

Scripture Reading:

Acts 19:8 “8 And [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”

"The Power of the Occult"

What we see before us in this morning's text are examples of God's power in the miracles of healing and deliverance and the power of the demonic forces in the attack on the sons of Sceva. My focus will be on the power of the occult with some warnings for us today, but I do want to say just a word about what Luke records here regarding those extraordinary signs & wonders surrounding the Apostle Paul. These have been abused down through the ages in many ways, and you would not have to go far in some channel surfing today to find a televangelist offering to send you a special prayer cloth for a modest donation.

I am going to spend more time on such miracles when we come to the account of Paul raising the young man who fell from a window after a LONG sermon, considering the power and abundance of these miracles and what they mean for us today. In the meantime we need to remember that there are two dangerous ditches on either side of the proper road to understanding Biblical miracles: On the one side are those who insist that real faith and power today must be accompanied by dramatic miracles. This certainly puts many in the same danger that the sons of Sceva found themselves as we shall see...

- But it also diminishes the real power of the Gospel where Jesus reigning as King of kings & Lord of lords brings glory to God's creation through His Body, the Church!

The other ditch, which those of us in the reformed tradition are far more likely to be in, is insisting that ALL miraculous events have ceased with the completion of God's revelation and the death of the Apostles. While it is true that God the Holy Spirit used many powerful signs and wonders to confirm the authority of the Apostles and authors of the New Testament Scriptures, there is no place where the Bible says He will no longer use such demonstrations of power.

- As we will learn this morning, real miracles require real faith and are fully under the control of the Holy Spirit and since both are with us today, we cannot deny the possibility of modern miracles.

With that balance in mind, it is also important to remember that these miracles not only confirmed authority but also demonstrated what it means for Jesus to be the Savior of the world and for the Holy Spirit to fill the earth with His Kingdom!

Pastor Lusk put it well at a recent conference where he reminded those in attendance that: The resurrection power of Jesus is going to transform God's creation: To reverse the fall!

- **The miracles of Jesus are a foretaste of the promised future renewal of creation.**
- **The miracles of Jesus do not violate the natural order, they reveal to us what the real natural order should be and what our future holds.**

-- For a moment of history Jesus fed the five thousand and at the end of time all of God's people will feast at the Lamb's great banquet!

-- For a moment in history Jesus healed the sick and at the end of time God will heal all our infirmities.

-- For a moment in history Jesus cast out demons and at the end of time Jesus will cast out Satan forever.

-- For a moment in history Jesus raised the dead and at the end of time God will raise the dead, and death will be no more!

- **Just as we have learned here in Acts that we must bring people to Jesus, so we must also remember how all of these signs and wonders point to the finished work of Jesus as well!**

And, since we are not yet at the end of time, we will continue to see the impact of the Gospel, The Way, on all areas of our lives!

- **We must also still be prepared to deal with the power of the occult and today's text gives us some sobering insights to consider!**

Luke first tells us of extraordinary miracles related to the Apostle Paul demonstrating that God has the power to heal the sick and cast out demons...

- **Luke then gives us an account that reminds us that the power of the occult is not to be toyed with.**

As we saw with Simon the sorcerer, who wanted to buy the power of laying on hands to bring forth the Holy Spirit, we now see some folks who want the power that they have seen surrounding the Apostle Paul:

13 "Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so."

Jewish exorcists were not uncommon in those days, and as can be clearly seen in a casual reading of the Gospels there was an extraordinary amount of demonic activity at this time in history. There are two good arguments for why we see so much at this particular time:

- **First and foremost, the nations had been deceived by Satan and Jesus had come to set them free.**

We learn in Revelation twenty that because Jesus is now reigning, Satan has been bound and can no longer deceive the nations. This does not mean that he or his minions give up without a fight and that brings us to the second reason:

- **The demons knew their time was short and were doing all they could to thwart the work of the Savior.**

We see the truth of how Satan is bound when they must submit to Jesus, the Disciples and now the Apostle Paul.

- **However, we also see in this account that their power is real and that they are not to be messed with if we are not walking in faith with Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit!**

These false disciples invoke the name of both Jesus and Paul without faith and Luke tells us what happens: 15 "And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

This could almost be funny if it were not so serious:

- **This demon knew that he must submit to the power of Jesus AND to those Jesus commissioned like the Apostle Paul.**

But these men who had no real faith had no such power over the demon, which is made painfully obvious by what Luke then reveals:

16 “Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

- **Seven to one would seem like pretty good odds, but not against the power of the occult!**

This demon gives the man he has possessed the power to overcome seven men, leaving them wounded and naked: They are defeated and shamed. There are two lessons for us today:

- 1) We must not treat the powers of darkness lightly!**

Our nation has been blessed by Gospel faithfulness and we often do not even think about those blessings. You do not see demons possessing people on a regular basis in our country, but this was not always the case...

- **And could well be the case again if we continue down the proud path away from the one true God that we are on today.**

In the meantime, we must avoid all matters relating to the occult: From something as simple as a Wigi board to a complex séance. If you want to study this matter more fully, you might want to read *The Light and the Glory* by Peter Marshal to see some of the real history of demonic activity in the Americas.

The second lesson is to notice the reaction to this event by those who observed what happened to these men: 17 “This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

- **God is glorified by this demonstration of Satan’s power!**

We know that it is often very difficult situations that bring people to the end of their own rope and lead them to cry out to Jesus... This is what we see here at Ephesus and the reaction does not just come from only unbelievers...

- **It also comes from believers who had not taken the commands of Jesus as seriously!’**

18 “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Again, we need to step back and see that here in Ephesus God is using the attack of a demon to spark a great revival... A revival in the true Biblical sense of that word!

- **What was the result of all this confession, repentance and penance?**

20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”

Yes, judgment does begin with the household of God...

- **When God’s people respond in faith & real actions, it changes the world!**

When we see the people of God much more serious about gathering on the Lord’s Day, confessing their sins and knowing God’s forgiveness. When they are more serious about learning how to better serve the Lord from His Scriptures, desiring to be nourished at the Lord’s Table and responding to the great commission...

- Then we will see the Word of the Lord grow mightily & the Kingdom of God prevailing in our day as well!
- Worship changes the world!

AND there is a very practical application for us in this passage as well...

- What do we need to burn?

Obviously, if any of you have any secret magic books that you are hiding at home, it would be good to have a public burning! What we need to understand is that this repentance, which seems SO obvious to us, was not obvious to these new converts at Ephesus. As we shall see next week, this was a city steeped in idolatry and much demonic activity. Please note that it is believers who respond by bringing out their magic arts and revealing their secrets, which destroyed their worth and then burning the remains...

- God used this demon and some scam artists to get their attention and they properly respond by repenting & turning from evil ways.

The application today needs to be heartfelt... I can find some easy places to step on a few toes, but each of us needs to allow this passage to bring us to point of evaluating things in our lives the same way these Saints did.

- We need to be willing to make some real changes, and they will most likely come at a great cost!

We don't know which silver coin Luke was referring to, but 50,000 of them is going to be BIG money in any age!

So what are some of the 'magic arts' that Satan can use today to distract us from the work of the Kingdom?

- One obvious problem that we all know is epidemic in our nation is pornography.

The advent of the printing press and Internet make it available in a quantity and quality that has been unknown in ages past & thus we must be especially on our guard. It is certainly not new to our age... Think of the paintings that no one will show that were in the homes of Pompeii. Being on our guard means that we must be willing to cast out the places where we are tempted and be ready to help one another with encouragement and accountability.

While men have to be especially careful, it is sadly no longer just a male problem:

- Today we have young women pursuing men in ways that we could not have imagined just a generation ago.

We have movies showing "real" love between ten or twelve year olds!

All of this must be countered with Biblical wisdom showing our young people what healthy relationships look like and the real joy of sex! They need to understand that it was God who made it beautiful and special and that when we try to take short-cuts to pleasure we end up destroying not only the real pleasure but the mind and lives of ourselves and others.

Men need to be reminded that Jesus set a very high standard for faithfulness and that Proverbs makes very clear that the wayward women's house is on the road to hell! The marriage relationship is one of the most important parts of God's creation designed to show His nature and love.

- Satan desires to destroy these relationships at all costs!
- Our response should be to destroy anything that he has given us as tools for that destruction, just as the Ephesian Saints burned their precious magic books.

We must also remember that Satan can be very subtle with his attacks...

Another place where we must be ready to resist the devil is with his much more subtle attacks on our time... We don't often think about the abuse of our time as sin, and perhaps we need to really focus in this area because we are a nation with more leisure time than any nation or place in history.

- **Work, even hard work is not sin!**
- **Being a sluggard is!**
- **God commands us to work six days, not five.**
- **God says that a man who does not provide for his family is worse than an infidel.**
- **God tells us that we are to love Him with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and strength!**
- **Meaning ALL the time.**

There is no place for breaks or time-outs in that command!

God commands parents to instruct their children in the home, when you are taking a trip, when you lie down and when you rise up, which sounds pretty comprehensive and time consuming. The world loves to talk about the importance of quality time with children, but I have never found that you can have quality time without lots of quantity!

- **Now, don't get me wrong, there is certainly places for rest and refreshment in the Lord's service.**
- **We are commanded to rest one day in seven!**
- **We are commanded to take vacations when you apply the principles of the Old Testament festivals to the New Creation.**
- **Hebrews tells us there is rest for the people of God**
- **And we must remember that Jesus said that His yoke was easy!**

So how do we balance these two seemingly conflicting concepts?

- **With Biblical wisdom and the willingness to always evaluate what we are doing, just as these Saints here in Ephesus did.**

When computer games came of age as our children were growing up, we looked at the balance between the time spent on those games verses the time spent reading as a good test.

- **The challenge of how to handle this wisely has certainly grown more complex as all the games gadgets have advanced.**
- **How many hours a week are too many hours spent playing games or watching sports?**
- **The Bible does not tell us a set figure, There certainly can be too many, or too few with Legalism!**

If I ask someone if they think they spend too much time on a particular activity it is usually not a good sign if they really don't have any idea how much time they are spending, or if it turns out they are spending much more than they think they are.

I am convinced that it is NO coincidence that many of today's games are specifically designed to require a great deal of our time!

Sure there are some with extreme violence or even occultic themes that can easily be rejected, but I am talking about seemingly innocent games that much more subtly just chew up incredible amounts of our time:

- **Time that perhaps is needed for some important Kingdom work!**

C.S. Lewis demonstrates his usual brilliance in discussing how Satan uses subtlety to undermine our walk with God in The Screwtape Letters.

I could go on & on with other examples, but as I said, this is a place where we need to allow the Holy Spirit to bring the conviction of sin upon our hearts. We need to bring out those things that must be confessed and destroyed:

- **Whether it is porn, drugs, quiet rebellion or whatever else might have us enslaved.**

The fact that these Saints in Ephesus suddenly realized that they had many sins to confess and even much material to destroy did not call into question whether they were Christians.

- **On the contrary, the fact that the Holy Spirit used this demon to bring conviction to their hearts is evidence of the real faith they had been given.**

There are many today who ask whether a Christian can be possessed with a demon?

- **The simple answer is that IF you are filled with the Holy Spirit and following Jesus, then it is not possible!**

However, it should remind us of the importance of the lesson we have seen for the past few weeks:

- **Harden not your hearts!**

I will leave you with this as a bottom line:

- **The best defense when it comes to avoiding demonic influences is having a great offense!**

Paul would certainly have had some of the events of this day in mind as he wrote the final words of his Epistle to these same Ephesian Saints:

- **May we be those who today take very seriously this admonition from the Apostle Paul...**

Ephesians 6:10 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. [direct or subtle attacks]12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

- **The Book of Acts is the story of how the Spirit of God fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus and may we be those who are always working with Him as the well-armed Saints we are called on to be!**

Communion Meditation: Exodus 12: “ 22 And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. 24 And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. 25 It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. 26 And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' ” So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. 28 Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ”