

Paul in Ephesus - Miracles

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of June 1999. The preacher is Phil Millman.

His sermon is entitled Paul in Ephesus, Miracles and is from Acts chapter 19 verses 11 to 20.

Loving God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it teaches and instructs us. Help us to understand it now so that we may be better equipped to serve you in the days ahead.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, you may like to have your Bible open at page 903, is it? Acts chapter 19.

When I was in grade four, we went on a family holiday from Sydney. I was living in Sydney at the time. I went on to Victoria, primarily to go bushwalking at Wilson's Promontory.

[1 : 0 3] That was a great holiday. But one of the highlights for me would have been coming in to spend a couple of days in Melbourne because it's the first time that I can recall going to another capital city, another big city, and so on.

When we came into Melbourne, we did all the touristy things and in those days, Captain Cook's cottage was hot on the agenda and we visited that.

We saw the Maya Music Bowl, which was also hot on the agenda. That was good. And, of course, it wouldn't be a trip into Melbourne to do the touristy thing without seeing the hallowed ground, the MCG.

And we did all that by tram, I imagine. We went on a tram ride around the town. It was really good. The other thing that sticks in my mind when I came to Melbourne was the size of the city.

It was big. And my legs were really sore by the... or tired by the end of the day after travelling around Melbourne. Well, it's exciting to visit other cities and finding out about their cultures and that's the sort of thing we were doing when I came on this holiday.

[2 : 1 2] And in today's reading from Acts 19, we read about the Apostle Paul's work and ministry in the city of Ephesus. Now, today, Ephesus is just a ruin.

I've been there and it doesn't seem like much, especially if you're not into ruins. But Ephesus, like Melbourne... I wasn't into ruins when I went and visited Ephesus in 1986.

But Ephesus, like Melbourne, has a fascinating history and understanding some of its background will help us to understand this passage a little better. Now, see, you just turn on the map just to refresh us.

This is actually Paul's third missionary journey and this says Paul's second missionary journey somewhere. But Ephesus is on the west coast of Turkey and so on. And it was a central sort of area and it was a strategic place for the Apostle Paul to be doing God's work as it was the centre from which by road or by sea Paul could easily keep in touch with the young churches that he had already established in that area and around in Europe.

Europe's on the other side over at the Corinth and Athens site over there. So it was quite a central sort of area. Okay, thanks. Well, besides being the geographical centre for Paul's work, Ephesus was also a prominent centre of pagan religion.

[3 : 41] In it was this great temple of Artemis which was renowned as one of the great wonders of the ancient world. It was four times as large as the Parthenon which you've probably all studied in history at school.

That is, it's four times as large as the Parthenon in Athens. And this temple of, this great temple of Artemis was full of paintings and the like.

Inside was this larger than life-size statue of this many-breasted goddess that the Romans called Diana. Now, I tried to get a picture of it but I was too late to make an overhead of it because it's, or a mock-up of it anyway.

It's quite extraordinary. To some, this goddess Diana, she was a goddess of fertility. To others, a virgin huntress. Whatever though, this statue was worshipped by many people who came to the region of Ephesus.

And there were also a great number of magicians and sorcerers within the city who would have had books or letters with magic spells within them for performing magic.

[4 : 54] There were also, within the city of Ephesus, a number of silversmiths as well. They would have a lot of trade in selling replicas of this temple of Artemis and other icons for pilgrims who travelled throughout this city.

Because, as we've seen on the map, Ephesus was a major area. You'd have a lot of people coming in and out of Ephesus and they would be tourists in some respects picking up trinkets of the trade and so on.

So Ephesus, if you like, was a multicultural and very cosmopolitan city and a thriving place. Well, the culture, within Ephesus there's many cultures and some subcultures and one of the cultures that Paul would have been very familiar with was the Jewish culture and there was a Jewish group within Ephesus.

And in verses 8 to 10 we read that Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Now Paul's theme throughout Acts is to preach the kingdom of God. And here, in Acts 19, it's no different. He's telling his audience that the Messiah, that is God's anointed one that the people are looking for is the risen Jesus.

[6 : 23] Jesus is the one by whom we have eternal life. would be part of the message that he was arguing at that time in the synagogue, the Jewish synagogue.

