

All right. Tonight open your Bibles to Acts 19:8 as we continue our verse by verse study through the book of Acts.

We have told you - and I'll mention it again just, I think, if nothing else but through repetition it'll kind of stick with us - that the book of Acts is a narrative report. It is written by Dr. Luke. Between this and the gospel, he wrote well more than 25% of the entire New Testament. But it is a sharing with us of the growth and the birth of the early church. It covers roughly thirty years of church history. It is interested in how the gospel began to be preached by God's people filled with His Spirit.

The first chapters of the book cover roughly the first fifteen years; it is the establishment of the church in Jerusalem amongst the Jews. It is to them that the gospel went first. With the conversion of Saul and then the leading of Peter to go to the house of Cornelius to share there, as well as the gospel being taken by men from Cyrene as well as from Cyprus to a place called Antioch in Syria (300 miles or so to the north - you can see it on the map, and I hope you have your maps that we've given you; if not, stop by the counter on the way out), the Word began to be clear to everyone that God's intention was that all men would be saved. And so that took a while for some of the Jews to be comfortable with; they believed that, somehow, Gentiles, if they were going to be saved at all, should become Jews first. But that wasn't anyone's experience; not Peter's, not Paul's, not Barnabas'. They had an Acts 15 council meeting in Jerusalem that determined the same; God's salvation came through grace.

The last fifteen years of the book of Acts, and certainly more than half the book itself, is interested in seeing the gospel go to the ends of the world. And most of that world work, if you will, at least from the book of Acts standpoint, was three long missionary journeys that Paul took with different staff from different times, out in ever-widening circles from Antioch (there, on your map there in the north in Syria, 300 miles, like I said, to the north). Paul went out in 46 A.D. - spent two years out, mostly spent time in Galatia (that is, today, modern-day Turkey). He then left a few years later, in 50 A.D., and went for the next six years - spent most of his time in Europe. So you'll find that, on the second missionary journey,

Paul spent much time, like I said, in Europe. He also revisited all of the other places he had begun. And the third trip, which is where we're currently at, was not only revisiting the Galatian churches and eventually going back through Europe, but he spent most of his time in Ephesus - from 55, 56, 57 A.D. Paul spent time on his third missionary journey, hundreds and thousands of miles, 1500 square miles of land that he covered to just share the gospel.

So tonight, in chapter 19, we are with Paul in Ephesus. He is on his third and final missionary journey. Back in chapter 18:1, Paul had come alone to Corinth. He had met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla; they worked in the common trade of making tents. For some eighteen months, Paul would spend time with them ministering in Corinth; a church would be planted. And God protected Paul from all of the abuse that he had suffered. He was ready to quit. The Lord actually came to him and said, "I've got a lot of people in this city, Paul. Just stay at it." And he did, and God miraculously protected him. We studied, in chapter 18, that story.

I also mention to you (most of the time on Wednesday nights) that the way you learn from narrative is different than what you learn from doctrinal books like the epistles, where every sentence has to be analyzed in context, and there's one supposition upon another, and it's a little bit more work. When you get to narratives, you learn by the example that God sets before you. You look at the experiences and what does God choose to tell us about the early church. And so that's what we've been trying to do, trying to give you mileages and travel times and years that Paul is out so that everything kind of can come together in your understanding.

But for eighteen months, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Aquila and Priscilla ministered, if you will, at Corinth. When Paul left Corinth, and he felt led of the Lord to go home, he left the brethren there, and he sailed by himself for Syria via Jerusalem, and then Aquila and Priscilla joined him on the way; and the first stop that they made was in Ephesus. It's about 250 miles across the sea there. Paul shared in the synagogue at Ephesus on the way home from his second missionary journey. There was a promise of fruit; it seemed pretty exciting for them. Paul really felt, by the Lord, he had to go home to Jerusalem for the feast. So he left Aquila and Priscilla, if you will, in Ephesus with the words, "If the Lord be willing, I'm going to come back." Paul then sailed by himself 650 miles to Caesarea, to Jerusalem, made the feast day, said hello to the church. We mentioned (at that time) there wasn't a close warmth between Paul and Jerusalem because of the

