

The Powerful Name of Jesus

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- [0 : 00] Well, we're coming now to our Bible reading, so please do pick up your Bibles or help yourself to the piles of Bibles at the side of the hall. And this morning we're going to be jumping into the book of Acts, chapter 19, the book of Acts.
- I'm sure you'll know this, but Acts is the follow-on book from Luke's Gospel. And it's all about what Jesus continued to do after he ascended to his throne in glory.
- With the Father. It's really the acts of the risen Lord Jesus. And we're going to read from Acts 19 about what happened when the powerful name of the Lord Jesus comes to the city of Ephesus.
- So let's read Acts 19, beginning at verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord. And it happened 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?
- [1 : 17] And they said, no, we've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, into what then were you baptized? And 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. 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. There were about 12 men in all. And he 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.
- [2 : 31] 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. 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 upon them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.
- [3 : 44] 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 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 is word. To 19 that we read together. A passage that's really all about the powerful name of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 51] Do you lack certainty concerning the things you've been taught about Christ and his power?

I used to work for a church down in England. And one of the young men who came along to the church is called Lewis. That's not his real name. I still know Lewis. But I've changed his name in case he's listening this morning.

He was a very nice chap and still is a very nice chap. He came along regularly on Sundays. He loved doing all sorts of different activities in his life. He was a keen sportsman.

He worked extremely hard at his job. He was a very, very commendable young man. But as I got to know Lewis, Lewis, it didn't take long for me to see that he was completely disinterested in seeing the gospel of the Lord Jesus 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 made known to people in the local area.

[6 : 10] Lewis was a passenger in our church rather than an active partner in the gospel. And one day we went out for coffee.

And in a moment of boldness, I asked him some pretty blunt questions. And from the way he answered me, it was clear what his problem was. His Jesus was too small.

The Jesus that Lewis believed in was far from being the real Jesus that Luke describes for us in the book of Acts. The Jesus that Luke tells us about in this book is the risen, all-powerful, all-conquering, majestic and ascended Lord who sovereignly spreads the news of his victory over all the earth, all the nations, by his spirit-empowered people on earth.

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

That's why he couldn't care less about sharing Jesus with the people around about him. What about you? You like Lewis?

[7 : 29] You're Jesus too small? Is the Jesus you believe in, the real Jesus that Luke tells us about here? Or just a pale imitation of him?

Maybe you're here this morning and you too lack certainty about the power of the name of the Lord Jesus. Well, if you do, then Acts 19 is precisely what you need to hear.

It's precisely what I need to hear too. For in Acts 19, Luke records for us what happened when the name of Jesus came to the city of Ephesus. Three times Luke makes a point of highlighting this.

In verse 5, verse 13 and verse 17. The name of Jesus. The name of Jesus. The name of Jesus. And I'd like us to look at this passage now in four sections that are really four fight scenes.

I wonder if you knew you were coming to church to witness some fighting. Well, you are. These are four fight scenes. And in each scene, we will see the name of Jesus come up against some sort of barrier or opposition.

[8 : 32] And in each scene, there is a clear winner every time. Let's have a look at fight scene 1. This is verses 1 to 7. The name of Jesus versus the ignorant.

The name of Jesus versus the ignorant. Because 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. And there he found some disciples.

So Paul comes to Ephesus and he encounters 12 of these men whom Luke describes as being disciples. Well, let me tell you, much ink has been dedicated to the commentaries on trying to figure out exactly who these 12 men were disciples of.

Some suggest these 12 men are the fruits of the early ministry of Apollos, who's mentioned there in verse 1. And he came to Ephesus earlier on, mentioned back in chapter 18.

[9 : 40] But I'm not convinced by that. These 12 men, as we shall see in a moment, they are ignorant of the Lord Jesus. And they are ignorant of the Holy Spirit. And they have not even heard of the Holy Spirit or received Him.

But back in Acts 18 verse 25, We are told that Apollos was fervent in the Spirit. And he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

So if these men had been disciples of Apollos, you would expect them to know Jesus and know about the Holy Spirit. But they haven't. The best suggestion I've come across is that these 12 men were somehow disciples of John the Baptist.