Now this association with the synagogue lasted for three months and was brought to an end in verse 9 when Luke tells us when someone, sorry, when some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the way.

That is, they spoke evil about Christianity because they didn't believe that Christianity was the way. So what does Paul do? He leaves the synagogue taking with him the disciples that had been converted through his ministry and so on.

And we looked at some of those disciples last week. He takes those disciples with him to carry on evangelism, if you like, in the neighbouring hall which was a neutral ground for proclaiming the good news of the gospel.

Now this hall that he goes to is the hall of Tyrannus. And it was probably owned by a guy called Tyrannus. This is what the commentary sort of suggests.

[7 : 28] And this person perhaps lectured in this hall of Tyrannus in the cool of the mornings and when he would have people's attention. And in the afternoon this hall would possibly be free.

And Paul perhaps rented the hall and he spoke evangelistically to the people in Ephesus. Now this new outreach was effective for Paul because we see that over a two year period all the residents of Asia, Jews and Greeks heard the word of the Lord.

I often think that we should be working in partnership as Christians to proclaim the gospel in strategic places around Doncaster. I don't think that I'm not saying that we should ignore our common worship here.

That's very important and I think that's primary. But maybe as a church and as in partnership as Christians together we should be exploring ways in which we can share the gospel together outside this church building in and around Doncaster.

It's food for thought. Now the apostles work in Ephesus continues for two years and he was used powerfully by God because as I've just said Paul was an apostle.

[8 : 54] An apostle is an eyewitness to Jesus' work and has been chosen set apart by Jesus for the work as Paul was if you read in Acts chapter 9 you read about his conversion and his being set apart and so on.

Part of an apostle's credentials were signs wonders and mighty works as 2 Corinthians chapter 12 suggests. Now we read here in verses 11 and 12 of Acts chapter 19 that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.

Paul was the agent if you like but God was the one who was doing the work. Now Luke makes mention of the extraordinary nature of the miracles that take place here and we read that articles of clothing that had touched Paul healed people when they were taken back to them.

People were healed of diseases. People were exorcised of evil spirits. they are extraordinary miracles because Paul's clothes seem to have some supernatural power within them.

But because of Ephesus is probably the word preoccupation with pagan music and sorcery we see that God displays his awesome power through the apostle Paul and his clothing to show his absolute sovereignty over all things.

[10 : 27] And there is the sense though that what is going on here is a case of God meeting the needs of these people at their own level of understanding.

And now by these very means they were being taught that in Paul's God the God that Paul preached there was a greater power than they had ever known or seen before.

But we should hardly be surprised here by God's action. If you've read the Gospels you will notice too that Jesus performed miracles in a most extraordinary way.

Luke tells us the story of a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years and that is she's miraculously healed upon touching Jesus' cloak. There are numerous stories of people who are possessed as well with an evil spirit that are miraculously exercised or healed.

Now that Luke calls these miracles here in Acts extraordinary which is the word which sort of stands out in verse 11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul that he calls them extraordinary ought to make us wary of people today who claim to have special healing powers because they touch your handkerchief or they give it a blessing and all those sorts of things.

[11 : 57] Paul's miracles that occurred in Ephesus were extraordinary and happened to draw attention to God to make people stand and take note of God.

There are many frauds. There are many false teachers as Paul's been preaching about in the mornings through the letters of Jude. There are many false teachers around today who will try to tell you that they have something special, that they have special powers given to them by God.

Most often their work is centred on themselves for financial gain, for perhaps popularity and some other felt need. But it's not for God.

They're false teachers. And friends, be wary of people who claim to have these skills. To point out how extraordinary these miracles were, Luke tells us a story in verses 13 and 14 about some people who went around making a living by various kinds of powers, including the practice of exorcism.

We read in verse 13, Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adieu you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.

[13 : 17] These people, these Jewish exorcists, were ready to call on the names of any and every God to perform exorcisms. And often they recited long lists of names so as to be sure of including the right God in any particular case.

These Jewish exorcists now proceed to use the name of Jesus in an endeavour to rival the apostles' powers. They used the magic formula that we read here.