religious legalities that they were having to work themselves out, even though Paul constantly came and helped them and supported them, as did other *Gentile* churches. And then Paul went 320 miles north - went to the church in Antioch. It does seem, from all that we can gather in the Scriptures, that he was there less than a year, far less than a year - maybe five or six months - before he went out on the road again, and he wanted to pursue the gospel and the churches. It burned in his heart. Paul wasn't good at just sitting still. While Paul was gone, we are told in chapter 18 that Aquila and Priscilla got to minister to a fellow named Apollos - wise guy, smart man, from Egypt. He'd only heard about the gospel according to the baptism of John; he never got beyond that. And so they took him under their wing. They taught him for the time that Paul was gone. He caught fire. The Lord began to use him. He moved from Ephesus to Corinth and began to help the church there that Paul had left earlier. When Paul comes into town (in the first six verses or so, here, of chapter 19), he runs into twelve disciples in Ephesus that were really the fruitfulness out of Apollos' ministry; they also didn't know anything more than the baptism of John. And so Paul took them, he explained to them who Jesus was. They received the Lord. He prayed over them, laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. We talked last week, exclusively, about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and your absolute need for it in your life. And I hope that you were here and if not, that you can go listen to the study. But in any event, there were about twelve guys in all, and we ended in verse 7 of chapter 19.

Tonight we begin again with Paul in Ephesus; in fact, this entire chapter is devoted to Paul in Ephesus. He was there a total of three years, by his own admission, and we'll read about that in chapter 20. But we're going to read about his ministry in Ephesus. And again, because it's narrative, here's what the Lord would like you to know about the early church and the way that it functioned and how God used them.

So let's start at verse 8. We'll stop tonight at verse 20 because why would you not want to stop at a verse that says, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed"? It can't be any better than that. So let's start at verse 8 tonight, where we read these words, "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and

Greeks." When Paul got back a year after he had stopped here on the way home, there had been open arms to receive him. It does seem from verse 8 that when he got back, that door was still open. So Aquila and Priscilla's ministry there with the Jews, during that time that Paul was gone, was certainly not as bold or in-your-face as maybe you'd normally see Paul preaching. They laid a good foundation. They seemed to limit their ministry to individuals and not so much kind of the preaching to the crowds. And, even as you go back to chapter 18:26, they took this fellow from the synagogue away from there (Apollos), and they began to teach him more clearly. So when Paul showed up, for three months he had an open door which, by the way, at least from standards of the book of Acts, is a long time. Paul usually could blow himself out in two weeks. Right? "Yes, you're not ever welcome back." "Okay." That's pretty much how he operated. But for three months, Paul had an opportunity to minister, and people were getting saved.

And notice what we read, in particular, "Paul boldly reasoned and persuaded those in the synagogue regarding the kingdom of God." In the Bible, the words "kingdom of God" is a very broad biblical term that is usually just a reference to a place that God rules, where He sits upon the throne, where His subjects obey Him and bow before Him. You can find the beginnings of that, if you will, early in the book of Genesis where the LORD said, "Let us make man in our image and in our likeness. Let him have dominion over the sea and the birds of the air" (Genesis 1:26). And God established a kingdom upon the earth over which He was the LORD, and His people were His subjects; and until sin entered the picture, that kingdom of God was readily seen, and Adam and Eve were placed into it. But when sin came, and disobedience against God and to His Word, death and sin entered the picture, suffering and sickness and all. But man transfers himself willingly out of the kingdom of God - the place he was invited to be, where God made him - and he is placed into the kingdom of Satan, the one who runs this world; the kingdom of darkness - there's a prince over the world, and it's the devil. Since that day, and since that fall, every person is born a sinner, and every person is born into the kingdom of darkness because of sin. By sin of one man death entered into the world, and sin came into everyone's life (Romans 5:12). Since that day, man has tried a lot of different ways to change kingdoms. We usually call kingdom changing, religion. By that, I mean religions are manmade rules that man applies to himself in some form or another and then presents to God in the hopes that He's grading on the curve. "If I can just get in.....like 50%." And that's what religion does - it's man making rules, seeking to perform them to the best of his ability, and then offering them to God as some kind of a peace deal where "You forgive me, and