Somehow they'd received some of his early teaching. Not the full content of it though. And so they remained ignorant of the true gospel.

And all its glory. And you know when Paul encounters them, he seems to spot this right away. And that's why he fires this question to them in verse 2.

[10 : 43] 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 to them, Into what were you baptized?

They said, Into John's baptism. And as you'll remember, John's ministry and baptism was one of preparation. John came to turn the hearts of the people of Israel back to God in order to get them ready for the coming of their Messiah.

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

By God's grace, they have made some sort of a turning to God, some sort of dedication to God. But they know nothing of the glory of the new covenant. The Lord Jesus and the new birth that He gives through His Spirit.

But look at what happens when they hear the full gospel of the Lord Jesus and are baptized into His name. Verse 6, They are transformed. They receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary way that publicly confirms their place in the people of God.

[12 : 00] Transformed by the gospel of Christ. Now just let me say, this is very important, 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 such a thing from this text is to completely misuse the Bible. It's to rip this out of its immediate context in Acts and also to ignore the wider redemptive historical context of what's going on here.

The situation of these 12 men was unique. It is a non-repeatable event. Let me just quickly give you three points as to why that is the case to back up that this is a non-repeatable event.

Firstly, Luke doesn't mention any events like this in Acts again. From now on in the book, people receive the Holy Spirit first and then they believe.

[13 : 10] Secondly, the rest of the New Testament clearly teaches that no one can come to faith now without having first received the Holy Spirit. In fact, nowhere does the New Testament teach that we are to expect a post-conversion spirit baptism.

Thirdly, in the book of Acts, these extraordinary public manifestations of the Spirit coming upon people post-conversion, friends, they only happen when the risen and ascended Lord Jesus wants to affirm and confirm that the gospel has spread into a new region.

Go home later this afternoon with your Bibles and read through. You'll see that this sort of post-conversion baptism of the Spirit happens in chapter 2 when the gospel is proclaimed in Jerusalem.

It happens in chapter 8 when it breaks into Judea and Samaria and then into the Gentile regions in chapter 10 and finally here in chapter 19.

These post-conversion spirit baptisms are always tied to the gospel breaking into a new region. Nowhere else. Why do I say all that?

[14 : 24] Well, I say all that, friends, because I want to warn you, if anyone comes to you today and uses this as a proof text to convince you that you are somehow lacking as a Christian because you haven't had a post-conversion baptism of the Spirit, they are not using the Bible properly and you need to ignore them.

You should not listen to them. Now, having said all that, let's be clear on the key point that Luke wants us to be certain about here and that is that the name of the Lord Jesus really does have the power to transform the ignorant, bringing people into the true people of God, bringing them to faith.

That is why we're told that these people are speaking in tongues and prophesying. They're doing what the apostles did back at the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

And remember, all the way through the book of Acts, speaking in tongues is just proclaiming the mighty works of God in legitimate human languages. It was a visible affirmation that these men of Ephesus, they are no longer strangers and aliens to God, but through the name of Jesus, they have been brought in to the true people of God.

John Stott puts it like this. He says, this is Pentecost catching up with these men and they can now enjoy the full experience of a New Testament Christian.

[15 : 54] So friends, that's fight scene one, the name of Jesus versus the ignorant. Here's fight scene two, verses eight to ten, the name of Jesus versus the insolent.

The name of Jesus versus the insolent. The name of Jesus will not tolerate or be thwarted by 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 came into a new area, he would always take the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Here it's a little bit different because Paul has actually been in Ephesus before.

He returns to the synagogue that he had previously visited in chapter 18, verse 19. Back then it was an extremely brief visit. It did not go well.

[17 : 03] The Jews rejected Paul and his message. They rejected Jesus. And so he left Ephesus completely. For whatever reason, he didn't even talk to the Gentiles.

But now he's back. God is so gracious and patient and kind with people. Paul has come back to give them another chance to hear about the name of the Lord Jesus at the center of the kingdom of God.

