

The powerful name of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 01] Well let me add my welcome to Willie's and we come now to our Bible reading and you will find that in the book of Acts. In the New Testament Acts chapter 19, that's page 928 of our church Bibles.

And we begin the first of our three week series in this section of Dr. Luke's second great book. A book that was really written to give us certainty about all that Jesus Christ did after he rose and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

So Acts chapter 19 and we begin reading verse 1 here, the word of the Lord. And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

There he found some disciples and he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, no, we've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

And he said, into what then were you baptized? They said, into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him.

[1 : 19] That is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them.

And they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. They were about twelve men in all. And he, Paul, entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

This continued for two years so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul.

So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick. And their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.

[2 : 43] Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?

And the man in whom was the evil spirit leapt on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house, naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks.

And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.

And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them, and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word. Well, please do turn in your Bibles to Acts 19.

[3 : 54] Acts 19. Acts 19. A passage that's really all about the powerful name of Jesus Christ.

Do you lack certainty concerning the things you've been taught about Christ and his power? Let me tell you about a young man called Lewis. Lewis used to come to my last church down in the very south of England.

He was a very nice guy. He would come to church regularly on Sundays and to the small groups during the midweek. He loved doing all sorts of different activities with his life.

He was an incredibly hard worker in his job. He did lots of commendable things. A really good guy. But as I got to know Lewis, it didn't take long for me to see that he was completely disinterested and seeing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ advance.

Lewis couldn't care less about serving in the church and joining in with its corporate ministry, doing his bit to see the name of Jesus proclaimed around the local area.

[5 : 07] Lewis was an apathetic passenger in church rather than an active partner in the gospel. And one day we went out for coffee and in my rather usual, sensitive style, I asked him a few rather pretty pointed and blunt questions.

And you know, it didn't take long for me to see what his problem was. It was clear from the way he answered me. And when I asked him, what do you think about the Lord Jesus? Here was what his problem was.

His Jesus was too small. The Jesus that Lewis believed in was far from being the Jesus that Luke describes for us here in this book, the book of Acts.

The Jesus that Luke tells us about in this book is the risen, ascended, all-powerful, all-sovereign, majestic Lord, risen and ascended, who sovereignly spreads the news of his victory over all the earth, all the nations through his spirit-empowered people, the church.

The Jesus that Lewis believed in was just a pale shadow of the real Jesus. And that is why Lewis came to church and he never got up out of the pew to serve.

[6 : 18] That's why he was so apathetic. He couldn't care less. What about you? Is your Jesus too small? Are you like Lewis?

Is the Jesus that you believe in the real Jesus that Luke tells us about here? Maybe you lack certainty about the power of the name of our Savior. Well, if that's you, then Acts chapter 19 is precisely what your soul needs to hear this evening.

For in Acts 19, Luke records for us what happened when the name of Jesus arrived in the city of Ephesus. Three times Luke makes a point of highlighting that.

In verse 5, the name of Jesus. Verse 13, the name of Jesus. In verse 17, the name of Jesus. And this evening what I want us to do is I want us to look at this passage under four scenes.

Imagine four fight scenes. Where the name of Jesus comes up to fight against some sort of an enemy or a barrier to the advance of the gospel.

[7 : 20] Scene 1, verses 1 to 7. The name of Jesus versus the ignorant. Scene 2, verse 8 to 10. The name of Jesus versus the insolent.

Scene 3, verse 11 to 17. Scene 3, verse 11 to 17. The name of Jesus versus the imposters. And scene 4, verse 18 to 20. The name of Jesus versus evil ideology.

And what we're going to see is in each scene, the name of Jesus trumps and triumphs. And the gospel of the kingdom advances despite all barriers and all hostility.

Let's look at scene 1. The name of Jesus versus the ignorant. The name of Jesus transforms those who are ignorant of the true and full gospel.

Please look at verse 1. And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

[8 : 19] There he found some disciples. So Paul comes to Ephesus and he counters 12 of these men whom Luke calls disciples. And let me tell you, much ink has been spilt by commentators in trying to figure out, you know, whose disciples were they exactly.

And we can't be sure. Some suggest that these 12 men are the fruits of the early ministry of Apollos. Who came to Ephesus earlier on, back in Acts 18, verse 24.