I talk to You, and everything's forgotten." It doesn't work that way, and the problem with it is "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). So, no matter what plan you have, you really can't get out of the kingdom of darkness on your own because sin brings a punishment or a reward with it. God, fortunately for all of us, had a plan and provided a way whereby you could change kingdoms, where you could actually come and enter in, if you will, to the kingdom of God. When Jesus is speaking there to the disciples in John 10:1, He said, "No one can enter the sheepfold. I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold through the door is a thief and a liar and a robber." And He spoke of Himself - that the only way to get back into the kingdom of God was through Christ - pointed to Himself. "To him the door of the sheepfold is open, the doorkeeper opens it, the sheep hear his voice; he calls them by name, they follow him." And He presented Himself to us as the door back into the sheepfold where God rules. And you and I, when we got saved, we repented of our sin, God took us out of the kingdom of darkness, placed us into the kingdom (the Bible says) of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13), the kingdom of light, the kingdom of hope, where He rules supreme; and God moved into your heart, and you now become a subject of God. You're a subject, a child of the King. You're born again. This kingdom of God is promised throughout the Old Testament. There are those promises that you will continually read of how God would bring One to sit upon the throne of David, who would rule there forever. Yet when Jesus came - announced by prophecy, announced by a forerunner that the prophets said would come, a King was born in Bethlehem - He was rejected by the nation. They didn't embrace Him; they will the next time. But they didn't that time. And because of God's grace and mercy, and obviously knowing what was coming, the kingdom of heaven went underground in the sense that God established His kingdom not upon the earth yet (that will come) but in the hearts of men. So when Jesus said, there in John 14:17, "You've heard of the Holy Spirit, He's with you, He's going to be in you," that new birth places us into the Lordship of Christ, and we become His servants, if you will. And what do we read, there in the New Testament? "This is the mystery - Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). And so we don't yet see His kingdom outwardly. We will. But right now, you're in the kingdom of God; you're living by His rules and bowing your knee to His authority and following His Words and relying upon His grace. The kingdom of God.

And Paul came to preach about the kingdom of God. But the only thing he could have preached in that regard was the new birth and the need to be saved. When you pray, as Jesus gave that example in the disciples' prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," that's really a prayer for the Lord to come and establish His

kingdom upon the earth, which will happen when you and I have been raptured and when, after the Tribulation, the Lord will return to rule for 1,000 years upon the earth, and you'll rule with Him. And then you read things like He'll restore everything, and every knee will bow, and every Old Testament prophecy will be fulfilled. But for now, the kingdom of God is within you. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you are born again, you cannot see nor can you enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Because that's the way that the relationship with God works today for all of us; we come to Christ, we receive Him. He now dwells in us.

So, for three months, Paul got an ear from these Jews at the synagogue, and he was just tellin' 'em like it was, and the old Paul would preach, man. He had answers, he was anointed, and he was dynamic. And for three months, the crowd allowed him to speak about the way of God, the kingdom of God, faith in Christ. Over time, and not that much time, some folks got tired of hearing him, began to refuse what Paul had to say, began to vocally speak evil. Notice what we read here, in verse 9, "evil of the Way before the multitude." They weren't just arguing with Paul in a coffee shop somewhere; they were calling him out in public. It was now a public dispute, and Paul didn't really want much of that. It's not really the way the Lord works. "Some were hardened" and withdrew themselves and didn't want anything to do with it. So we read here, in verse 9, "he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus" and would stay there for another two years.

"Some were hardened," there in verse 9. The word "hardened," this is the only place that it is used. The word, in various forms, is found in the Old Testament as well. For example, when the Pharaoh willfully denied letting the LORD's people go, when he deliberately stood against what was convincing and absolutely irrefutable evidence that God was with the children of Israel, he said, "I'm not lettin' you go, I don't care who your God is," you'll find this word being used. It says, "He hardened his heart," and then we read that, "God set him in the place of his choosing." He hardens himself to what God has to say; God then hardens his position. He gives him what he has been asking for. He hardens his choice. There's that Scripture in John 12:37, where it says, "The Lord did many signs before them, and they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled, which he said, 'Who would believe our report? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?' " And then it says, "And then they could not believe." And so they went from they "would not believe" to they "could not believe." So here is the same picture. God

made His way abundantly clear. People had a great opportunity to think it through, plenty of time to consider the promises, decided they didn't want anything to do with it, and God hardened them in their position. God gave them what they wanted. That's not a good thing. It's not always such a good thing to get what you want from God. But you find the same thing with Pharaoh, you find the same thing in John 12, you find the same thing here. You go from "will not believe" to "could not believe," and there is that place that you can get to where God just gives you what you say you want.

