's ministry and teaching through the Holy Spirit in Ephesus, all right?

And then verse 11 says, God doesn't just do miracles through Paul but extraordinary miracles as if normal miracles weren't extraordinary enough. More power encounter. And we didn't print all that happened here in the liturgy but basically from verses 11 to 16, God is working powerfully through Paul and people recognize it.

People are even taking handkerchiefs that had touched Paul and they're bringing them to their sick friends and people are getting cured. Evil spirits are fleeing. And you know, with this being a very spiritually dynamic city, there are also these Jewish exorcists that Acts 19 talks about who notice the power that's at work in Paul.

So what do they try to do? They try to copy Paul's technique. They invoke the name of Jesus trying to command evil spirits to flee from people. But when they try this, an evil spirit goes, I know Jesus and I know about Paul but who are you?

And the man with the evil spirit beats them bloody and runs them out of the house naked. And you know, you might think that this would weaken the people's faith in the power of the name of Jesus.

[21 : 35] You know, maybe that was one spirit that, well, the name of Jesus didn't work on that one. But verse 17 says the opposite actually. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

Apparently, everyone heard about what happened with these Jewish exorcists trying to use Jesus' name for their own purposes. And then rather than people thinking, oh well, that didn't work, or well, I guess some evil spirits are immune to Jesus' the Jesus incantation.

No, people probably because of Paul's teaching and life were recognizing that, hey, this Christianity stuff, the way is not like any other religion. It's not just about performing a ritual or using some religious technique to wield and manipulate divine power for our own purposes.

Christianity isn't just some life hack. No, that evil spirit recognized Paul, recognized Jesus, and recognized their authority, but not these Jewish exorcists because these Jewish exorcists had no meaningful relationship to Jesus.

He wasn't their Lord. They weren't united with Jesus and his Father in Heaven. They had no authority, no power. Jesus' name was not going to be manipulated, objectified, or used. And in fact, Jesus is seen as so powerful that he's actually seen as sovereign over that evil spirit that went to teach those Jewish exorcists a lesson.

[22 : 57] So ironically, their failure to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus ends up leading to Jesus' name being held in even higher honor in Ephesus. They are all seized with fear, it says. And not only did this impact all of Ephesus, but it led to a revival, a large public corporate act of repentance in the city.

Verse 18 says, many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. This means that many who said that they were Christians, many who said that they were part of the way, were also mixed up with other faith commitments, caught up in the spiritual, syncretistic climate of Ephesus, but now they're moving toward the exclusivity of Christ.

The one who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And this wasn't just a confession of their lips, but it was repentance in action, even at great expense. Verse 19 says, a number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly.

When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas. You know, archaeologists have dug up this area and they've noticed tons of these types of scrolls, tons of these written words and inscriptions all over Ephesus.

They call them the Ephesian letters. And piecing together all the evidence and reading the historians, what they've gathered is that these words were magical formulas that people used and they would carry and recite to protect themselves from harm.

[24 : 25] So when you read about these burning of the scrolls, that's what's happening. People are burning their scrolls with all these magic formulas. And it says 50,000 drachmas worth. For reference, 50,000 days wages for an average worker.

A drachma is like a day's wage. So that's, I did the math, 135 years of salary were burned right there in repentance because of the power of the Holy Spirit working in that city.

And so this was a massive public repentance and renunciation of the prevailing powers in Ephesus. And it only led to the word of the Lord spreading even more widely. Verse 20 says, in this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Again, Ephesus was having a power encounter and the power of Christ's word and spirit were prevailing. And so much so that it was even disturbing the Ephesian economy and threatening their political stability.

Again, the Christian faith isn't just a private personal religion but a public faith. And when God's word and spirit move forth in power, it doesn't just change individual lives and hearts but it impacts whole societies.

[25 : 30] That's what the power of Christ wants to do here in Berkeley, here in the Bay Area, in our world. Read with me from verse 23. About that time there arose a great disturbance about the way.

A silversmith named Demetrius who made silver shrines of Artemis brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together along with the workers in related trades and said, you know my friends that we received a good income from this business and you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and the goddess herself who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world will be robbed of her divine majesty.

When they heard this they were furious and began shouting great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Soon the whole city was in an uproar. So basically Paul's message, Paul's ministry centered on Jesus and his kingdom.

It has massively disrupted this entire city, its very economy, its political stability. There is undeniable power encounter going on in this spiritually dynamic city.

[26 : 48] So that's what happened here in Acts 19 but so what? So what and then what? What are the implications for us particularly as it relates to power? Well first notice Paul's spirit led, spirit empowered method.