And notice the little detail in verse 9. It tells us that he had taken the 12 recently transformed disciples of verses 1 to 7 into the synagogue with him.

And I'm in no doubt that they were carrying on doing what they were doing in verse 6. Declaring the mighty works of God in human languages. That would have been a massively powerful testimony to the Jews that Paul's teaching was legitimate.

a tangible evidence that the powerful name of Jesus really is the place of salvation for everyone who believes. But how do the Jews respond in verse 9?

[18 : 11] Answer? With stubborn hearts. Unbelief. The NIV says that they mocked and maligned the way before the congregation. Slagged off Jesus and slagged off all those who follow him.

But just know as please that what it is that causes them to become stubborn and sink down into further unbelief. The thing that causes them to do that is actually the very message of the kingdom that Paul was proclaiming.

That is what causes them to become stubborn. You see friends the name of Jesus has the power to save but also the power to harden. The gospel is an instrument of God's judgment just as much as it is an instrument of his salvation.

And the sovereign power of the name of Christ draws out his chosen ones but can also harden others. And the same thing happens today doesn't it? When the name of Jesus is proclaimed the gospel is shared it either draws people to Christ or can drive them away.

That's what happens actually when we come and listen to the word of God preached. you never leave the church gathering the same. The word always has an impact on our hearts and either it's pulling us towards the Lord Jesus or it's hardening us in our unbelief.

[19 : 36] And the Bible's clear friends we are responsible for any hard heartedness that we have. The men in that synagogue were responsible for the hard heartedness that they had.

And so what does Paul do in response? Does he shrink away feebly and decide to call it a day in Ephesus? No chance. Mockers will not stop the name of the Lord Jesus.

So Paul withdraws but not from the city. What he does is he just does what the Lord Jesus does so often in Luke's gospel. Moves away from mockers and carries on ministering somewhere else in the local region.

And look where Paul ends up. He ends in this massive lecture hall. Massive lecture hall. Verse 9 The Hall of Tyrannus. And verse 10 This continued we're told for two years he was sharing the gospel in this massive building so that all the residents of Asia not just Ephesus but the whole surrounding region heard the word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks.

And we know from the history books that Ephesus itself was a really well connected city. There were four main roads that came and met in the city of Ephesus. And you can imagine people travelling from all over the place coming in and they would have been caught up and heard Paul's teaching either in person or via word of mouth.

[21 : 06] And of course having heard it they would then take it off on their travels to wherever they'd be going. Luke wants us to be certain that the name of Jesus trumps and triumphs over all mocking.

Opposition will not stand against the Lord Jesus. Christ is so powerful nothing will stop the advance of his kingdom. Well fight scene 3 moves into verse 11 to 17.

The name of Jesus versus the imposters. The name of Jesus will not respond to the calls of charlatans. Please look at verse 11.

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.

Just notice please Luke stresses that what Paul was doing here was extraordinary. Extraordinary. They were extraordinary things even for the apostle Paul.

[22 : 21] But why? Why is God doing these things now? Why in Ephesus? Well I take it the answer is that God was doing these signs out of wonderful grace and mercy.

He is revealing himself the Lord Jesus is revealing himself through Paul through these signs to the lost and hopeless people of the city in such a way that would be accessible to them.

Ephesus was a city full of people obsessed with the spiritualism and magic and the occult and all sorts of dark practices. And so here in these extraordinary deeds that the risen Lord Jesus was doing the people who once walked in darkness are starting to see a great light Christ is graciously revealing himself in such a way that would help these people to come to know him.

And friends actually I think that these things actually do happen today when the Lord wants to reach out in his grace to reveal himself to a culture or a civilization that is illiterate or has no access to the scriptures or no access to any human witness to the Lord Jesus the Lord does graciously meet people this way.

A friend of mine who I trust dearly works for a Christian charity that offers support to missionaries who head out to some of the most remote parts of the world with the gospel.

[23 : 51] He once told me about a group of men in a remote tribal village who experienced a series of extraordinary events just the most wild stuff happened in their village.