At this point, Paul does something that he has done before; he leaves the synagogue, doesn't want trouble, not really out to push anybody's buttons. And so, as he had done in Corinth, he moves away. This time he rents a lecture hall from a man who was in town. He met daily with his disciples. He taught them and answered fully their questions. He reasoned with them daily. That's what that word "reasoned" means. He gave them reasonable answers, if you will, reasonable explanations for his faith. It was common, at least in the Greek culture of Paul's day, that the lecture halls, which taught mostly philosophy, were open from 7:00-11:00 every morning and 4:00-9:00 at night every night; and that from 11:00-4:00 was like the afternoon. A lot of countries, even today, shut down in the afternoon; people eat, they take a nap, whatever. So it does seem, from all that we read, that Paul may have rented this school of Tyrannus during the siesta time. He rented the place during those hours between 11:00 and 4:00 and gathered with his students or teachers or parents, or whoever they might've been, because everyone kind of shut down at the same time. He took his lunch hour, if you will, extendedly so, to teach. We know from chapter 20, which we'll get to next (1 Corinthians 9, as well), that Paul said the entire time that he was in Ephesus he worked as a tentmaker. When we were on our "Footsteps of Paul" tour this last year, we saw the marketplace where all the vendors would sit, and it could easily have been that Paul was in one of these storefronts, maybe on a corner where he could have gotten a lot of business. So understand that from Paul's standpoint he was in Ephesus for a total of three years, but he was working every day. He would go out in the afternoon and teach, he'd bring his Bible, he'd meet with folks. He had a full-time tent making job, probably with Aquila and Priscilla (since they were there as well). They were in the same kind of job. And then he devoted himself every afternoon, seven days a week, to the teaching and the evangelism of the city. As a result, this young church began to grow, and it began to flourish; and their extent became unbelievable. We read, in verse 10, that all who dwelt in Asia over that two years would hear the word of Jesus, whether you were a Jew or whether you were

a Greek. Can you imagine that one man's willingness to spend his lunch hour and his weekends, if you will, preaching the gospel would touch an entire country? Let's put it in terms we can understand. We've been here thirty-some years. Has all of Whittier heard the gospel because we're here? And if not, what can we do? Or La Habra or Brea. Help us, Lord, is what we can pray. I mean, Paul's ministry was such that it wasn't hyperbole to say everyone had heard about Jesus, and it came from this little schoolhouse that was rented on the off-hours as Paul met with these folks day in and day out.

We read, in verse 10, "this continued for two years," and everyone who dwelt there had heard. Imagine the schedule that Paul must have had to keep. Now I don't think it's much different than the Sunday school teachers tonight are doing, teaching your children. We have people in our Sunday school that have been there over twenty years, teaching the kids. Their kids are now in the class that they were from. That's a long time. Right? The folks that we have in our church that go to the convalescent homes on Sundays we just inherited a new convalescent home. They just opened the doors, "Could you please come every week?" and we said, "We don't know if we have the people." And within weeks, now we have the people, and God just raised up a bunch of folks. But these folks all work for a living, and yet they spend their ministry time regularly, free time of theirs, making the most of what God has given them. The folks that go to our prisons, they go on their own dime, at their own time, and it takes time. You have to qualify and go through background checks and show up and sometimes wait on guards who are just not all that excited to see you, always. And yet the Lord continues to raise them up. I like Paul's example that ministry without excuse, with diligent work, can have a huge impact. Full-time ministry with a full-time workload: that's an amazing thought. And as Paul taught - and when we get to chapter 20, when he meets with these leadership people on his way, really, back home for the last time (or he thinks - he'll not see them again) - he was able to say to these leaders in this church, "You remember how for three years with tears I taught the entire counsel of God. I kept back nothing from you." Paul was devoted to making sure that the leadership and the people in the church knew the Bible well, knew it well. He would say, "I taught you the full counsel of God's Word. I taught you day and night. I taught you from house to house. I taught you publicly." To get a little feel for how this all worked in Ephesus, if you look forward in history, when Paul is arrested in Rome, in Caesarea, even, and he is kept from traveling, he sends Timothy to pastor the church here in Ephesus. Later on, John the apostle - the one who wrote the book of Revelation, and those little books - 1, 2 and 3 John, as well as the gospel in

your Bible - he would follow Timothy to the pulpit in Ephesus. When John died, a fellow named Polycarp, who was a 1st-century pastor disciple of John, would come and take the church in Ephesus. The church has this long history of godly men and godly work and just an amazing history of what the Lord began just because Paul was willing to take his afternoon break and sit with people and tell them what God had to say. If you ever think that, "Gosh, I don't know what to do," just teach the Bible to someone. Share God's Word with someone. Look at the power in God's Word. It ends in verse 20 saying it's the "word of the Lord that grew and prevailed." Ephesus is the demonstration of the faithfulness of a few folks to the Word of God and the changes that it brought. It really is a living example. Like I said, if you go on one of those tours of Paul's footsteps (and maybe after we get back from Israel, we'll try to plan another one), it is the most amazing - you get goosebumps walking up and down the streets of the ruins of Ephesus, the amphitheater that's there. It's just ridiculous. My goodness! And here Paul sat and every day taught God's Word.

Forty years from now, from where we are in our book, Jesus would write a letter to this church. And you find it in Revelation 2, the first seven verses. But He would say to this church, forty years down the road, that it had become a machine. It was doing all of the things right - they were growing, they were powerful, they were noticeable, they accomplished much. However, the Lord says, "My problem with you is you are no longer motivated by your love for Me. You're now just accomplishing many things." It's almost like a routine. That's not the way it is here. Paul, in the love that he had for the Lord, gave God's Word out, and the church began to flourish. But a generation that followed inherited a work that their hearts weren't engaged with as it was with Paul. You find that in most churches. You know, most revivals never last more than fifty years, even historically, in all the history of man, as long as we've been keeping records. And the reason is there's a generation that God speaks to, and everyone gets on board, and they know the Lord personally, and they respond to Him in love. And then they're handed a church or a work from people who experienced God, and they take all of the success, and they say, "Well, now we'll run the place." But they never paid the bills, you know? They never had the suffering. They never were on their faces, never fasted and cried out. They didn't have to it didn't cost them anything. And so the second generation takes, but they don't really it's kind of like inheritances. You can have a father that kills himself making it and hands you money, and you go, "I'll just spend that." It's not kind of the same heart. Same thing with revival. So this church, as well as it began, as good of leadership as it

was given, the Lord, in Revelation 2, said three things to them. He said, "I want you to remember from where you've fallen. Go back to where you started." Second of all, "Repent." There're three R's - remember, repent (turn around), and then He said, "Return to your first love, or I'll take the church away." "Come back to doing it the way that you started, and certainly I can bless." When Paul will leave this church several years down the road - after he leaves and then comes back - he will warn them about what is coming to them and what the church is going to face. He believes it's the last time he's going to be there, and he warns them about the wolves that'll come in from within and try to devour it and all.

But look at verse 10. What a fruitful time this church ministry, and Paul got to stay. He stayed here longer than anywhere. This is about as rooted as he gets. Even his home church, he didn't seem to spend this time in. And his zeal for God's Word, his love for the lost, his confidence in what God had said, transferred over to his disciples. And so these men go out from this place, and Ephesus becomes the center of church planting. In fact, all of those churches in the book of Revelation (in Revelation 2 & 3) probably came out of this church, in one direction or another - the Colosse church, the Hierapolis church - you'll find them mentioned. But they came out of a group of people that, at least initially, were meeting over here at this house or this school, in these school rooms. And can you imagine? The gospel is seen and heard, the churches are planted, the hearts are stirred, ministries begin. All because there's a guy that's willing to teach the Bible without shame. And when he's persecuted, he just moves along. He doesn't stay to argue in public. He just moves along and teaches the people that want to hear him.
Narrative.

