

The Expulsive Power of the Gospel

Acts 19:11-41

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What do you trust in when it comes to the power to change? When I say change, I mean change in your personal life and even change in our culture or lives as citizens of the United States.

If people want to make changes in their city, state, or nation, they typically think of political power and voting power. They hope their candidate will get things done for their city, state, and nation. Politics has its place, and we should vote. However, does power really reside with politicians? How effective is political power really?

What about the power to change on a personal level? On a personal level, most people turn to willpower if it is to improve their health. They make a list that includes exercise, eating healthy foods as opposed to not eating foods that are bad for you, and getting enough sleep or rest instead of running your body down. Have you ever made this kind of list? How strong was your willpower really?

Acts 19:11-41 is filled with the display of the real power of the gospel. In these verses, we see Jesus' power over sickness and demons. Then we see a demon overpower the Seven Sons of Sceva. Then we see the transformative power of the gospel when those who were saved bore the fruit of genuine repentance by burning all of the magical art books and paraphernalia. Finally, we see how so many people were saved in Ephesus that the gospel made a financial and cultural impact.

The main point of the sermon is straightforward: *It is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that eternally changes the lives of those He has saved.*

To understand that, we must go back to Acts 19:8-10. Look at these three verses:

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

The powerful changes that occurred in Ephesus were because of the faithful teaching of the gospel. In other words, as the gospel was faithfully proclaimed, it changed the hearts and lives of hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people throughout the city.

We are going to hear Luke's account of the work of the gospel in Ephesus in our text this morning, but I want us to look back at what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus to hear his perspective. Listen to Ephesians 3:7-10 because these verses pretty much sum up the heart of our text:

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace¹, which was given me by the working² of his power³. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

The Apostle Paul remembered the power of God working through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesus. So, when he wrote them, he reminded them of the power of the grace of God in Christ.

Friends, *God's word is powerful. And as the writer of Hebrews says, it is living and active in the lives of those who follow Christ.* It is also powerful and sufficient to change the lives of all who listen to it and live according to it.

This is the reason we read so much Scripture in our worship services. It is why we sing songs filled with Scripture. It is why after the text of the sermon passage is read every Sunday morning, we remind ourselves: (say it with me)

*The grass withers, and the flower falls
But the word of the Lord endures forever
(Isaiah 40:8)*

Here at Grand Avenue we really believe God's word is sufficient to *save sinners* and *sanctify the saints* of God. We believe it is powerful!

Now just to drill down into that belief. Specifically, we believe the central point of Scripture is the sinless life, holy sacrifice, and glorious resurrection of the Son of God. That's why we read, sing and proclaim God's word; we are applying it in light of the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because the gospel is what the *saved* and the *unsaved* need to hear each and every Sunday. As a matter of fact, that gospel is what we need every day of our lives. The gospel is the power of *salvation of those who are lost* and the *transformation of the lives of the saved*.

I want to point you to the three displays of the power of the gospel that occurred in Ephesus and see how they apply to us today.

1. The extraordinary power of the gospel (vv. 11-17)

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² 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.

¹ The gift of God's grace was the gospel which finds its power in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

² The Greek word for *working* is *energa*. We get the word energy from this Greek word.

³ The Greek word for *power* is *dunamis*. We get the word *dynamite* from this Greek word.

Verses 11-12 tell us all of the powerful works *that God* was working through the Apostle Paul. Paul was not doing these in his own power or because he was some kind of magician.

Nevertheless, because people crave this kind of power, v. 12 has been abused by televangelists and charlatan preachers for many years. The people desire power, and they will do anything to get it. Many will fake their power in order to get rich and, by their wealth, feel powerful. So, they will tell people that if you purchase handkerchiefs or some other items as a means to say they can give spiritual power and even riches. These fake preachers will manufacture their power in order to get you to believe they are powerful legitimate preachers on the level of the Apostle Paul. Do not be fooled by these wolves in sheep's clothing.

God did this work through the Apostle Paul. It was not the power of Paul or some handkerchief with Paul's sweat on it or an apron that he had worn that healed those people.

Here is what happened in Ephesus. It was the power of God that worked in that specific day and time in order to show that the gospel was indeed the real power of God. Those displays of power that came through Paul were to show the people of Ephesus that the gospel is the absolute power of God to save sinners and that they needed to listen to the preaching of the Apostle Paul.

Here is what you need to remember when you read stories like these in the Bible. They were acts of power to verify the message of the gospel. It proved to the Jewish and Gentile people that Jesus was indeed powerful and that He was who He said he was, and so they needed to listen to the gospel message that the Apostle Paul preached.

Here is the deal, those things happened at that time in Ephesus in order to verify the message of the gospel for the lost people of that city. It was part of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Those acts of power were not done to say we should all be doing those things. They were to point us to the power of the gospel that saves sinners.

Verse 20 confirms our point. It says that the church grew because they were making prayer handkerchiefs and aprons. Is that what it says? No, v. 20 says:

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

You see, it is always about God's word and how that word points to Jesus. It is never about the person who preaches or some handkerchief or something else. We should thank God for faithful preachers but when it begins to focus on the preacher and his power, then beware.

Bottom line: The greatest act of power is the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. Our response to the message of the gospel is where we experience an even greater work of the power of God. You see, when we repent of our sin and trust in Christ, a greater act of power than having some sickness healed or a demon cast out is performed because it is by the eternal power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Jesus told His disciples this after they returned from preaching the gospel in the villages. They returned, and they said that even the demons submit to us. He told them, *"Do not marvel that the demons submit to you but marvel that your names are written in heaven."* In other words, the most amazing display of power is that you are saved.

Friends, this is the power of God that we proclaim here every Sunday when we worship together. This is the genuine power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that changes our lives.

However, we must beware that we do not turn the gospel into some mere magic words or spiritual talisman that is void of the power of the gospel. Here is what I mean.

Look in vv. 13-16 at the story of the *Seven Sons of the Jewish High Priest Sceva*. In this story, we learn how acts of power are misunderstood and misused when these dudes wanted to use Jesus' name like it was a formula for success, wealth, and change.

Friends, before I go any further, you need to know this. The spiritual forces of evil are real. Demons are real. There is a spiritual realm that is actively seeking to destroy God's people and God's church. Are you tracking with me?

Now, look in vv. 13-15. Exorcism was big business in the first century. You could make lots of money off of unsuspecting people. So, these guys realized what Paul was doing was real. They thought using "*Jesus' name*" was a good business model and marketing strategy, so they tried to copy Paul by using "*Jesus' name*" like it was a magical charm or slogan. But notice what happened in v. 15, after they tried to cast out a demon in Jesus' name. The demon said to them and did to them:

"Jesus, I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Here is what you need to know about demons. They know who Jesus is. This evil spirit knew who Jesus was because Jesus was the Creator and King against whom he rebelled. The demon was no dummy. He knew that one day Jesus would eventually cast him and all of the demons into the bottomless pit of Hellfire. While he knew these things were true, he did not have faith in Jesus. He knew the facts about Jesus, but he did not have saving faith in Jesus. Demons are beyond salvation. It is too late for them, but it is not too late for people who only know the facts and need faith.

Now, here is some application for us. Lots of people know some facts about Jesus. Perhaps they grew up going to church and learned some *fun facts* about Jesus, but they never turned from their sin and placed their faith in Jesus. So, Jesus has never changed their lives because they never had saving faith. They only have a kind of demonic knowledge of Jesus. The letter of James tells us that the demons believe, and they tremble, but they are not saved. There is a kind of demonic knowledge or faith that does not save.