And do you know what it did? It moved them to pack up and travel and they traveled for miles until they found a church. Until they found the Bible and they came to know Jesus by God's mercy.

Remarkable. Now can I just say this? We today here we won't ever need such extraordinary signs from the Lord because we have His clear and living word of revelation right here before us.

Now friends if you and I sought out such extraordinary signs like this then it would actually be a great mark of unbelief. For we would be really saying to the Lord your written word is not enough.

We need something more. We don't trust that you've given us what we need. So friends we don't need such extraordinary signs today because we have God's word in our mother tongue.

[25 : 05] But sometimes sometimes in certain places the Lord really does choose to reveal Himself to others in such extraordinary ways.

He is so gracious and merciful. And just remember that whilst all of these extraordinary signs that Paul was carrying out once all that was happening verses 9 and 10 was also happening at the same time.

Yes? Paul was preaching God's word. Paul was proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. That is he was explaining the meaning of the signs. Declaring that Jesus is the risen one.

The king of kings. The one above all other spiritual powers. He would have been calling people therefore to leave their rebellious ways and to surrender their lives to Jesus.

To come to Him for forgiveness and for new life. To turn to Him to be made right with God before they face God as judge.

[26 : 11] But as often as the case in the book of Acts gospel outreach is soon met by gospel opposition. Please look at verse 13. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits saying I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.

Now Luke tells us about these imposters. These Jewish men who having witnessed the name of Jesus and what the name of Jesus was doing they tried to muscle in on Paul's ministry and used the name of Jesus as though it was some kind of a magical force that anyone could call upon to carry out their requests.

These men had obviously not listened to a word that the apostle Paul had proclaimed during his ministry in the hall of Tyrannus. Verse 14 tells us that one such group of these Jewish exorcists were these seven sons of the high priest Sceva.

and they tried to invoke the name of Jesus and cast out an evil spirit. And listen to what David Gooding says about these men. This is on his excellent book written about the book of Acts.

David Gooding says Sceva's sons were not interested in Christ's moral teaching nor his spiritual claims. They had not believed the Lord Jesus in the biblical sense of that phrase.

[27 : 43] They had not repented of their sin and sought forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith in Christ. They were not Christians. They were charlatans.

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

At best what these men did was gross superstition. at worst it was demonism. Will the name of Jesus Christ respond to the call of these 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 answers these Jewish men. Jesus I know and I know Paul. I recognize him.

[28 : 48] Who are you? You see what the evil spirit does there? He questions them. He also affirms Jesus and Paul doesn't he? As being the real deal. He recognizes these two names as names not to be messed with.

He's heard of names that are genuine threats to the kingdom of darkness. But these seven sons of Sceva are imposters. And the evil spirit then moves the man in his possession to attack them.

Giving them a severe and humiliating beating. And in the end these sons of Sceva they run out of the house naked and wounded. And all of this friends all of this takes place in full view of the surrounding public.

And just look at the results. Look at verse 17. This became known to all the residents of Ephesus. Both Jews and Greeks. Whatever their background. Everyone heard about it.

And how did they feel? They were full of fear. Fear fell upon them and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Isn't that remarkable?

[29 : 56] Once again Luke wants us to be certain that the name of Jesus is so powerful it triumphs over opposition and in fact uses opposition to expose imposters and to see Jesus name being extolled over a whole region.

And friends that brings us on to our final scene fight scene four. The name of Jesus versus evil ideology. The name of Jesus has the power to bring about mass repentance.

Turning people away from their rebellious pagan beliefs away from ideology that is evil to trust in Christ instead. 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.

This is what the name of Jesus does to people. It brings about real repentance in their hearts and therefore will also manifest real repentance in their actions.

[31 : 15] Repentance that is costly and public. These scrolls that people were bringing forward to burn would have cost an absolute fortune. 50,000 pieces of silver to be precise.

But now that the hearts of these people know the name of the true God, the one who has the real power, the real spiritual power over the world, they know that they cannot live by trusting in the teaching of these scrolls anymore.