But that doesn't convince me. Because these 12 men, as we shall see more in a moment, are totally ignorant about the Lord Jesus. And they haven't received the Holy Spirit.

And back in 18, verse 25, you'll see there that Apollos was fervent in the Spirit. And he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Christ Jesus.

So remember, the only issue that Apollos had was that he needed a little bit of training from Priscilla and Aquila in order to sharpen up his teaching. And so if these men here in chapter 19 had been taught by Apollos, if they were his disciples, then you would expect them to know about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 30] But because they don't, I'm not convinced that they are Apollos' disciples at all. They are not fruits of his early ministry. The best suggestion I've come across is that these 12 men were somehow disciples of John the Baptist.

Somehow they'd received his teaching, but they hadn't received the full content of his teaching. And so they remained ignorant about the full gospel. And Paul seems to spot this as soon as he meets them, this ignorance in them.

You can see that from the question he asks them in verse 2. And he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, no, we've not even heard there is a Holy Spirit.

And he said, into what then were you baptized? Baptized, they said, into John's baptism. And you remember, John's ministry and baptism was one of preparation. He came to turn the hearts of the people of Israel back to God in order to get them ready for the coming of the Messiah.

The coming of the Lord himself in the flesh. The one who would not baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit himself. And that is what these men are ignorant of.

[10 : 39] Now they have made some sort of a dedication to God. Some sort of an effort to turn away from sin. But they know nothing of the glory of the new covenant. And of the Christ and the new birth through the Spirit.

But look what happens when they encounter the name of the Lord Jesus. And are baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Verse 6. They are transformed. They receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary way that publicly confirms their place in the people of God.

Just let me say on that note, Luke is definitely not teaching that their experience here is in any way normative for any of us here today.

In the past, some Pentecostal preachers and theologians have used this as some sort of a proof text for a so-called post-conversion baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But friends, to teach that thing from this text is to rip it out of its immediate context and acts. And from its wider redemptive historical context. The stitching of these 12 men is unique.

[11 : 47] It's a non-repeatable event. Let me just give you three quick points. There's loads to say about this. Let me give you three quick points just to back this up. Why it is a non-repeatable event for us today. Firstly, Luke doesn't mention any more events like this in the book of Acts.

From now on in the book, people receive the Holy Spirit first and then they believe. Secondly, the rest of the New Testament clearly teaches that no one can come to faith now without having first received the Holy Spirit.

And nowhere does the New Testament teach that we are to expect a post-conversion baptism of the Spirit. Thirdly, in the book of Acts itself, these extraordinary public manifestations of the Spirit coming upon people post-conversion, they only happen when the risen and ascended Lord Jesus wants to visibly show and affirm that the gospel has spread into a new geographical region.

Go home tonight. Go home tonight. Read the whole of the book of Acts just to see for yourself. And you'll see that when the gospel is first proclaimed in Jerusalem in chapter 2, there's extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit.

Then when it breaks into Judea and Samaria in chapter 8, there's more extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit. And then when it moves into Gentile region in chapter 10 with Cornelius and finally with Paul here.

[13 : 12] These post-conversion spirit baptisms are a rare thing in the book of Acts. They're extraordinary even for the book of Acts. They're always tied to the gospel breaking into a new geographical region.

And so friends, if anyone tries to use this as a proof text to convince you that you're somehow lacking as a Christian because you haven't had a post-conversion baptism experience, then they're talking rubbish and you shouldn't listen to them.

They're abusing the Bible. Well friends, having said all that, let's be totally clear on the key point that Luke wants to be certain about here. And that is that the name of Jesus Christ really does have the power to transform the ignorant, bringing them into the true people of God.

That's why we're told that these men started speaking in tongues and prophesying. They're doing what the apostles did at the day of Pentecost, proclaiming the mighty works of God in legitimate human languages.

It was a visible affirmation that these men of Ephesus, they're no longer ignorant of the truth, but they're now in the full people of God. As John Stott says, this is Pentecost catching up with them.

[14 : 29] And they can now enjoy the full experience of a New Testament Christian. So that's fight scene one, the name of Jesus versus the ignorant.

Fight scene two, the name of Jesus versus the insolent. The name of Jesus will not be thwarted and it will not tolerate mockers. Please look at verse eight.

And Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. So Paul follows his usual pattern of ministry that we see him carrying out through the rest of the book of Acts.

Whenever Paul comes into a new area, he always takes the gospel first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. Here it's just a little bit different because Paul actually has been here before.

He returns to the synagogue that he'd visited previously in chapter 18 verse 19. And it was an extremely brief visit. It didn't go well. The Jews rejected Paul and his message.

[15 : 33] And so Paul left Ephesus completely. He didn't actually go and speak to any Gentiles at that point. But now, back in chapter 19, God has graciously brought Paul back to this place, to these Jews, so that they will hear more about the kingdom and all about the name who is at the very center of that kingdom.

I just noticed the end of verse 9. Paul didn't go into the synagogue alone. The end of verse 9 tells us that he'd taken the 12 recently transformed disciples of verse 1 to 7 into the synagogue with them.

And I'm in no doubt that they would have carried on doing what they were doing in verse 6, declaring the mighty works of God in legitimate human languages. And what a testimony that must have been to those Jews as all those new disciples came in and they saw tangible proof that what Paul was saying about Christ is true.

He is the Messiah. But how did the Jews respond? Well, they should have responded by repentance and faith. But do they do that? Look at verse 9.

Friends, please just notice here what it is that causes them to be stubborn and to sink down into their further unbelief.

[16 : 54] It is the very message of the kingdom that Paul was proclaiming that causes them to sink down into further stubbornness. Willie touched on this this morning.

The revelation of God, wherever it comes to human beings, it either draws people towards God, towards Christ, or it hardens them. You see, the name of Jesus has the power to save, but it also has the power to judge.

The gospel is an instrument of God's judgment just as much as it is an instrument of his salvation. The sovereign power of Jesus draws some but hardens others.

But of course, those who harden their hearts in the synagogue are still fully responsible for their own stubbornness and unbelief. So what does Paul do?

Having seen the rejection, does he feebly decide to call it a day in Ephesus? No chance. Mockers will never thwart the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus.

[17 : 54] And so Paul withdraws, just like Jesus did back in Luke's gospel when he was on the earth and the Jews responded to him with stubbornness and hard hearts. And Paul starts proclaiming the name of Christ in the local lecture hall.

Verse 9, the hall of Tyrannus. And verse 10, we're told, look, this continued for two years. Two years. So that all the residents of Asia heard the word of God, both Jews and Greeks.

And of course, we know from the history books that Ephesus itself was a well-connected city. You can read up on this in your own time, but you'll find that four major roads that linked up the rest of Asia met together in Ephesus.

As you can just imagine, all those who travel into the city, to all these other regions, as they came through Ephesus, they would have heard Paul's teaching and the name of Christ. And then they would take that teaching away to all the different parts of Asia as they traveled on.

It's incredible growth, incredible spread. And it all goes back to those insolent people in the synagogue. Luke wants us to be certain the name of Jesus trumps and triumphs over opposition.

[19 : 05] Christ is so powerful, mockers will not thwart the advance of the kingdom. Scene three. The name of Jesus versus the imposters.

The name of Jesus will not respond to charlatans. Please look at verse 11. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul.

So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that he had touched, that touched the skin, were carried away to the sick. And their diseases left them. And the evil spirits came out of them.

Notice Luke stresses that what Paul is doing here was extraordinary, even for Paul. They were extraordinary, even for the apostles. This wasn't your kind of bog standard apostolic sign.

This was extraordinary, even for Paul. But the question then is, why? Why now? Why is God doing them now? Well, I take it the answer is that God is doing it out of much grace and mercy.

[20 : 08] He's revealing himself to the lost and hopeless people of this city in such a way that would be accessible to them. Ephesus was a city that was rife with spiritualism.

We'll see a bit more about that when we look at fight scene four in just a moment. But the people there were obsessed with magic, their cult, with all sorts of dark practices. And so here, in these extraordinary deeds that the risen Lord Jesus was doing through Paul, the people who walk in darkness are now beginning to see a great light.

Christ is graciously revealing himself in such a way that would help these people come to know him. It's such a beautiful act of grace and mercy. And you know, doubtless this sort of thing happens today.

When the Lord wants to reach out to a people in his grace to reveal himself, or to a culture or a civilization that's illiterate, or has no access to the scriptures, or to any human witness to the Lord.

I have another friend who lives down south. I have a lot of friends that live down south. But he works for a Christian charity that supports missionaries in some of the most remote parts of the world. And I remember having a conversation with him one day, and he was telling me about a tribe, and just the most remotest part I've ever heard of in the world.

[21 : 25] And these sorts of extraordinary events happened. And it caused the tribe to pack up and travel for miles and miles and miles, seeking out a Christian church. Because they wanted to know more about the Lord who'd revealed himself to them.

Now, we won't ever need such extraordinary signs from the Lord, because we have this clear word of revelation right here before us. Friends, if we sought out extraordinary signs like this, then it would actually be a great mark of unbelief.

We would actually be saying to God, God, your written word, it's not enough. We need something more. We think it's quite inadequate. So please, give us something more.

Friends, we do not need to receive extraordinary signs today, for we have God's word in our mother tongue. But sometimes, in certain places, the Lord really does choose to reveal himself like this.

It's extraordinary. And when he does, it's such an act of grace. But just remember that whilst all of these extraordinary signs were happening, verses 9 and 10 were also happening.

[22 : 30] Paul was given an interpretive word to explain the meaning, of these extraordinary signs. Paul was proclaiming that the name of Jesus Christ is the one who was doing all of these signs, calling people to turn away from their life of sin, and to bow down to him as their Lord and Savior.

But as is often the case in the book of Acts, gospel outreach and advance is soon met by greedy opposition.

Please look at verse 13. Luke tells us here about these impostors, these Jewish men, whom, having witnessed what the name of Jesus had done, they tried to muscle in on Paul's ministry and used the name of Jesus as though it was just some kind of a magical force that any old person can call upon to carry out their requests.

They'd obviously not listen to a word the apostle Paul had said in the hall of Tyrannus. Verse 14, one such group of these Jewish exorcists were the seven sons of Sceva, the high priest.

They try and invoke the name of Jesus to cast out an evil spirit from a man who was possessed. And listen to what David Gooding says about this in his excellent Bible commentary.

[23 : 57] I thought to myself, I can't write a better paragraph than this. So I'm just going to read it to you. So I hope you pay attention. Chapter 17. Sceva's sons were not interested in Christ's moral teaching, nor his spiritual claims.

They did not believe on the Lord Jesus in the biblical sense of the phrase. They'd not repented of sin and sought forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith. They were not Christians, but charlatans.

Jesus to them was simply the name of a great spirit power in the world beyond, which could be harnessed by an expert magician for his own use, as long as they knew the appropriate formula or spell or incantation.

They had observed their miracles that Paul had done in the name of Christ. And they thought that this name was a useful one to add to their repertoire. They enjoyed no personal relationship with the Lord.

Their attitude was that of modern theophysics or some forms of Buddhism, according to which Jesus is one of the so-called white brotherhood or just a Buddha who's escaped the necessity of reincarnation and is available, along with many other such beings, to help men and women if they only know and apply the right technique for inducing him into action.

[25 : 17] This is neither Christian doctrine nor truth. At best, it is gross superstition. At worst, it is demonism. Will the name of Jesus Christ respond to superstitious charlatans?

No chance. In fact, in his sovereignty, the Lord Jesus actually uses the speech of the evil spirit to expose these fraudsters for what they are.

Just look at verse 15. The evil spirit answered them, Jesus, I know. And Paul, I recognize. But who are you? See? The evil spirit affirms Jesus and Paul as the real deal.

He recognizes that those two names are threats to the kingdom of darkness. And at the same time, he confirms that these Jewish exorcists, seven sons of Sceva, are imposters.

And of course, the evil spirit then moves the man in his possession to attack the imposters. And they get a severe beating. They're stripped of their clothing. They're wounded.

[26 : 22] And they flee the house. And all of that happens in full view of all the public roundabout. And look at the result in verse 17. This became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks.

And fear fell upon them all. And the name of Jesus was extolled. Once again, Luke wants you and I to be certain that the name of Jesus is so powerful, it trumps and triumphs over all opposition.

In his sovereignty, our Lord even uses the actions of these imposters and the actions of the enemy to big up his own name across all the region.

fight scene four. The name of Jesus versus evil ideology. The name of Jesus has the power to bring about mass repentance, turning people's hearts away from their rebellious pagan beliefs, away from ideology that's evil, to trust in the truth.

