

Acts 18:24-19:20

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- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. All right. Well, so this weekend we hosted another Welcome to Grace and Peace class, which is our kind of membership pathway class.
- It was really great. We had a great group. It was really fun to do. Don't worry if you missed out on that. We will do another one in the fall, probably in September. And so you can be a part of that when it comes back around next time.
- One of the things about that is that I spend a good bit of time in that class talking about Grace and Peace's core mission, which I say a lot of times, which is that we want to be a place for people to discover God's grace and His peace.
- That's what we want to be. We want to be a place where people might discover God's grace and His peace for them, the gift of Jesus to the world, that we might inhabit that, that that might be what we're all about.
- [1 : 2 4] But, you know, you kind of got to dig into that a little bit more. And so I presented our folks with a bit of a math equation that we spent some time doing a little bit of math. It's not hard math.
- But what we talked about was whenever you have a gospel culture, a culture that is centered around the gospel, how we act with one another represents the gospel of Jesus.
- And when you add that to gospel doctrine, the truth of the scriptures, the truth about who Jesus is and what He's done, what that equals is spiritual power.
- It equals transformation. Gospel culture plus gospel doctrine equals spiritual power, spiritual life. And so what I wanted to show you this morning is the passage that we're looking at in Acts is actually a really beautiful example of that simple math.
- Gospel culture, gospel doctrine equals spiritual power. Let me, so that's what I want to look at. I just want to look at gospel culture, gospel doctrine, and spiritual life.
- [2 : 3 1] So let me give you a little bit of a background of where we are, though. What we saw last week was that Paul was finishing up his second missionary journey. He was returning back home to his home in Antioch in Syria.
- And he needed some rest. He'd been out on the road. He'd spent more than two years traveling around establishing these churches. He was in a grind. He was tired.
- He needed time to rest. And he spent about a year back in Antioch, where he came from, before he headed out again on his third journey. And so we pick up a few of the details about that.
- But essentially what he did was he left and went inland, went overland, to visit a bunch of the churches that he'd already established. Here's what was different about his third journey from the other ones. The first two journeys were all about Paul going and establishing churches, meeting, building new relationships, new converts.

In this one, he started going to the existing churches, visiting old friends. And so we see a lot of the same names that have already come up, pop up again. So one of the names is Priscilla and Aquila.

[3 : 39] These were a couple. They're actually super interesting. They had been in Rome, had come into contact with the gospel in Rome, but had been kicked out, ended up in Corinth, where Paul met them.

And they became partners in his ministry. And then they, after Paul had left, they went to Ephesus, to the church that Paul had started in Ephesus, and they became the leaders of that church.

And so they were kind of the kind of lay leaders of a small group of Christians in Ephesus. And so Paul was coming back to visit them. But before he got there, here's what we find out, is that a new preacher comes to town, and his name was Apollos.

So I want to pick up in verse 24. And we're just going to read a couple of verses and talk about it, read a couple of verses, talk about it. That's what we're going to do. So, verse 24, follow along with me. Now, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he only knew the baptism of John.

[4 : 53] He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, Achaia is Greece, where Athens and Corinth are.

And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. And when he arrived, he greatly helped those who, through grace, had believed. For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Okay, so, Paul's not back yet to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila are kind of holding the fort down, and Apollos shows up. We're told three things about Apollos.

First thing is, we're told that he is educated, he's eloquent, he's really gifted. He came from Alexandria, which is in Egypt. And Alexandria was kind of the hub of intellectual life.

If you know one of the seven wonders of the world was the library in Alexandria.

[6 : 07] And so, he came from there. In fact, there was a huge Jewish population in Alexandria at that time. They are the ones who translated the Old Testament to Greek, which we have used for our translations.

They had done a ton of biblical scholarship. In fact, most of the manuscripts we use, many of them came from Alexandria. In fact, Martin Luther speculated, he was the first one to speculate this, that Apollos, because he's learned, because of what we know about him, he may have been the one who actually wrote the letter to the Hebrews.

We're not sure. It's one of those great mysteries. We don't know who wrote that book. But Apollos is one of the best, is one of the best possibilities. So, he is, he's smart. He's educated.

But secondly, he's well taught, and he's spiritually fervent. He's a guy who has, like, he's compelling. When he teaches, people want to follow him.