Verse 11 tells us something interesting. "Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them." I guess I would have you mark the word "unusual" because, even in the narrative, Luke said, "This isn't the way God worked usually. This is unusual." But in a city that was bound to the occult, and we will certainly read that before we finish tonight, God did something that probably the occult people needed to see to move themselves towards the things of God. God uses whatever it takes to get you to where He needs you to be, and this - with the occult and all the weird stuff that comes with the devil worship and all, God made Himself stick out - was certainly a way to do that. However, don't expect this to happen in your life; it rarely happened in the Bible. The word "handkerchief" here is the word for headband or sweatband. The

word for "apron" is just that. It's either a linen or a leather apron worn for working, and probably leather if Paul was using it to knit together tents and all. So, I love the picture because I imagine - I've got goofy ideas in my mind a lot of times - Paul returning to work after the break, and his clothes are gone again. (Laughing) "Where's my apron?" "Oh, they took it down the road, man. Some guy was really sick." "And my sweatband was full of sweat!" "Yeah, the guy wanted it - his leg's sore." Really? I thought to myself - you have to be a rather mature man of God to be able to be used by the Lord like this and maintain your balance. Because else you'd be bragging about, "My socks can heal colds, but my sweatband can" (Laughing) You'd get a little full of yourself rather quickly, I would think. But God did something miraculous, unusual, and He wanted to get the Word out. That's what He's interested in - eternal life - more than anything else. Imagine sweatbands and aprons being brought to someone and immediately that they're healed or they're delivered from Satan or from the demons. Through this, God made a name for Himself, and with this, the gospel that Paul was preaching every day in this rented school room began to see power, and there was a verification of what he was saying. He wasn't just talking a good game; people could see it. And God stood with him. "And these signs shall follow those that believe" (Mark 16:17). And I believe that God does that still. He does great things in the eyes of the world so that what we're preaching is the very same things that people need to hear, and they're verified by the work of the Lord. Not this way - "unusual" - but in whatever God chooses to do. And I always like these things in the Bible because you can't put God in a box. You know, people love to recreate. "How did the Lord do it?" "Well, there were sweatbands and aprons." "All right. Let's get some of those, and let's sweat in 'em, and then let's put 'em on people." That'll work. It's never gonna work because you can't formulate or duplicate the work of God. His methods are discovered by faithfulness. What works in one place may not work in another. It's hard to replicate..... "We want to copy it. Well that's what'll work." No. No. The very next story here tells us that's not a good idea. We should know the Lord.

There is something to be said, and it's a lesson that is repeated (and that's why I bring it up here) in the Bible where the Bible puts us in positions where we have what the Bible scholars oftentimes call points of contact. Let me explain what that means. Most people believe, as Christians, that God can do the miraculous. I don't think any of you, as believers, would say, "Well, I don't think God could do that." Of course He could do that, and you believe that. The problem is we're not so sure He'll do it for us. Like, "I know God heals, but I don't know if He'll heal me." Or, "I

don't know if I should pray to be healed because I don't know if I have enough faith." There's always this I believe it intellectually, internally, but I don't necessarily believe in that connection with God actually doing what I believe He'll do. So we have what is called passive faith, passive meaning I believe it, and I stand over here and do nothing. Right? That's what I do. So, when you get to the Scriptures, you find out that the word "faith" is an active verb. There's no such thing as passive faith, except in that case, and that's not good or very fruitful. So we're called upon to have active faith. And here's how God helps us. He tells us, for example, in the book of James (5:14-15), "If you're sick, call for the elders of the church. Let them anoint you with oil, and let them pray over you. And the prayer of faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will raise them up." And you say to yourself, "How in the world is some oil on my head going to make me feel better?" It's like the little kid who got a shot in his backside for a head cold, and he goes, "How long is it going to take to go from there to here?" (Laughing) So, putting oil on my head, is that going to help me? And the answer is no! Oil doesn't heal at all! What does? Obedience. God's power. So it gives me something to do. A point of contact where I touch God's promises by obeying what He says for me to do. It's very important. And it helps me because it allows me then to turn from passive faith to an expectation and a hope.

When we were contemplating coming out here in the mid-80's to start a church and a Bible study, everyone that I knew and my wife knew told us that was a stupid idea. We had a good ministry job. I had 1,500 people coming on Sunday nights where I was teaching at Calvary Downey. I had my kids both in Christian school. We had a house that we could afford. And we walked away from all of it because we believed God wanted us out here. Now, honestly, no one but she and I thought it was a good idea. Everyone thought - you know, the accountant in all of us, the guy who adds up numbers - this was a bad idea. Except when God tells you to do something, how do you get rid of that? So, when a man called me (who I knew), and without knowing our struggle, said, "Hey, I was praying for you yesterday, and the Lord put a word on my heart, and He told me to call you today. I don't know if this applies to you or not, so if I'm way off base, you tell me. But the Lord told me to call you and your wife and to say what you're planning to do is the right thing. Go do it." Didn't know anything about this. And I went, "Ah! It's perfect." That was encouraging. Right? A word from the Lord through a friend who was willing to be faithful. And we just stepped forward with a lot more hopefulness than we might have, had we not heard from the Lord. So it encouraged my faith.