Please look at verse 19. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

[27 : 42] This is what the name of Jesus does to people. It brings about real repentance in their hearts. It brings about a public, outward repentance in their behavior.

Repentance that's costly and public. The scrolls that these people were bringing forward, they cost a fortune, 50,000 pieces of silver to be precise. But now that the hearts of the people know that the name of Jesus is the name of the Messiah, the Lord, they cannot live by the words of these scrolls anymore.

And so they torch them. They burn them visibly as a public expression of the change of their allegiance. No longer were these new converts lived by the evil ideology that gripped the society and the city.

They have a new master now. As one commentator says, burning the scrolls was a way of repudiating what these scrolls contained and displayed a great trust in Christ.

They will now look to Christ to deliver them from trouble and to supply their needs instead of looking to superstitious nonsense. And please don't miss the wonderful contrast that Luke pulls out between the state of the words on the scrolls in verse 19 and the state of the word of the Lord in verse 20.

[29 : 03] This is really the climax of all of the fight scenes. This is the climax of the battle after the fight is over. Luke wants us to see what's happened now that the name of Jesus has come to Ephesus.

Verse 19, where is the word of the pagan scrolls, the evil ideology? It is lying in ash, dead, burned. And where is the word of the Lord?

Verse 20, it is alive. It is victorious. It is increasing. It is growing and growing and growing from strength to strength.

At the end of these four fight scenes, it is clear who the winner is and it is clear who is lying on the canvas. The name of Jesus has the power to transform the ignorant.

The name of Jesus will not tolerate or be thwarted by the insolent. The name of Jesus will not respond to imposters. The name of Jesus has the power to save people from evil ideology.

[30 : 05] Well friends, our time is gone but let me close where I started by asking is your Jesus too small? Is the Jesus that you believe in the real Jesus?

This Jesus? Is he the sovereign, all-powerful, all-conquering, majestic Lord who's risen and ascended above every other name at the right hand of the Father in heaven and who is right now through his spirit empowered people advancing his kingdom on earth?

That lad that I told you about earlier, Lewis, that's not his real name just in case he comes to visit and you meet him and you go, oh, you're Lewis? That's not his real name but I started to meet up with Lewis regularly and together we spent time reading through Luke's first book, his gospel.

And do you know that having given his heart a bigger view of the power of Christ and having received certainty from Luke's historical account, Lewis is a new man.

Last I heard he'd moved away and he was really stuck into his local church doing everything that he possibly could to see the corporate ministry of the church to advance the news about Jesus in the local area.

[31 : 22] Lewis was throwing everything he had behind that. What about you? Is your Jesus too small? Do you need to give your soul a good dose of Luke and Acts to remind yourself of the real Jesus?

If a church only knows a Jesus who is a pale shadow of the real Jesus then it'll be a church that's full of people who are indolent, people who couldn't care less about serving and doing their bits in church life.

A church that doesn't know this Jesus it'll be full of people who are just primarily concerned with their own comfort. It'll be a comfortable church full of people who have settled into the same old rhythms and routines of church life.

They will never be prepared to make costly changes to promote the gospel to see growth. Instead when changes are made they will become bitter and annoyed because their comfort has been disturbed.

And as a result they will hinder the gospel growth. And so friends let's be sure all of us as individuals and as a corporate body as a church that we trust this Jesus the real Jesus the all-powerful Lord the one whose kingdom is utterly unstoppable.

[32 : 40] For if you know this Jesus then you will know that the reasonable the obvious the logical the only way to respond to him is to throw everything that you have behind his mission.

Will we be a church like that? Or will we be a church whose Jesus is too small? Let's be quiet for a moment so that we can respond to the word of the Lord in our own hearts and then I'll pray for us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father we stand in awe at the majesty and the power of the name of your Son.

Father please forgive us for the times when we've thought so little of him. The times when maybe the prospect of facing gospel opposition has made us shrink away from proclaiming his name.

We ask that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would fill our hearts with greater certainty concerning our Lord's sovereign power so that we will be all the more passionate about advancing his name to the nations.

[34 : 04] We pray that knowing the power of Jesus would stir us on to serve him and his glorious cause more and more and more. We pray all this in his precious name that is above all other names.

Amen.