Why does it not save? It does not save because you must be born again. Demons are not born again. You must be raised from spiritual death to spiritual life by the power of the gospel. The question is: What about you? Do you have saving faith, or do you only know a few fun facts about Jesus?

Do not be fooled by spiritual slogans. Some people think because they can say slogans like: *God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life that is saving faith*. Others think that it is enough to simply say they believe in God. While others believe it is good enough to say *God is love*, the fact is they really do not know the love of God at all because they do not know Jesus. Even more dangerous, some people even know that *Jesus died on the cross for sins*, but they have never by faith in Jesus surrendered their lives to Jesus. What about you? Have you been using spiritual slogans to hide the fact that you are not saved? Here is the deal, it is better to have a demon or life beat the pants off of you, and you repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus than to resist and go to Hell for eternity.

You may be here this morning, and you may be like the Sons of Sceva, and you really don't know Jesus. Oh, you may throw His name around because you learned it in VBS or Sunday School or heard it on a TV show, but you don't really know Him. As Dr. Al Moher says about this text:

All around us are people ready to call upon Jesus without really knowing him. They are ready to call upon a sweet Jesus who will be their constant companion and spiritual talisman, but they are not interested in knowing Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. They want a Jesus they can use, not a Jesus who saves. The "prosperity gospel" movement invokes the name of Christ, prays in the name of God, and claims his promise and blessing all for financial security rather than eternal salvation.⁴

However, it is not just unbelievers who will misuse the name of Jesus. Even Christians will use and abuse the name of Christ for their own selfish purposes. Brother and sister, do you ever find yourself praying to Jesus in a way that is really using Jesus' name to simply get what you want? Beware that you do not fall into the trap of seeking Jesus for success and avoid suffering?

Jesus explained true salvation and discipleship in Luke 9:23-24 when He said:

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Bottom line: The extraordinary power of God is only found in the old rugged cross. Have you embraced the cross of Christ in your life, or are you living for something else?

2. The transformative power of the gospel (vv. 17-20)

Verses 17-20 tell us about the transformative power of the gospel. Let me give you a formula for vv. 17-20:

Faith in Jesus + Repentance of sin = Gospel Growth

In v. 17, we see how faith was displayed by those who heard the gospel:

¹⁷And this⁵ 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.

For many people in Ephesus, the extraordinary display of the power of the gospel resulted in faith that became the *transformative power of the gospel* in their lives.

Here is what I mean, faith that does not result in repentance is not saving faith. Faith without repentance is only sentimental feelings about Jesus.

On the other hand, repentance that does not have faith in Jesus is moralism or legalism. It is trying to earn God's favor and salvation by being good. We call this salvation by works.

Friends, genuine saving faith turns from sin and turn to Jesus. So, when we hear v. 17 say that *fear fell upon them all and they extolled or glorified Jesus*, Luke means those people placed their faith in Jesus.

⁴ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Acts 13-28 For You*, 95.

⁵ The acts of power.

Verse 18 tells us about the repentance that followed their genuine faith in Jesus. Genuine faith and repentance resulted in the people confessing their sins to one another and repenting (turning from those sins).

It was also displayed when *they burned all of the occult/magic books they used for conjuring evil spirits.*

What is even more amazing is what v. 19 says:

And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

You know your faith and repentance are real when it begins to change your finances. As the gospel of Jesus Christ transformed the hearts of the Ephesians, they not only confessed their sins but they got rid of the occultist inventory by starting a very expensive bonfire.

Consider this, one piece of silver or silver coin was called a *drachma*. It was worth a day's wages for a common laborer. So, fifty thousand pieces of silver represented more than 136 years of continuous labor without any days off. Here is the formula:

$$50,000 \text{ days/work} \times 8 \text{ hours/day} = 400,000 \text{ hours of labor}$$

$$400,000 \text{ hours} \times \$15 \text{ an hour}^6 = \$6,000,000.00$$

Friends, that is a lot of money to part with because you have become a Christian.