And so what do they do? They gather them together and publicly they torch them. It was a visible public expression of the change of allegiance that has happened in their hearts.

no longer will these new converts live by the evil ideology that gripped society. They're turning away from society. They don't want to go along with society anymore and all of its values and all of its messed up morals.

They're going to go to their new master and follow him. As one commentator says burning the scrolls was a way of publicly rejecting the pagan ideology that surrounded them.

[32 : 25] And it represented a great trust in Christ. He is the one they will look to now to deliver them from trouble and to supply for their needs. Now friends don't also miss the beautiful contrast that Luke pulls out here at the end of the passage.

Luke pulls out this great contrast between the state of the words of the scrolls in verse 19 versus the state of the word of the Lord in verse 20.

And this is the real climax of the section. Luke wants us to see what has happened. Now the name of Jesus has swept over Ephesus. In verse 19 the word in the pagan scrolls it is lying defeated in ashes burned to a crisp.

But the word of the Lord the gospel of the Lord Jesus the news about his name verse 20 it is alive it is increasing it is active it is prevailing mightily growing from strength to strength.

As the name of Jesus has the power to transform the ignorant. The name of Jesus will not be thwarted by the insolent. The name of Jesus will not be abused by imposters.

[33 : 47] The name of Jesus has the power to save many people. A whole city if the Lord Jesus wants to. Let me close where I started by asking is your Jesus too small?

Is the Jesus you believe in this Jesus the real Jesus? Is he the sovereign all powerful all conquering majestic Lord who has risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven and who is right now as we speak subduing his enemies?

Through his spirit empowered people advancing the message of the gospel of his kingdom proclaiming his name to the ends of the earth. Remember that chap I told you about earlier Lewis my friend down in England?

Well way back then after we had our awkward coffee I started to meet up with him regularly and we spent time reading Luke's first book together Luke's gospel and you know having given his heart a bigger view of the power of Christ the spirit worked powerfully in my friend he received greater certainty concerning Christ's power and let me tell you Lewis was a new man a new man the name of Jesus had given him much more boldness and passion for gospel mission.

he's a man who serves constantly in the church doing whatever he can to see the church proclaim the good news to those around about him he's also brilliant at inviting people to his church I met up with him last summer and he is phenomenal at just inviting people from his sports clubs from his work to come along and encounter the word of the Lord Jesus in amongst the church family where he belongs.

[35 : 41] What about you? You're Jesus too small? Do you need to give your soul a good dose of look and act to remind you of the real Jesus?

Friends if a church knows a Jesus that is just a pale shadow of the real thing that it will be a church of people who are indolent that is people who couldn't care less about serving doing their bit to see the gospel advance reaching out to the people of Glasgow to know him as saviour and Lord.

A church that doesn't know the real Jesus will also be a church actually gripped not by fear of Jesus but by fear of the world. By fear of the world.

It will be a church that is primarily concerned about staying comfortable being very comfortable in church settling into the same old rhythms of church life and routines of church life never prepared to make costly changes to sacrificially serve others to see gospel growth.

And so my friends let's all be sure and I need to be sure of this myself that as individuals and as a church we all trust and know this Jesus the real Jesus are all powerful Lord and saviour.

[37 : 09] For if you know this Jesus then you'll know that the reasonable the obvious the logical the only thing to do is to throw all that you have at his feet and to serve him and to throw all that you have behind his mission work that we've been called to do together as a church.

the task of seeing his name extolled not just in Glasgow but to the ends of the earth. Well let's bow our heads and have a moment of quiet and then I'll pray for us.

Let's pray. Our loving Lord and Heavenly Father please forgive us for the times when we've thought so little of our Lord and saviour.

We ask for your help our dear Heavenly Father as your children beloved in Christ that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would fill our hearts with greater certainty concerning his sovereign power so that we will all be all the more passionate about advancing his name amongst the nations.

Please help us. We are so weak. Help us to fear him. And therefore if we fear him we need not fear anything else.

[38 : 42] We pray this in his name. Amen.