

Acts 19:8-20

“God’s Word Brings Revival”

The book of Hebrews tells us, *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*¹ Think about all the truth contained in just that one verse concerning the word of God. It’s alive, it’s powerful, it’s sharp, piercing, dividing & discerning. It cuts through excuses, self-justification, attempts at manipulation or deception... It divides the emotional from the eternal & cuts all the way down, discerning even the thoughts & intents of the heart.

There’s no other book throughout all of human history that claims the capacity & contains the reality to do these things. You might say of another book, “It really changed my way of thinking.” Or perhaps, “This book changed my attitude about ____.” But the Bible (the word of God) doesn’t stop at changing thoughts or checking attitudes, it transforms the human heart. Cuts deep into the soul, exposes all that is wrong & then manifestly makes us different. Changes us from the inside out. It ignites faith *w/in* us, pours life *into & through* us... It has this surgical/spiritual kind of capacity to take our heart of stone & give us a heart of flesh. To take us from dead in sin to alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Bible goes far beyond words on a page. The words are electric, overflowing w/life & power. Jesus said, *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”*² Peter put it this way, *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,”*³

The word of God contains the power to bring revival, renewal & times of refreshing. & That’s the exact impact we see in the city of Ephesus in our text today. So much so that by the time we reach Vs 20 we read these words (look w/me).

Vs 20

There was just a great work that God was bringing to pass through His word. There was real *revival* taking place. & I know that the word “revival” might sound sort of old school to some of you, kind of “archaic” or old fashioned. But it’s the truth of what was taking place here. There was just a real advance of the kingdom of God, & at its root was God’s Word.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Heb 4:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 6:63]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Pe 1:22-23]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God was just really encountering people through His word as it was preached & read & understood. Their lives were being transformed, they were achieving victory over temptation, leading lives of consecration & the work of God was spreading like a “positive pandemic” 😊. (Though I know that’s a counterintuitive thing to say, the point is that people were getting serious about being right w/God & impacting/influencing others to do the same).

But what we’re looking at today is, what led up to this result? How did things get to this point? & What we’re going to see is #1 *A Dedication* to God’s Word, #2 *A Confirmation* through God’s Spirit, #3 *A Consecration* of lives (a renunciation of sin) & #4 The Believers made a *Separation* from their past lives. Now that doesn’t mean that these are the exclusive ingredients that make for revival, but we certainly see them here...

Vs 8-10

So we’re seeing that here in Ephesus, Paul’s ministry began w/his normal pattern. He went into the synagogue & spoke boldly, reasoning & persuading concerning the things of God... He would speak *theology*, reason *prophetically*, demonstrate how these things foreshadowed what was fulfilled in Jesus *Personally*... What is a little different is the amount of time he continued to do this. Typically; it wouldn’t take too long (perhaps 1 or 2 visits) before some of the Jews would get irate w/him, & reject his message; but here he was given audience for 3 months!

You may recall that when he came to Ephesus initially, he entered this synagogue & he was fairly well received. They wanted him to stay, but he needed to get to Jerusalem, so he said he’d return should the Lord will. Well, here he is & he’s ministering boldly, sharing Jesus unapologetically. & He did this as long as the door remained open. But eventually (as per usual) some of the Jews who had significant influence over the synagogue drove him out.

Why? Vs 9 tells us that it was because some were “hardened & did not believe”. You’ve heard, “The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay.” Both subject to the same thing, yielding 2 different results. The same holds true w/the human heart & the message of the gospel. We can all sit here today & listen to the same message. Some of you will open your hearts, become softer & more receptive to the message, perhaps give your life to Christ & allow Him to transform *your* heart through His redeeming love/grace, no different than He has countless others. However, some of you may sit here & kind of close off your heart, not really want to hear it or respond appropriately to it. The danger in that is a desensitizing, a hardening of your heart that can eventually lead to rejecting Jesus altogether.

That's what happened here. & If you reject the *message*, you don't want anything to do w/the *messenger*. & So as they began to speak evil of "The Way" (that is the way of Christ, what it means to have life *in* Christ, being set apart *to* Christ), he departed & took the disciples (those who wanted to learn more about Jesus, the new covenant of grace, the power of the Holy Spirit etc.) w/him.

We mentioned last time, he didn't have time to waste arguing w/people who weren't interested. He focused his efforts on making strong disciples. (You might write it down so you can read it later, 1 Ti 6:3-5.)

Evidently, he rented (or perhaps it was given to him to use) a lecture hall of sorts, the school of Tyrannus. Other than his name here, we know nothing about him. His name means "Tyrant" so perhaps he was a tough teacher! ☺ But according to another ancient text he met from 11:00 am to 4:00pm. **Now, that would be consistent w/the fact that the culture in that part of the world would typically work a split shift. They'd work from about 7:00-11:00 a.m. & in the heat of the day, they'd take a siesta (or afternoon break) till around 4:00 & work till around 9:00.**

We also know that Paul worked to support himself while he was in Ephesus so it would also coincide w/his work schedule in the same way... When everyone else went home, Paul went to work teaching & reasoning through God's word... Not in the creature comfort of climate control & comfy chairs, but in the heat of the day in a hot, sun blazed lecture hall. Not for 45 minutes once or twice a week, but for 4-5 hrs. 6 days a week! (Assuming they took the Sabbath off).

& This went on for 2 more years! Talk about a dedication to discipleship, a dedication to teaching & receiving God's word! He was equipping the saints for the work of the ministry! This would amount to well over 2,000 hrs of Paul pouring God's word into these people! It's no wonder the work there was so broad & effective! Paul was eager to *teach* & the people were eager to *learn*! They were willing to sacrifice comfort & convenience so that God's word might take root & bring forth fruit in their lives...

Think about how much time we commit to being trained in things we want to excel in. Be it a trade/profession, a hobby or interest, maybe self-defense, fitness or some kind of sport. Now compare that to how much time we train to excel in the things of God... How much work do we really put in that we might know Jesus, understand His word & minister effectively to others? These people were putting in work, sacrificing time, making God's word a priority & God was honoring it!

The result? “All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews & Greeks.” (You might jot down 1 Cor 16:5-9). Now, when we read “Asia”, don’t think of China/India, think the ancient Roman Province of Asia Minor.

If you lived in that region, you couldn’t escape the work of God’s word, you were gonna hear about it. How so? Was Paul out pounding doors? No. Did all of Asia make their way through Paul’s school? No. (Btw, how would like a 2 yr degree in ministry from the apostle Paul 😊)! The implication is that these people were putting into practice the things they were learning! They were going out into their workplaces, into the marketplace, into their schools, villages or neighborhoods & sharing the message!

Listen; what’s the point in learning it, if you’re not going to do it? Remember, discipleship isn’t found in *knowing* God’s word, but in... *doing* God’s word.

& I’m just tell you, that that’s *exactly* the way God wants things to work right here in *this congregation!* You come here (& that’s wonderful), God *meets* you, *ministers* to you, works transformation & brings healing, wholeness & times of refreshing to your life. **But listen; it’s *expected* that you will then take those things that you’re learning out into the environment, into the arena of your everyday life reaching areas that I myself or the other people here never could! It’s just as Paul taught when he wrote to the Ephesians.** Let’s look together **Ephesians 4** (Vs 11-16.)

When we each do our part, the net effect is (did you see it there in Vs 16?) “growth of the body”. Both spiritually/numerically, more people will be reached if we simply take & share those things that are shared w/us & that we’re learning. People need the good news. “God loves you, Jesus died *for* you & rose again 3 days later so that you through faith in Him would receive forgiveness of sin & new life, everlasting life...” There was dedication to discipleship, to knowing & growing in the word of God.

Vs 11-12

Dedication to the *word* of God, but we also see confirmation through the *Spirit* God. Miracles were taking place. You may remember that I told you that Ephesus was an epicenter of magic in the ancient world. (We’ll see more of that in a minute), but here God is exposing the lies of the wicked one by bearing witness to His word through miraculous works...

Don’t you just love this phrase in Vs 11, “unusual miracles”? 😊 Quick question: Is there another kind? 😊 I thought the whole premise of a miracle was something “unusual”, is there a “*normal*” kind of miracle?

Be that as it may, if there be a standard norm, Luke let's us know, that's *not* what was happening here 😊! For example, even the handkerchiefs (more literally the sweatbands) & aprons would be brought from Paul's body to the sick & the diseases would leave them, if they were demon possessed, the demon would leave them. (Again, being an epicenter for sorcery, demon possession was not altogether uncommon).

But I would have to concur upon reading this, that it's not "normal" for someone's sweatbands to bring healing or demonic deliverance to people! This was pretty radical! There was Paul, working during the day, he's got his leather apron on, sweat bands around his wrists, his forehead & all, & when he takes them off, people are snatching them up & taking them to their sick friends & people are being healed!

Pray tell, what's going on here? Well, one thing we know is that God refuses to be boxed in. As if He's confined to doing things one way & no other way. As He Himself has said, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'"*⁴

God evidently likes to do things in new & different ways. What then is our take home? We'll *receive* whatever is proven to be from the hand of God. But we *pursue* only that for which we have a Biblical pattern. Someone comes to you & says, "Look what God has done!" *Ok, great. Maybe God did it, but do we see the biblical pattern for it? Then we won't pursue it, we'll receive it, but we won't make a pursuit of it. Things get weird that way. Let's stick to what we do know (as found in the word of God), rather than pursue something we don't know. What I'm looking for is life transformation...*

We'll concede to the fact that when God is moving, sometime unusual things (dare I say "strange" things) happen. It can be hard to discern, is God doing this? Is man doing this? Is the enemy trying to deceive... I'm just being honest, it can be hard to discern. That's why it can be dangerous to pursue strange phenomenon. *What we're look for is the fruit that it produces. Did it make you stronger in your walk w/God? Did it draw you closer & make you more committed to J.C. Are you walking in a manner that's more holy & glorifying to God & His work in your life? Then great. But we don't seek strange phenomenon.*

Now; it kind of reminds me of the woman w/the issue of blood in Matt Ch 9.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 55:8-9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

She was persuaded that if she could only touch the hem of Jesus' garment that she would be completely healed after suffering for 12 yrs. & losing everything at the hands of physicians. So she made her way through the crowd, dropped to her knees, reached out & touched the hem of His garment & guess what? She was completely healed.

Question; was the garment of Jesus infused w/power? No. All kinds of people were brushing up against Him. But it was a point of contact for her that "activated" her faith. She went from believing God *could* do it, to God *would* do it... *now*. This is similar in that there was nothing magic about Paul's sweatbands, they were probably kind of gross 😊. But even in that, there were all these "mystery religions" in that area where everything had to be clean & white... God's rebuking all that kind of thing. He's bringing healing & deliverance through dirty ol' sweat bands. But it's a point of contact for people by which their faith is released & God is honoring their faith... But again, let's remember, this was "unusual". This isn't common on God's "to do" list.

What *is* common is for Him to work through the hands of those who are His. It's significant that we read *not* that Paul was doing this, but that *God* was working through Paul's hands. God is always on the look for hands to use, searching for someone to show Himself strong on behalf of. Offer Him your hands, let God use your life...

Now; as you might imagine, seeing what's happening, there were some others who wanted to try & get in on the action, capitalize on the movement...

Vs 13-16

I would imagine that Luke wrote this portion w/a smile on his face. Because to be honest, this is kinda funny! & Time forbids us to talk in depth about it, but though today we'd probably label a person w/some kind of disorder (of which some are no doubt legit), the truth is, demonic possession isn't some ancient mythology of the unlearned, it's a reality!

But seeing the "success" that Paul was having through the name of J.C. there were some itinerant, kind of roving Jewish exorcists who traveled around, seeking to deliver people through superstition & ceremony. They thought they'd imitate (to the best of their ability) Paul's pattern. They heard him speak of Jesus (& that seemed to do a lot of good) so here they go, right?

The problem of course is 2nd hand knowledge, rather than personal relationship. The power isn't in His proper name, it's the whole of who He is! & That power is extended *to/through* me (or you) through a personal connection/relationship w/Him.

I can watch medical shows & gain a 2nd hand knowledge, but I'm no doctor. I can watch crime shows, that doesn't make me a forensic analyst or criminal profiler... I can hear about Jesus, that doesn't make me a Christian or give me any kind of "access" to His power. I could go to another country & say, "In the name of the President of the U.S." & make some demand, they'd laugh me to scorn! Why? Because I have no relationship w/him, no *authority* from him.

Now listen. There are many people, perhaps even here today, who if they died today would not go to heaven, they'd perish in hell (& I know that's strong language). Not because they're unfamiliar w/church, or aren't morally upright. But because they have no personal relationship w/Jesus. They only know, "the Jesus whom the pastor preaches", or "the Jesus my spouse (or friend) believes in". They haven't received J.C. for themselves...

These guys thought they could use the name of Jesus no different than Paul. But the name of Jesus isn't a magic formula... So the demon looks at these guys & is all, "Jesus I know" (the word is, "to know experientially") he knew exactly who Jesus is. "Paul I know" (the word is, "to know cognitively") he was familiar, aware of Paul. "But who are you?" (That's not what you want to hear...) Evidently, demons know the names of their enemies, but don't waste their time familiarizing themselves w/someone who's not a threat. Do demons know your name?

Because they weren't connected personally to Jesus, they had no authority from Jesus & they found that out the hard way! This guy leaped on them, overpowered them & prevailed against them. Sent them running, beaten, bruised & naked out of the house!

This would become another sign as to the power of & need for Jesus (btw, it's no coincidence that the book of Eph contains more information on spiritual warfare than any other Paul penned).

Vs 17-20

Vs 18 is *consecration*/renunciation of sin & 19 is complete *separation* from their past lives. We're told that they were believers, but yet like us, many of them were still dabbling in some secret sins, doing some things they ought not & they were coming clean! As David wrote in Ps 32, "*I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*"⁵ There's something freeing about transparency & opening up for accountability.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 32:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The proverbs tell us, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."*⁶ That's what we have happening here. God is just stirring these people toward righteousness & a reverent fear for the holiness of who He is.

Realizing how serious it was, they wanted nothing to do w/the misgivings of magic or the former life that they'd had before Jesus. They just kept coming & coming, separating themselves entirely from that life, burning books that contained spells, incantations & charms. We might say that they were burning bridges to their past.

Now; you may not have a book of incantations or spells (though you might). But maybe the Lord is stirring you to separate yourself from those things you have lingering around from before your time w/Jesus. Don't sell it, flush it down the toilet. Don't give it to someone else so it can do damage to them, pour it down the drain, put it in a burn barrel, delete the images entirely, you get the idea.

Doesn't matter "how much it's worth". These guys wanted it gone, 50,000 pieces of silver, different people say that's worth different amounts, let's just say, "a lot". Is it worth it to follow Jesus? Salvation is free; sanctification, discipleship will cost you. What's it worth to you? God help us to be more mindful of the eternal perspective. We used to sing the song, "You can have all this world, give me Jesus." Do we really mean that?

What kind of cargo is the Lord telling you to toss overboard? Be done w/it, be separate from it? Maybe nothing, maybe a few things... But when they burned the bridges to their past, the word of the Lord grew mightily & prevailed. So, let's pray & echo the words of David, who said, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*⁷

Prayer Points:

God that's our prayer. So many times we try to hide things, even from ourselves, how much more do we deceive ourselves into trying to convince ourselves that maybe You don't know or notice. But we confess now, we know that You know. Show us O God, & lead us individually, as a body in the way, everlasting. Spark revival, renewal, may Your word & Your work branch out from this place in a great way to the glory of Your name.

& If you haven't received Jesus. You're familiar w/Him, but don't really know Him. God loves you, don't harden your heart, open your heart & receive Him today.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 28:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 139:23-24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.