He's got a spiritual life to him. So, he's useful to the church. It says that he was teaching accurately. But, the third thing we find out about Apollos is, he only knew the baptism of John.

[7 : 22] What does that mean? Well, that meant that he had only really been taught about John proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, that Jesus was the coming of the Messiah. In a sense, we could say this.

Apollos was living in the Old Testament. Apollos hadn't gotten the fullness of the New Testament image of Jesus yet. Now, it's likely that, you know, he knew about Jesus, and he may have known some of the details, but it's clear that he didn't know everything.

Let me just stop there. Isn't that fascinating? Apollos is being used by God as the one who is extending the church, and he doesn't even have the New Testament yet.

He may not have even read all four Gospels. Remember, those are like scrolls that people are copying and passing around. Most people don't know how to read at this point.

They're not all put together. This is 30 years after Jesus' death, and they still don't have all that together. You should count yourselves lucky that you might have two or three of these things sitting at your house somewhere.

[8 : 31] You might should read it. You know, we are infinitely better equipped than even Apollos was, and yet God is using him. Here's the thing.

Here's what's so amazing about Apollos is that this situation with him represents what a Gospel culture can really look like. Apollos was super gifted, super eloquent.

He knew a lot, but he didn't know everything. And so Priscilla and Aquila, they're like, this guy, you know, he's really smart, but maybe we need to help him out.

So they pull him aside, and it says that not only was he teaching some things accurately, but he needed to know more accurately the things of God. And so they pull him aside, and they begin to teach him.

Here's what's amazing. Because of that Gospel culture that is at work, he took this so humbly. There is not a sense that he somehow felt like his pride was at risk.

[9 : 35] Whoa, my reputation as being the big teacher guy. There is a humility to him that is a fruit of this Gospel culture that is being created in the church at Ephesus.

When I talk about a Gospel culture, one of the ways that I like to talk about this is that a Gospel culture is a place where you get treated better than you deserve.

You get treated better than you deserve. That's what it looks like to live in a Gospel culture, is that you're treated the way that God treats you, better than you deserve.

You know, being around churches, I've seen this happen a lot. There's been magnificent stories of redemption. A lot of them I really can't talk about. One of them that I can, a little bit, is one that I experienced in a church a couple of years ago.

There was a man that, you know, he'd had a long season of spiritual rebellion. It had begun to come out, not just out of his heart, but in his life.

[10 : 46] He had been, there was some infidelity with his wife, some substance abuse. He had not cared for his children well. And man, it was really tragic as the details and truth began to kind of tumble out of his life.

And he had to suffer some really hard consequences. But people in the church began to walk alongside him, began to treat him better than he deserved.

And over time, what began to happen was, that gospel reality and that culture began to seep down deeply in him. There was restoration that took place.

He and his wife began to be restored in their relationship to one another. He and his children began to be restored. And if you look at this family now, you wouldn't be able to see the depth of the woundedness.

The scars that are there have healed over. There are still scars. But they've healed. And there's new life and new vitality in them.

[11 : 52] Because what happens in a place where there is a gospel culture is that there is the opportunity for spiritual life to be seen. And we get just a glimpse of that with Apollos here.

And that's beautiful. You know, one of the questions that I think about a lot is, is grace and peace becoming a place where people are treated better than they deserve? That should always be a standard that we ask of ourselves.

But it's not just our church. It's your family. You know, are people in your family treated better than they deserve? Are your friends treated by you better than they deserve?

You know, we all want to be treated that way. The question is, do we treat other people that way? So, gospel culture is being seen here.

But there's also gospel doctrine at work. So, let's just keep going in this. So, look at chapter 19, verse 1. And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, so Apollos left and went over to Corinth, Paul was passing through the inland country.

[13 : 03] He was passing through visiting these churches. And he came again to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, No.

We have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit. And he said to them, Well, into what then were you baptized? And they said, Well, into John's baptism. And Paul said, John's baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one who was coming after him, that is, Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord, Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

There were about twelve men in all. Okay. So, Paul, Apollos left Ephesus. Peter came along, or, I'm sorry, Paul came along, came to town.

And what he found when he got there was this church that has a gospel culture, but there's some gaps in some of the disciples' lives. There's some things that have not quite fit together yet.

[14 : 07] And he sees it particularly in these twelve disciples that were lacking in some way. How did it get to be that there could be a church with a gospel culture, and yet gospel doctrine wasn't totally there?

I think what we're seeing is just the early days of this church, and Paul seeing, you know, some people are getting it, and other people aren't. Apparently, what Priscilla and Aquila were teaching hadn't filtered down to these guys.

And so, their conversation that he has with these guys shows two things. Here's what you need to see. First, they didn't know about the Spirit. Now, that doesn't mean they'd never heard of the Holy Spirit.

Apparently, these were people who knew something about the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit spoken of in the Old Testament. It's not that they'd never heard about it, but they had not heard about Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit came and appeared as the agent of God, as Christ's means of extending His kingdom to all people.

They hadn't known about Pentecost. And so, they were similar to Apollos, kind of living in the Old Testament. Jesus had come as the Messiah, but what did that mean now?

[15 : 22] The second problem was that they had only heard of John's baptism. John was saying, you need to repent. You need to turn away and to turn to Christ. But that, John wasn't baptizing people into Jesus, into the story, the full story of Jesus.

He was simply pointing towards Jesus. This is just like Apollos. Apparently, these guys had learned something from Apollos. And so, Paul took them, he baptized them into Christ, and he laid his hands on them.

And all of a sudden, when he does, the Spirit came down. What does that remind you of? Pentecost. They experienced a mini Pentecost right then.

We could say they, you know, Pentecost caught up with them. Or maybe we could say, John Stott says it the other way around. He says, they finally caught up with the Pentecost reality that was already happening.

Pentecost was already happening. But here's the reason for that. What's the purpose of that? Well, it's because, well, I'm going to stop. I'm going to go, I'll go back to that in a second.

[16 : 28] See, part of the beauty of what's happening there is that Paul is coming in and he's establishing this gospel doctrine. Truth. The truth of who Jesus is.

What Jesus is doing. And when you, when you marry gospel culture and gospel doctrine, things begin to happen. You know, the gospel doctrine is the truth of the Scriptures, which answers for us the central questions of life, right?

It answers the questions of identity. Isn't everybody talking about identity? Aren't we obsessed with our identities? But the Scriptures answer who we are, where we came from, why we're here, where we're going, what we ought to do.

All of those questions are found in, in this idea of the gospel doctrine because the message of the gospel of Jesus is what sets us out. That's what sets us going forward in life.

That's what, that's what helps clarify for us what our gospel culture ought to be about. You see, you can't have a gospel culture if you don't have gospel doctrine.

[17 : 40] You can have a bunch of nice people who get together and treat each other well, but that's not real gospel culture. There has to be a marriage between the truth of the Scriptures, the truth of the gospel that becomes realized in the culture.

What is that truth? It's that because of Jesus, something new can be born in you. You don't have to get treated the way your sins deserve.

It's the truth that we talk about that Tim Keller talks about. The truth of gospel doctrine is you are far worse off than you think you are. Every one of us, me included, we want to pretend, we put on nice clothes, we act nice to people, we try not to do bad things, we try to make ourselves up in all kinds of ways.

But the reality of our hearts is that we are far worse off than we think we are. But, because of Jesus, you can be far more loved and accepted than you ever dreamt was possible.

Than you ever dreamt was possible. You and I live in a world where you're constantly getting exactly what you deserve, but because of the gospel of Jesus, you no longer get what you deserve, you get what Jesus deserved that has been given to you.

[19 : 09] That's the best news ever. See, when you marry this gospel doctrine to gospel culture, something happens.

So, I want you to see what happens here. We'll close with this. Spiritual power begins to be unleashed. So, verse 8, so when Paul entered the synagogue, so all of this stuff about gospel culture and gospel doctrine, that gets Paul excited, so he goes and starts preaching.

That's what Paul does. He's preaching. So, he goes to the synagogue and for three months he spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But, when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

And this continued for more than, for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Let me just make a small comment about that, is that Paul takes his typical strategy.

He's going to go to the Jewish people, the religious people first, and he's going to preach to them until they finally get fed up with him and kick him out, which they did. And so, he went and he started talking to the Gentiles. And so, he went to this place called the Hall of Tyrannus, which was some, like, event venue, or maybe it's even a school, we're not really sure, but it's owned by this guy named Tyrannus, which does make you wonder, I mean, his name does mean tyrant, you know, is this the school of the tyrant?

[20 : 43] Is that kind of what we're supposed to see here? So, you know, if you're in high school and you feel like you're the only one who's had a tyrant as your teacher, no, you're not. The Hall of Tyrannus is there.

Sounds, and so, Paul spent two years doing this, preaching, trying to establish a church. Sounds familiar. He's doing right there what we're doing, renting somebody else's building, trying to build a church through the preaching of the gospel.

This is what we're doing. Okay, so during that time, though, tremendous growth happens. It says everybody heard about what was happening, and so something began to develop.

So, let me read in verse 11. God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.

Okay, let me just stop there. So, things are happening even such that like a handkerchief that Paul had touched then goes and heals people. There's a real strong Benny Hinn vibe going on in this.

[21 : 58] I don't know if y'all know who Benny Hinn is. Real strong Benny Hinn vibe. I, you know, I grew up in a church that was kind of, you know, you know, it was in sort of that world that the Benny Hinn of the world lived, and, you know, I remember seeing TV programs of these false preachers selling handkerchiefs that they had touched for, you know, 20 bucks for people, and there are all sorts of charlatans out there.

So, what's going on here? Well, a couple of things. The first thing is that this is descriptive. What you need to hear the tone of Luke's voice here in his writing, he's saying, yo, this is not normal.

This is not the kinds of things that happen to normal people. God is doing something here that is incredible and completely weird. Earlier in Acts, Luke told us about Peter as he was walking through the temple and his shadow would be cast on people who were lame and they would be healed.

And that too was descriptive. It's describing what God was doing through them. It is not setting up something that is normal. This is not the way that things normally go.

What is the purpose then? If it's not normal, why is God doing this? Here's why. This is really important. It's because God uses miraculous, abnormal things in order to authenticate, to validate the truth of Paul's gospel message.

[23 : 38] I don't know if you noticed, but each week, the past couple of weeks, the titles of my sermon have begun with the ends of the earth. We started in our series in Acts going in Jerusalem because this is the way that Acts is structured.

It starts with the gospel going in Jerusalem and then it expands to Judea, the area surrounding Jerusalem, and then it expanded further to Samaria, and now it is expanding to the ends of the earth.

And so the focus of Luke here is on the ends of the earth. So what's happening in this particular thing is that the church in Ephesus has become this kind of central, important church body for the sending of the gospel into Europe.

From Ephesus, Apollos goes to Corinth, other missionaries are going to be sent into Europe. This is a strategic location and what God is doing here is He's authenticating Paul's message so that it would strengthen that particular church for the mission that God had for it to go, to keep going further.

Every time that the gospel goes into a new area in the book of Acts, God accompanies that new area with these miraculous kinds of signs.

[25 : 07] And they are always just simply to authenticate and validate the message. So, how ought we to think about that now? Well, you know, I don't think we should expect to see that kind of thing now.

You know? The gospel has gone into our culture and so what we should, whenever somebody's trying to sell a handkerchief on TBN or something, what we ought to do is reveal that person for the charlatan and the false prophet and the wicked teacher that they are.

That's what we should do. We should show them for who they are. But because they are wicked, because that's not the purpose, it's not normative, but here's the thing.

This shows that there is a power dynamic that is at work here. There is a true conflict of power that happens. So, right after this, look at verse 13.

It gets weirder. Verse 13. Then, some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists, these are Jews who, you know, who had kind of, they pretended to have spiritual powers, they would, you know, there was a whole class of kind of mystical Judaism.

[26 : 24] That's kind of a big thing that pops up occasionally. Then some of them undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits.

Kind of like the guy we read about earlier. Saying, I adjure you by the Jesus that Paul proclaims. That's funny. Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva, that's an unfortunate name, were doing this.

But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus, I know. And Paul, I recognize. But who are you? And the man in whom was the evil spirit leapt on them, these false teachers, he mastered all of them and overpowered them so that they all fled out of that house naked and wounded.

You see, the tables have turned. Not only is the demon-possessed man naked and wounded like we read about earlier, now the people who are trying to use Jesus' name for their own monetary purposes.

They're trying to get money and fame for themselves by using Jesus' name. Tables get turned, they run out naked and wounded. Verse 17, And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, and fear fell upon them all.

[27 : 52] And the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also, many of those who were now believers came confessing. And divulging their practices. By practices, this is like magic and other kind of occult things that were common in Ephesus.

And a number of these who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found that it was, it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. So, this hilarious kind of conflict between these false exorcists and this evil spirit, it's really amazing.

But what happened was it just started this revival in the city. Because there was this conflict of powers, the power of God versus the false power of wickedness and evil.

It's fascinating because it showed that there was a, there was a true power that had arrived in Ephesus. There was a true gospel culture, it was married to a true gospel doctrine, and there came spiritual power.

[29 : 11] And all of a sudden, because this new power that had come to town, the other powers were trying to figure out what to do. Remember in Tombstone when Wyatt Earp kind of comes to power in Tombstone?

There's all kinds of nefarious, you know, evil guys, and they all then begin fighting against one another. They have to figure out whose side they're really on. That's what's happening. The power of God has entered into the room.

It is clearly the supreme power. Jesus is the supreme power, and now all of those evil powers have to respond. What are they going to do? That's what we saw in the passage Mike read.

The evil powers have to say, are we going to go against him? Are we going to run? What are we going to do? There's a new sheriff in town, you might say. And this kind of thing, so this is what is still happening in our world.

Now, mostly we don't see that in America because the gospel has kind of gone to all the corners of America, but you see it in other places. One place where you particularly see this kind of thing happening, this power struggle happening, is in, just over the last few years, we've had the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean where you have all of these Arab and Persian refugees that are crossing into Europe, and many of them into Greece, into the place where, into, and off the coast of Turkey.

[30 : 39] This place, Ephesus and Corinth, and you have these refugee camps. And I read about a story about this one Persian man, Persian meaning Iranian, and he was in one of these refugee camps and he came, they have all these Christian aid stations and he showed up at one of these Christian aid stations at six o'clock in the morning and he was visibly disturbed.

And he came in and he started talking to the Christian people there and he said, I don't know what to do but I've had this dream. I had this dream this man came and he stood into my dream and he said, I am the Alpha and the Omega.

I am the way to God. You need to follow me and I will show you the way, the truth, and the life. And he woke up and he came and he said, I don't know what to do.

I don't know who this person was. I don't know what they're telling me. I don't know how to follow them. And the pastor who was sitting there picked up a Bible and he said, do you have one of these?

And he said, no, I don't know what that is. And he said, well, it's a Bible. Let me show you from the Revelation at the end of the Scriptures and he read to them the passage where Jesus standing in his glory says, I am the Alpha and the Omega.

[31 : 58] And this man, this pastor was able to show this man who Jesus was, that he was the one appearing to him and the man was converted.

He gave him a Bible and he said, you need to hide this Bible because you'll get in trouble if the rest of your friends see this. And his response was amazing. He said, there is no one in this camp who has the power of the Jesus I just met.

He came back an hour later with ten of his friends who all wanted the Bible, who all wanted Bibles. See, we may not see this in our overly Christianized culture, although increasingly less Christian, let's be clear.

But there is a power struggle that is at work. Every time you have a gospel culture that is married to true and vibrant and robust gospel doctrine, it will show forth the power of Christ in that place.

And so one of the things we need to wrestle with is in what way might God use grace and peace in an encounter with the powers of this world. Will it be with some sort of social issues?

[33 : 14] You know? Opioid crisis. Drug abuse. Child abuse. You know? Racism. Maybe it's a spiritual, a deep spiritual angst like the materialism we see all around us.

The kind of drive to comfort. the greed that we see. I don't know. I don't know what God's going to do. I don't know what our story is going to be.

The question for us right now is are we pursuing the kind of gospel culture and gospel doctrine that are married together in such a way that we might follow where Jesus leads us as he tears down the forces of evil in this world to establish his eternal good and gracious kingdom?

Will we have the courage to follow that? Will we have the fortitude to press into a church that treats people better than they deserve?

That proclaims the gospel as it is given to us in Christ? Will we do it? That's the question we need to wrestle with.

[34 : 31] Let me pray for us. Our Father, we pray that you would give us the courage and the fortitude to press into the story that you have for us as a church. The only way that happens is if by each one of us individually resting in the gospel, seeing Christ lifted up, seeing this gospel make its way into our culture, our community, that we might be a place with a gospel culture and a gospel doctrine.

Help us, we pray. In Christ's name, amen. Amen.