I adieu you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And the Jewish group that tried to perform this, we're told here that they were known as the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest.

Now that was probably a title they used for professional reasons in order to impress and to deceive their clients. And we can compare it in much the same way today that a modern quack will put the title of doc, doctor or professor in front of their name in order to gain some credibility and to be able to sell the products that they wish to sell.

Well these quacks here in verses 13 to 14, they then attempt to use the name of Jesus. But their attempts fail as they try to exercise a person with an evil spirit.

[14 : 44] We read in verse 15, the evil spirit said, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?

This evil spirit that is within this man challenged these exorcists right to use the name of Jesus. They didn't even know him.

Then the evil spirit in the man turned violent and it attacked them. Now I think that they would have been glad to escape only with the loss of their clothes and the wounds that they had.

And I think that these people perhaps discovered that no one can control or duplicate God's power. power. You see, they were calling on the name of Jesus without knowing who Jesus was, without knowing who he was himself.

The power to change people comes from Christ, not from people. You cannot put God in a box to use when you need to use him.

[15 : 57] So many people today only look for God in the supernatural things and think that he's not there when nothing's happening. A few years ago the Toronto blessing was popular amongst many people.

Many people as well hopped onto the bandwagon and went to the revival meetings that were held here in Melbourne and all around the world. Many went hoping for healing and blessing in all the ordinary things of life.

But the phenomena of this blessing, this Toronto blessing, has since lost its impact. And I wonder, and I often wonder, what has happened to those who tried to get God to perform a miracle for them?

What has happened to them? Have they grown in their faith? Or are they waiting for the latest phenomena to appear so that they again can get onto the bandwagon?

You see, when we become a Christian, it means that we profess faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. It also means that we continue on professing belief in Jesus and growing in our faith in all situations that we are placed in, not just when we want it to happen.

[17 : 16] Well, the story about the seven sons of Sceva and no doubt others like it would have become known among the Jews and the Greeks in the area.

And the effect among the people was twofold. First, fear was brought amongst them. In verse 17 we read, everyone was awestruck at what they'd seen.

This sort of reaction is only to be expected amongst people who are superstitious. The second effect in the second part of verse 17, the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.

The second reaction by the people was perhaps not as widespread as the fear that came over the people, but was more enduring. This is shown in the way that in verse 18 we read, many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices.

The extraordinary miracles that God performed through Paul and the incident involving the sons of Sceva helped the Christians to break the hold that superstitions had even on them.

[18 : 34] But it was a slow process for them. Pagans who had converted to Christianity were now changing their practices to think Christianly about situations.

They were learning to rely solely on God and their repentance is demonstrated in verse 19. We read, a number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly.

These books or letters or scrolls no doubt contained the magic formulas for which Ephesus was famous. The public burning of these books was, if you like, a final letting go of those things that had them in its grip.

They let them go. Before they became believers and even after they were believers, these books were to have an enormous influence on them.

Now, as more mature Christians, they see how futile, how evil, how sinful and useless these books are.

[19 : 39] The worldly value of the rubbish they burned was high. 50,000 silver coins. The average wage earner back then earned about one silver coin per day.

So as you can see, a lot of books were burned, weren't they? The result of all these things that have happened in Ephesus is that the word of the Lord grew mightily.

That is, more and more people were hearing the lordship of Jesus proclaimed. And as many gave their lives to Jesus as Lord, so the message about the gospel, the good news of salvation, grew in power.

In the sense that its effects were being increasingly felt both in Ephesus, within the city of Ephesus, and the surrounding areas. With the people who would be coming into the city, perhaps hearing Paul speak in the hall of Tyrannus, and perhaps being converted, going away, the gospel message is spreading, and the power of the Lord is having a big impact in those areas.

When these people in Ephesus became believers, God's spirit began to work on their hearts and enabled them over a process of time as well to change their behaviour.

[21 : 01] The same applies to us. When we become a Christian, as I said earlier, we put our belief and trust in Jesus. He, Jesus, is the means by which we are saved into God's eternal kingdom.

And as we continue on believing, God's spirit does amazing things to us as well. And there will be times throughout our Christian life when God's spirit calls us to clean up certain areas within our lives.

It doesn't happen all at the same time at that moment necessarily when you become a Christian, but it happens over a lifetime. People who have been Christians for 50 years have still got things to clear out of their lives and so on.

Well now, just as God called the Ephesian Christians to burn their books with magic spells and so on, I believe God also calls each one of us to get rid of those things in our life which can be stumbling blocks in our faith.

What sort of things can they be? It can be all sorts of things. I've just listed a few things which I thought might be worth drawing to your attention.

[22 : 22] I think one of the subtlest influences in our world today is the star guide that we read in the papers. I wonder how many of us here actually read them.

Who opens the newspaper? Who opens the magazines and looks at the star guide just for a bit of a joke? If you do, then stop doing it.

We often think that it is a harmless bit of fun. But how easy is it to get sucked into reading them and actually starting to rely upon them?

On a similar sort of situation, years ago, I had someone read my palm. It was just done as a joke. I didn't think anything more about it.

Except that they told me something would happen to me at a certain age. Now I began to worry about that. And it got to a point where it was more than I could handle.

[23 : 28] It was silly. Because someone had tried to predict my future. And it was a futile thing. And nothing came to pass of it.

But you become wary of these things and you actually start to rely on it. If you've had those sorts of things done, stop it. They're not good for your Christian growth. You do not grow as Christians if you start to rely on those sorts of things.

Get rid of them. Many of the magazines and novels available from the newsagent are trash. They are absolute garbage.

And I wonder how many dollars we would burn if we decided as a parish to have a public burning of some of those magazines and books that sit on our shelf. Many of those glossy magazines that you read, Dolly's and Cleo's and I don't know what the guys read, but I am a guy.

I should know, but I don't know what they read. Those sorts of things. They're just trash. And they are all about self-actualization. The advice that is offered in them is more often than not wrong.

[24 : 37] And the morals that are conveyed in them are certainly not in practice with Christian faith. Now, there are instances where it is right to read them.

And I think it's right to read them in order to help us understand how the secular world operates. To see what is going on in the life and so on. But it's wrong to read those sorts of things for guidance.

They're just junk. Get rid of them. You don't need them. All they do is they make you greedy. One of the other things which I think has had a huge impact on many people is music.

Last night, I went to a music trivia night for my youngest daughter's kinder. It was a great night. But they were playing songs. And the songs, they would stop the songs.

And there were 350 people there. They would stop the song at a particular point. And perhaps half of us or more would continue on singing the next line.

[25 : 41] Because music has been drummed into us over the years. Now, music's a great thing. Don't get me wrong. I love music. But some of the stuff that we hear on the radio is meaningless.

There's a lot of junk. That comes out. I'm an offender of it. I hop in the car. And the car radio is on. Because we don't like to not have some noise around us.

We get bombarded with songs that have such meaningless words. Why not, when we hop into the car sometimes, why not replace some of that radio music with a Christian music tape or a recent sermon or even the Bible on tape?

Why not replace it with something that will feed our mind and help us to overcome that trash which just gets fed to us daily through the media?

See, if we put those sorts of things on in our cassette player, in the car and so on, then they can be helpful to us as a Christian.

[26 : 43] They help us to grow in our faith and our understanding. Now, I realise that some of the things that I'm saying, they sound a little bit wowser-ish and so on. But our Melbourne today is just as superstitious, if not more, and as immoral as ancient Ephesus was.

There are many subtle things that we as Christians can get caught up in without even realising it. Think it's okay to go to the casino?

Next thing you know, you're sucked into it. If we become a believer in Jesus and we are living a life that is contrary to the Christian practice, then it's time we changed our behaviour.

That's what I'm suggesting. If you're not sure if something is wrong, then ask someone who you think will know. Often, I find, if you're feeling guilty about some particular thing, then maybe that's God's Spirit telling you to get rid of it.

Well, let me finish by saying that Paul's proclamation of the Gospel in Ephesus was to have a huge impact on the city over time. And we've seen one aspect of that today by the response of the people who turned to Christ.

[28 : 08] The result of their changed behaviour was a strengthened relationship and dependence upon God. What areas in your life is God calling you to change so that your relationship and dependence upon Him will grow?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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