It's super important to notice that all Paul's success in Ephesus is completely owed to the direction and the power of the Holy Spirit which Paul had absolutely no control over.

Notice he doesn't try to climb the ladder in Ephesus to gain influence and a hearing. He simply goes to the spiritually interested and those who are open to the way of Jesus even if they're a fringe group and he starts there just with those 12 disciples.

And he's not coercive but he seeks to win and persuade. He's not selling anything but he's simply convinced himself that everyone has every reason to embrace Jesus and his kingdom.

And this is why he also brings his message into public places side by side in dialogue with anyone who's willing to talk. That's why they go to the hall of Tyrannus. He spends multiple years there just unpacking all the reasons that he has for why the kingdom of Jesus is so great while also at the same time healing and casting out evil spirits in Jesus' name to demonstrate his power.

[28 : 00] But the whole time he's relying not on his logic or his persuasiveness but ultimately on the Holy Spirit to change people's hearts and even to change whole regions and societies.

Paul's method is not a technique so much as a relational spirit-led spirit-driven faithfulness that inevitably bears fruit in exactly the way that God intends.

And this is such a huge contrast to what the Ephesians were probably used to. You have the Jewish exorcist who tried to manipulate Jesus' name like a magic formula. You have your Greek philosophers who leaned on logic and syllogisms to try to persuade people.

You have the silversmith example, Demetrius, he's leveraging wealth and people's greed and populist rhetoric to try to get people to do what he wants them to do. But as Paul simply follows the leading of the Holy Spirit in faithfulness to his calling as an apostle, he effortlessly demonstrates that the highest power is not magic, logic, money, it's not popular opinion or influence, it's simply the Spirit.

I mean, I feel like I return to this again and again because I think it's what God wants me to hear again and again. My job, our job as human beings, as children of God, it isn't to win at life by all the metrics that are set before us.

[29 : 22] It's not to be the most impressive tree in the forest, no, it's to be the tree of Psalm 1. And if you haven't memorized Psalm 1 yet and you're a member of this church, get on it, alright? Psalm 1 is our psalm, right?

God's calling us to be a Psalm 1 tree with ever deepening roots in Christ, less concerned about branching out than going deep and reaching high into the heavens.

And as the psalmist says, that is the kind of tree that will bear fruit, that will experience the powerful abundance of God, maybe not exactly when we would have planned it, but always in season, in God's perfect timing.

And this is tied to the second thing I want us to notice which is the way that the way of Jesus and His Spirit runs so counter to the idolatrous way of Ephesus. The second implication here is that Jesus' way is really the only positive sum game.

Just think of like all the people every year coming into Ephesus, flocking to the temple of Artemis every single year seeking to offer their worship, seeking to pay their tribute, seeking to purchase that new scroll with that new magical formula, seeking to make a fortune selling those scrolls, plugging into the religio-economic machine that is Ephesus.

[30 : 38] But whether they were there for wealth or health or both, they were all basically engaging in the same practice. Transaction-based salvation.

Zero-sum game religion or even negative-sum game religion. If I sacrifice this much wealth, then I will receive this much health. If I sacrifice this much time, then I will gain this much treasure.

If I just follow this magic formula or just pick up that innovative technique, then I can level up. Then I can power up in my lifelong effort towards saving myself from pain and discomfort and harm and

misfortune and even death.

And this isn't just an ancient practice in Ephesus though, right? We may not be as overtly and explicitly spiritual here in the Bay Area. We may not all be hunting for magic scrolls.

I don't know if that's your thing. But maybe, and even more sadly, we're still convinced of life only in the imminent frame. And so we just look to technology and human ingenuity, self-help, hacks, tips, and techniques to basically do exactly what the Ephesians were doing.

[31 : 48] Trying to secure our salvation, trying to secure our health, our wealth, and our happiness through transaction. But see, Jesus offers us a far better way. He doesn't call us to power up to save ourselves, but to plug into Him and to enjoy His resurrection power.

He invites us to die with Him and to rise with Him and to live in His abundance as a counterculture to a world absorbed with scarcity. He's the only positive sum game. I love what the New Testament scholar Dennis Johnson writes about the difference between the the ways of Christ and the ways of Ephesus.

He writes, magical manipulation is a manifestation of the common human quest for salvation by works. Our hunger to control our destinies, to break free from our need for and our dependence on divine grace, but the message of Jesus is a message of God's gift.

Unearned, undeserved, unmanipulated, and uncoerced. It is the good news of rescue for the penniless, the helpless, the hopeless, who can neither pay their benefactor in advance, nor repay His kindness in their gratitude.

God's gift unmasks our pretensions to independence, our delusion that we can bargain or barter with the Lord of the universe. The Spirit is God's gift, not a product to be purchased or a service to be contracted or a wage to be earned.

[33 : 07] See, what God offers us is the same power that raised Christ from the dead, the Holy Spirit, at no cost to us and at every cost to His Son. It's the only power worth having and we can have it without striving but simply by faith, by trusting in Him and receiving His gift.

And this leads us to the final implication which is that God's powerful spirit dismantles exploitation. You see, when Paul was preaching and when people were being freely healed and set free from evil spirits in the name of Jesus, all for free, Paul was declaring that Jesus is Lord above every false man-made God the Ephesians had been paying tribute to.

And the results were staggering. Whole segments of the population turned away from Artemis. You remember the 135 years worth of wages that were burned in magic scrolls. It was a massive repudiation of the spiritual economy in Ephesus.

Paul wasn't even trying to run an anti-Artemis campaign. He didn't boycott the silversmiths. He didn't bomb the ancient wonder of the world temple. He simply preached Christ crucified and risen and people started connecting the dots.

And as they did, they walked away from an entire system that had been exploiting them. False authorities demanding allegiance, unjust economies, draining their resources. If you pay attention to Demetrius' speech, right, he didn't care about the people whom his idols were basically pillaging.

[34 : 35] Demetrius was happy to continue churning out these ineffective products, happy with the status quo, as long as money kept flowing to his pocket. But the Spirit dismantled all of that, and not through force or violence, but through the truth and freedom of Christ.

Whereas Demetrius preached the message of greed and fear to preserve his unjust, deceitful status quo, Paul was preaching a God of generous grace. He was preaching freedom from empty, expensive rituals and true power to disrupt the wicked status quo.

And see, that's what's going to change the world. That's what's going to change the world, the message and ministry of Christ and his Spirit reconfiguring what we invest in with our time and our money, altering the goals that we have at work, altering the goals that we have for our children, reshaping how we spend our leisure or even how we use our bodies.

And we desperately need this transformative power in our world and in our lives because make no mistake, Artemis is still very much with us. She just wears different clothes now, right?

We may not be bringing sacrifices to her temple but maybe we offer tithes at the altar of consumption where what you have determines what you're worth and where our closets are full but our souls still feel empty.

[35 : 55] Or maybe we kneel at the altar of success where our resumes and our promotions promise salvation yet leave us anxious that we'll still never measure up or maybe it's the temple of beauty right?

This multi-billion dollar industry feeding off of our insecurities and still none of us ever feels attractive enough. It could be the temple of politics demanding allegiance to false saviors who promise us power or protection yet leave us divided and disillusioned still.

Or maybe it's the glowing temple in our pockets again where algorithms exploit our weaknesses, addict us to distraction and enslave us to mindlessness and pornography and all the filth that's out there only making us feel more restless, lonely, and dissatisfied.

We need, the church needs, the world needs a higher power. And though no one would have expected it to come through a crucified Jewish man from Nazareth who claimed to be God, that is precisely where it's found.

And if you will take hold of that power, if you will take hold of that person, if you will take hold of him, Jesus Christ, not to wield his power for your own purposes like those Jewish copycat exorcists, but to be used of God as Paul was and as many others who've gone before and after him, that same power that Paul prayed for in Ephesians chapter 1, the immeasurably great power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that will be at work in you who believe.

[37 : 29] A power that truly makes you free, free from fear, free from greed, free from slavery to what cannot satisfy, free to bear fruit like the Psalm 1 tree, rooted deep and flourishing in season.

And my practical challenge to each of us this week, something I've been doing myself, is not presuming that we've already arrived, already approached my max efficiency and fruitfulness. I've been asking God, God, where are the places in my life that you want to show me your power? Where are the places where I feel powerless or limited? Show me your power in those places. Or where are the places where I need to be confronted with my limits and powerlessness? Show me your power in those as well in my powerlessness. Oh God, show me, show us, show the world your greater power.

God, we're going to be instead and increase our dependence on you and you alone. This is a God who wants you to know his love and he wants you to know his power.

[38 : 33] It's a beautiful combination and this is what will change the world by the Spirit of Christ. Let's go to him in prayer. Oh Lord, we ask that you would stir up within this church a holy hunger for your power.

Not for our own ends but your perfect holy ends. That your kingdom might come, that your will might be done on earth as in heaven through us in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, in our homes.

Would we be a people who depend upon, who experience and who share with others the incredible power of God in Christ, the power of salvation for all who believe, the power of resurrection, the Holy Spirit residing in us.

Lord, show us, give us a higher view of what you're calling us to. show us the good works that you've prepared beforehand that we should walk in and surprise us with how amazingly extraordinary those works are as we walk them out in service of our King Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen.