

Acts 19 v 11-20

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷ 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 honour. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ 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 fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

This morning we focussed on Mission based on the first few verses of Acts chapter 19, so this evening I am going to continue looking at the latter half of the chapter starting at verse 11.

Acts chapter 19 describes the tumultuous events of a few years in the life of the city of Ephesus; a place you can still go and visit in modern day Turkey. I went there a few years back and you can still go and wander down the streets lined with Temples, shops, and see where it was a bustling harbour, until sea levels changed leaving it high and dry.

Amongst the ancient ruins there is perhaps the first church signpost which shows a cross, pointing up an alley where some Ephesian believers might have met. However, very near it there is also an ancient sign for a brothel. Ephesus was a metropolitan trade centre and an important city in the history of the early church.

But this chapter is fascinating because it shows that Paul grew the church by preaching daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. One Greek NT manuscript adds the detail that he probably had to teach during the hours of the hottest part of day when most people would be asleep. Paul worked as a tent maker during working hours to earn his living and taught anyone who would come and listen in between. But gradually more and more Ephesians began to be touched by Paul's ministry until the kingdom of God took hold and the whole city began to react.

GK Chesterton said 'We do not want, as the newspapers say, a Church that will move with the world. What we want is a church that *will move* the world.'

Paul taught that gods made by human hands are no Gods at all, and when that teaching started making an impact on the way people spent their time and money, in other words, challenging the culture and economic system, riots broke out! The latter half of the chapter describes the power battle that broke out between crowds chanting 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' in opposition to the power of the Word of God who was touching hearts and healing lives through quiet spiritual revolution.

Wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, and people are invited to pray, there will be a reaction, both in the heavenlies and in the surrounding culture.

Paul was really aware of the Spiritual battle that was happening in Ephesus – in fact he wrote to them 'Ephesians 6:12 NIV. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

The front line of ministry is both amazing and messy at the same time. You might want to see extraordinary miracles, but be prepared for riots to follow.

We can be very tempted not to rock the boat. To not bother praying and keeping quiet about the incredible power of the Holy Spirit to transform hearts and minds and lives. But actually, the world is looking for hope. They want to see genuine miracles, but if we never ask for them, we won't ever see them. But they can bring up all sorts of challenges.

The first few verses of our passage challenge our rational sensibilities:

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Now why would Doctor Luke include such a strange sentence? How does he want his reader to react? With incredulity, or with faith?

Well he does point out that it is not Paul but God who does the miracles. Paul's job was to preach the Gospel to anyone who would listen. God did miracles on the side! And the kingdom of darkness began to be pushed back as evil retreated and lost its foothold in people's lives.

How do you feel about handkerchiefs and aprons being used by God to bring healing? Is it beyond the realms of possibility in our day? Well I believe God can do whatever he wants. If he spoke the stars into being, he can cure the sick with a hankie!

I have some personal experience of seeing people touched by God in miraculous ways over the years. I would like to see more and be able to report more stories to you, but the ones I have been able to confirm are wonderful and glory to God, people have been truly healed.

Mims is a very down to earth person, but she has faith to pray and as you know she is not afraid to go for it if she sees an opportunity. She can come and share her hankie story.

[Mims' testimony...]

My other friend Ruth also shared a testimony with me of a recent healing experience from their healing rooms ministry in Gloucestershire...

[Ruth's testimony...]

God is good!

Miracles also challenge our desire for control because we don't heal anyone, God does. Healing is not *magic*. As Luke is keen to point out in Chapter 19, if you think of Jesus' name like a magic totem or formula, you could end up taking a spiritual battering.

The forces of darkness are real but you cannot simply invoke the name of Jesus like a charm to bring healing and cleansing.

It is only by submitting to Christ that we receive the authority of Christ to cast out devils and set the captives free.

The seven sons of this Jewish priest Sceva thought they could simply add Jesus into their mix of potions and remedies.

But they were over powered. In other words their words lacked the power of a yielded life.

In it's blunt form the difference between Christian Ministry and sorcery is who gets the glory.

If you see a faith-healer who performs healing miracles and takes credit for themselves, that is sorcery. You can probably find them on Youtube, doing miracles in the name of Jesus, yet all the time, Jesus is saying 'I never knew you'.

True healing in the name of Jesus gives glory to God, and celebrates his power and authority.

Finally we see in this passage the power of Word and Spirit challenges us to renounce evil. A sense of awe descended on people in the city when they saw the power of God. One miracle can change an entire community.

People burned their sorcery scrolls because we need to acknowledge the true God, not any counterfeit powers.

When God comes in power it is challenging in so many ways.

But it is also liberating, healing and transformational.

A life touched by Christ is never the same again.

Unless we ask, we may not see it for ourselves.

So shall we ask now?