

“EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS IN EPHESUS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

August 15, 2021, 10:30 AM

Text for the Sermon: Acts 19:11-20

Introduction.

About now someone is thinking you are glad I am the preacher and not you. About now I am thinking I should have given this text to Pastor Mike.

Remember when people in Jesus' day asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth? One could ask can anything good come out of this text? What could this possibly say to me that could be helpful in my life today?

Those are OK questions to ask as long as you ask them in faith, believing the truth of II Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training in righteousness.

Remember also II Peter 3:16 when Peter says about Paul's writings that some things are hard to understand. Some things in Scripture are harder to understand than other things, some things require more effort, more study, more prayer.

When I approach any Scripture that seems difficult, challenging, not very applicable I pray what David prayed in the Psalms, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word. Give me understanding from your Word, Lord."

That's why we have a brief prayer for illumination before the sermon, acknowledging we are dealing with holy things and we need help. We need extraordinary help when dealing with extraordinary things. I have prayed, read, studied, listened, sought help, nothing is original.

Extraordinary things, 19:11-12.

We are dealing with extraordinary events here, this is not normal. This is very unusual.

Even as miracles go, these were extraordinary miracles. Handkerchiefs that heal, aprons that cast out demons, demons that cast out exorcists, people who practiced magic or occultic arts totally giving up their evil ways, the Word of God prevailing mightily. God is clearly up to something special and it is as relevant today as it was then.

Luke has set up a great contrast of power seen in the colossal failure of the sons of Sceva and the tremendous success of the apostle Paul. In this contrast we will see the reasons for why we experience defeat and victory in our lives as Christians and as a Christian church.

The Sons of Sceva, 19:13-17.

What a disaster. Instead of casting out the demon, the demon casts them out. This was their job, they were itinerate, traveling exorcist. Jews who wandered from town to town making

money through using spells and charms to supposedly cure sickness, telling fortunes. Sort of like medicine men.

And Ephesus was a center for the occult, for magicians, witchcraft, people who practiced the dark arts. Remember Paul's letter to the Ephesians when he wrote:

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

This was the sons of Sceva's kind of place, their turf. This failure on their part would not look good on the resume.

What was the cause of their failure? Three things.

First, the sons of Sceva failed because their faith in Jesus was a second hand faith.

Notice what they say, "I adjure you by the Jesus, whom Paul proclaims." They don't know this Jesus, they have just heard His name and they have seen what power Paul had when Paul spoke in the name of Jesus.

Their faith was something they had heard about, but not experienced. In II Timothy Paul describes these kind of people as having the appearance of godliness but without the power.

That's what got them in trouble with the demon, "Jesus I know and Paul I recognize, but who are you? By whose authority are you speaking to me?"

Second hand faith was their problem and it is our problem today and why we don't have victory in our lives over our sin and bondages. Many will say of course I am a Christian, I was born and raised in the church, I have always been a Christian. I know who Jesus is, I say His name. I can tell you some things about Him.

Is your faith second hand, from someone else, from your parents, your friends, the people at church, or is your faith first hand, you have made it your own?

Do you know Jesus? Do you have first hand, direct personal knowledge of Jesus? Do you have real, genuine faith in Jesus? Do you know the power of Jesus in your life, that same power that raised Jesus from the dead? Does your faith help you, make all the difference for you? Others have power, do you?

Second, the sons of Sceva failed because they thought Christianity was something you could take up when you wanted.

Notice what they did, they undertook to invoke the name of Jesus, when it suited them. The KJV says they took it upon themselves to take up the name of Jesus.

These exorcists were charlatans. They used and abused the name of Jesus, as though it was magic, and at their beck and call to use for their selfish and self-promoting purposes.

They separated Jesus from the pure teaching of His Gospel. They are not seeking to confirm the Gospel, to honor Jesus, to glorify God. They are obscuring Christ, not making Him known. They don't even know Him. They are using Jesus' name as a magical incantation for their own profit and benefit.

That is not Christianity. It isn't a religion of convenience, of your own doing. They treat it as something they control, they are at the center. They can pick and choose according to what pleases them. This and not that, here and there, now and then.

Is this your approach to Christianity? What part of what the Bible teaches do you like and what do you ignore? Do we come to God to use Him to fix our problems, to give us what we want, to get us through our current crisis, then we go back to running our lives? Is God our genie in a bottle? If He is there is a good chance you aren't a Christian.

Third, the sons of Sceva failed because they thought Jesus was an add on, an addition.

They were Jews and they thought they could do Judaism plus this Jesus Paul preaches. They thought they could add Jesus on like a rider on an insurance policy. They thought Christianity was something you could have without giving anything up, without laying anything aside.

This is how many people treat Christianity today and its why they have no power. They are trying to do Christianity without any sacrifices, no death to sin, no radical transformation. They want a cheap grace that costs them nothing. My way plus Jesus. Like going into the religion store and asking for just 10 pounds of Jesus, please.

They had no interest in true religion, or of turning from their false religion. They remained Jews, just wishing to add Jesus to their bag of tricks. They named the name of Jesus, but didn't turn from their sin.

I remember the leaders at the Lighthouse Mission in Bellingham being approached by the city of Bellingham to help with the homeless problem. They wanted the Lighthouse to help but leave out Jesus. They didn't realize that is why the Lighthouse is effective, because of Jesus. That is where the power is, where the help and hope is. You can't solve the world's problems without Jesus or by treating Jesus as just another useful idea or good person.

When a person is trying to live the Christian life with second hand faith, with a convenient Jesus who you just add onto your own life, you have no center of authority, no power outside yourself. When you are wrestling with principalities and power, Satan will just laugh at you, second hand faith will fail you.

So now let's consider the contrast in the apostle Paul.

The apostle Paul, 19:11-12.

What a contrast he is, the exact opposite of everything we have just seen.

First, Paul's faith was not something he took up, but something that took hold of him.

You remember how it happened. Paul was minding his own business, which at the time was killing Christians, when God knocked him off his horse on the road to Damascus and took hold of him. Paul didn't take hold of Christ, Christ took hold of him and humbled him and convicted him. What does Paul say about himself, "I am what I am by the grace of God."

Paul starts many of his letters with a clear statement: Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel by God.

Can you say that about yourself, that God has taken hold of you? Have you felt the hand of God on your life? Are you clear you are His and not your own, you have been bought for a price?

Second, Paul never just added Jesus onto his life.

Paul didn't hang onto his Judaism, it was never Judaism plus Jesus for him. What does he say in Philippians.

Philippians 3:5-8 ... circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

And to the Corinthians he says:

I Corinthians 2:2 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul surrenders everything to Christ and Christ alone. And for Paul that was the center and source of his power. He cares nothing about being Jew nor Greek, Republican or Democrat, or which side of the current issue of the day everyone is on. How about for the rest of the month we use our social media accounts to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Third, Paul was not master of Jesus, Jesus was his Lord.

Paul didn't know someone else's Jesus. As he says, "I know whom I have believed." There is nothing second hand about Paul's faith.

He lived a life of complete surrender, his life, his plans, his future, whatever happened.

Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle, a new person, a changed person. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and with the power of God. So much so that even his handkerchiefs and aprons had power to heal and cast out demons. Extraordinary.

Why did that happen? Remember miracles are never the primary thing in Scripture. God uses the power of miracles to confirm the authority of His servants, whether Moses at the Exodus, or Elijah and Elisha as the first of the prophets or Jesus and the apostles.

God does this with Paul to prove he is a true apostle of Christ. This was so people would believe his teaching, even people who didn't see or hear him, but touched a piece of his clothing.

Notice God was the one working the miracles through Paul. Paul never called himself a miracle worker or a healer. Paul is the instrument. God is the author, God gets the glory.

Application and conclusion.

So how does this apply to us? How would you characterize your life? We all have problems, many areas of struggle, spiritual battles and spiritual bondages. We have problems in our personal lives, we still deal daily with besetting sins. We all desire victory, joy, satisfaction. But too often our lives are characterized by failure. Satan seems to be winning. Are we victorious or defeated?

What can we do? Where is the hope and help?

Let's learn the lessons of the sons of Sceva and the apostle Paul. Let's be like the people of Ephesus who saw what happened and took it to heart. They saw the real power of darkness and evil and they saw the power of God which is greater. They saw the judgment of God and were moved to a holy reverence for God.

Of all the extraordinary event in Ephesus this is the most extraordinary. This is greater than all the other miracles.

The power of a changed life comes when sinners repent and show the fruit of their repentance with a dramatic turning away from sin and temptation to sin.

This is authentic, radical transformation, when someone turns from their evil and wicked ways, when someone totally renounces their sin and sinful past.

Why does Luke mention the value of the books? By their great value he is showing how real their repentance was, that it was not just verbal, but tangible.

They are doing the only thing you can do with sin, make a clean break, a clean cut. You can't be like Lot's wife, casting a backward glance, with a lingering or worse yet, longing look at sin.

Part of our marriage vows include the statement, “Forsaking all others.” The same holds for our covenant with Jesus, “Forsaking all others.” Forsaking everything and everyone else I have trusted in.

I get the reports from Dustin Leland’s parents from Haiti, and they frequently mention witch doctors who come to faith in Jesus and cleanse their homes of everything related to their past satanic activity. They renounce it all.

Give up idols, give up what you trust in, give up old ways, old habits, things that keep pulling you down. Whatever does not glorify God, let it go, in the name of Jesus.

Show a holy indignation with sin, a holy anger, and cast it all away into the consuming fire of God’s righteous judgment.

Whatever is a cause of sin to you, get rid of it. Delete apps, get rid of videos, books, magazines, certain entertainment choices, stop subscriptions, whatever your source of temptation, whatever causes you to sin against the glory of God. Show your love for Jesus by your desire to not return to what leads you from Him.

We all know the power of temptation and how weak we are, and how often we return to sin we confessed, renounced and hated. But if we haven’t cut it off or gotten rid of it, we return to it.

Would you like this new life, new power, victory over what has you in bondage, has made you feel guilt and shame? Burn your idols, burn your lust, greed, anger, selfishness.

Repent and believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t trifle with the name of Jesus, it is the name above all names, the name at which every knee will bow, every tongue confess.

We especially see the power of the name of Jesus when those least likely come to faith, when those most opposed or most involved in darkness, come to the light. This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to give us victory over sin and darkness and death.

19:20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Along with all the extraordinary things that happened, the Word of God increased and advanced and prevail in no ordinary way, but extraordinarily, mightily. The Gospel spread and was widely believed by many. There was an increase in godliness and the name of Jesus was extolled, meaning praised, honored, made much. Make much of Jesus and He will make much of you.

May the Word of God grow in you and prevail mightily in your life. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.