What happened here? Genuine faith in Jesus and repentance of sin will rearrange the way you think about your money and your assets. For the Ephesians, it was more important to them to have Jesus than silver or gold.

Brother and sister, let me ask you a question: Has your faith and repentance gotten into your bank account yet? You see, it is not simply that you blow your money on the kingdom of darkness. Buying magic books and spending money on the occult is probably not a problem for Christians. However, do you give your money to further the work of the Kingdom of God? Has your faith and repentance caused you to be a generous giving to the local church?

By the way, if you are a visitor or not a Christian, I am not talking to you. So, do not hear me trying to get you to give. I am talking to those who call themselves Christians and even members of Grand Avenue.

When I say "give," I do not mean you tip God every now and then but that you give generously. Repentance that gets into our bank accounts does not tip God by giving \$25 dollars here or \$50 dollars there. I mean do you give regularly and generously to the church, its gospel mission to help the poor and advance the gospel by supporting missions here and internationally?

I was recently reminded of a study that was done in churches that says in most churches that 20% of the people give 80% of the budget money. It is called the 80/20 Rule, which means that 80% only give 20%.

Now before I finish what I am about to say, I want to let you know that I do not know who gives what here at GABC. But here is what I was told, the 80/20 rule is true for Grand. It made me wonder just

⁶ An average hourly wage. Not too high but not too low.

how deep our repentance goes. You may not be holding on to occultic books, but money can become your idol.

Brothers and sisters, just how genuine and deep is your faith and repentance? Do you repent and trust Jesus in everything except your finances? Has your faith and repentance transformed your finances like they did the people of Ephesus?

You see, faith and repentance are not simply about embracing Jesus but also what you let go of as you hold fast to Christ. Tolkien illustrates that in his book the *Lord of the Rings*. Gollum could not let go of the *Ring of Power* because it held out promises of power, wealth, and life, but it only destroyed him because he could not pry his fingers off it.

Friend, what are you holding fast to in place of Jesus? You will never know the transforming life of Jesus until you let go of the empty promises of sin and embrace Jesus only. When you let go of your idols, you will know the increase of the life of Jesus in you that v. 20 tells us about:

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

Genuine faith and repentance result in gospel growth in your life and in our church. It is being filled with the life of Jesus, the joy of God, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

3. The destructive power of the gospel (vv. 21-41)

Our last point is in vv. 21-41 and is almost the opposite of our second point. Here we see how much of a hold the idol of money had on many of the people Ephesus.

So many people in Ephesus became Christians that it began to destroy the economy of occultic arts and the business of idolatry.

Demetrius, the silversmith, was so angry that his business and wealth were being ruined that he wanted the church to be declared illegal and thus outlawed as a religion because it was not in keeping with the Roman government's rules. He almost started a riot in the city. The Apostle Paul wanted to address the crowd, but the disciples would not allow him to speak. Eventually, the town clerk wisely shut the gathering down and sent everyone home.

Look at what happened. As the gospel penetrated society and culture, those who were saved had their finances rearranged. Spending their money on Kingdom priorities and so they no longer spent their money on idolatry.

Have you ever wondered what might happen if we practiced deep faith and repentance to the point where our spending habits were so altered that the unsaved world took notice? We might see our economy turned upside down and people come to saving faith in Jesus.

How amazing would it be that if we shared our faith so much and we saw so many people come to faith in Jesus that the whole social order was rocked to its core for Christ? *This is the extraordinary, transformative, and destructive power of the gospel.*

I titled this sermon: *The Expulsive Power of the Gospel*. I based it on a sermon by 19th-century Scottish pastor Thomas Chalmers. The title of his sermon is *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. He preached it to teach his congregation that the gospel creates such new powerful affections for Christ that they drive out any competing loves and affections.

This really is what we see in Acts 19:11-41. The Ephesians were transformed by the expulsive power of their new affection for Jesus that it transformed individuals and even society.