But there's a lot about the power of God, in the Bible, that I have absolutely no understanding of. And if you want me to help you, I'm just going to tell you I can't. There is a Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4) who was told by Elisha the prophet that she would have a child, and she did. And Elisha was elsewhere, and his servant Gehazi was with him, when the woman (some years later) came running towards him. And Gehazi, being the prophet's servant, kind of jumped in there to protect the prophet. (Sometimes people like to kill the prophet, you know?) And Elisha said, "No. Just leave her alone. Let her come to me. She looks like she's troubled." And she said, "I didn't ask you for a kid." But the kid had died. And Elisha was frustrated that the LORD hadn't shown him. And so he said to Gehazi, "Here's my staff. Run ahead. Don't let anyone stop you. Put it on his body. And I'll get there as quickly as I can." And the woman said, "Well, I'm not leaving your side. This is your fault." And off they went in the direction of where the lady lived. And when they got there, Gehazi said, "Yeah, this is not workin' at all." Elisha went in there and laid down on the boy, face to face, mouth to mouth, nose to nose. The body seemed warm, but he got up. Nothin'. Didn't help. Nothin' worked. Went outside and prayed, and the LORD told him, "Go in, and do that again." And he did, and this boy came to life. And he said to Gehazi, "Go give this boy to his mom." And the LORD healed him.

When Elisha died and they buried him (2 Kings 13), there was a time that there was a Moabite who was fighting near the grave, and as he was run through by a knife, he died, and he fell on top of Elisha's bones. And just in contact with his bones, he went, "Oh, I feel better now." He got right back up! I don't get any of that. I stand in marvel of it. It blesses me. But I don't know how God works. I just know that there are places that God gives us where He allows us to be releasing our faith to the point where we can have confidence in the Lord, that He's not just able but He's willing. He designs them for me to have faith in the impossible.

I see it in Mark 8, where that blind man is led by the hand, comes to Jesus, and Jesus spits on his eyes. I'm thinkin', "How does that help?" And I've concluded that couldn't have helped. "Come here, buddy." (Sound of spitting) No. (Laughing) Really? And He puts His hands on him, and He says, "Do you see anything?" and the man says, "I see men like trees, walking." In other words, "I sort of see stuff. I couldn't see anything before, but it's not clear. You're not a good optometrist. I can't see that good." And the Lord lays His hands on him again, and He made him look up, and then everything was clear. To me, that's just a sign of helping him along. Right? What he didn't believe at all, he began to have some hope, and, man,

the Lord encouraged his faith. And as He did, the Lord was able to work, and the man was touched.

I think about the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years (Matthew 9, Mark 5, Luke 8), who sneaks up behind Jesus, doesn't want to embarrass herself in public, really isn't even allowed to be there, unclean by the law's standards but figures this, "If I can just touch the hem of His garment, I know I'll be healed." And to her, it was that touch to the Lord, and, "The Lord will touch me," and it worked. God honored her faith. And then He made her come back and testify. And she, at least, didn't want to, initially.

But this is certainly an interesting, odd, way, I guess, for the Lord to work. You might remember, if you were with us in Acts 5, that when Peter was ministering, they would lay the sick out on the streets - they laid them in beds and they laid them in couches - and just the shadow of Peter coming by, falling on them, healed them. It's like that point it's all about encouraging faith.

So, the early church saw a lot of God's hand at work. But this point of contact, I think, is an important issue to understand. Physically, the oil on your head can't heal you, the shadow won't do you any good, Paul's sweatband may get you some money at the auction, but it's not going to heal you or deliver you. Unless God works through them. Right? So, when we have a promise like James, we can hold God to that in the sense that we're doing exactly what He wants us to do, and we can have confidence. If the Lord wants healing now, we've done our part, we've participated, we've been obedient. And I can release my faith, and actively so.

So, here in Ephesus - like I said, a very occultic town - God demonstrates his power in a very unique, non-repeatable way so that He might make His mark, and the people in town began to hear, and people did hear oftentimes. Now, before I move on from this subject I don't want to beat it to death, but Paul certainly didn't try to repeat this later in his own life. So in 1 Timothy 5, when Timothy got sick (because he was drinking a lot of bad water, I guess), Paul said to him (verse 23), "Look, Timothy, don't just drink the water. Find a little wine and drink that for your stomach's sake and the fact that you're always gettin' sick. Use the wine. It's not gonna make you as sick as the water is." Very practical. But no, "Hey, here Timothy, put this sweatband on your belly or take my apron home with you. You'll be just fine."

When Trophimus was sick in Miletus, Paul wrote about ... in his last letter to Timothy, he said that he had to leave Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20) because he couldn't wait for him anymore, but God hadn't seen fit to raise him up. And, again, you don't see Paul reaching for a headband. When Epaphroditus, who Paul mentions in chapter 2 of Philippians (he was a pastor from Philippi), had come to minister to Paul while he was in prison, he got sick. And Paul said (verse 27), "He was sick amongst us. He was sick almost to death, but thank God who had mercy upon him and not just upon him. Upon me, too, so that we don't have to have even more sorrow than we already have." Again, Paul wasn't reaching for a headband. He was praying God would heal him; wasn't sure that God would. He was kind of in limbo, like we are most of the time. "God, what are You gonna do?" But he was thankful that the Lord had stepped in and intervened, but it wasn't anything miraculous in that sense or these on-display kinds of actions. So, Paul finds himself struggling in prayer to be delivered from his thorn in the flesh; finally resolves that God's not going to deliver him from that. So, there's a lot of that waiting that we're not sure of, but then there are these miraculous ways that God seems to use those things that can release our faith, and we should make ourselves available to those. So in God's sovereignty, He does unusual things we can't formulate to reproduce them. What we can do best is - like Paul - love the Lord, obey the Lord, teach His Word, and then rely upon Him to guide. And then God does great things. I mean, He does miraculous things.

When.....I think I have time.....we came to Whittier, we were meeting in a house, we had two Bible studies going, two nights in a row, and we had 60 or 80 people in each Bible study. As we sought to see if the Lord would plant a church, we went to the school up here on Santa Gertrudes, and we wanted to ask about having a place to meet. And the schools were not particularly, in that time (in the middle 80's), conducive to helping churches; some of them had closed and were reopening, and there was just a lot.....you know, there was a time of favor, and this wasn't one of them. So, when I made an appointment with the director of the school over there - to go ask - I walked in kind of nervous because I knew kind of the deck was stacked against Christians and churches and all. And I had gone by and gotten coffee (I don't even know if there was Starbucks; well, there might have been, but I had the cheap one), and the lid didn't stay on very well. So I'm sitting in his office, and I'm lookin' around, and I go (Pastor Jack enacts the motion of tipping his coffee cup).....all in front of my shirt. Really great representative for the church to be. And he says, "Pastor, would you like to come in?" And I went, "Yeah, I'm sorry. I spilled the coffee. Heh heh." He goes, "Yeah, you're an idiot."

(Laughing) So I sit down, and he begins to question me about what kind of church is it, and what do you want to do exactly, and why do you need to meet in this school? And he did that for ten minutes. I tried to answer his questions, and I said, "Are we goin' somewhere with all this?" because now I was getting irritated. And he said, "Well, I'm from Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, and I just got moved here to the district. I just want to know where you're comin' from. So, yeah, we can get you in the school." And then he gets us in the school, he's there sixty days, and they move him back to another district. It's like the Lord moved this guy in, and he goes, "Yeah," and then he leaves. He put up with my coffee, he answered my questions, he was for us, he was one of us! It's so cool to watch. Unusual, sure. But we're so thankful for it.

So, the narrative of the early church.

Verse 13, "Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.'" I guess it shouldn't surprise us that when something works, the fake charlatans would like to make a formula out of it. They didn't know the Lord. There is nothing in their lives that would warrant them looking to see what God might do. If you want to fail in any kind of ministry, just try to do the work of God without knowing Him or try to just copy what someone else is doing. The word "itinerant" here is the word for vagabond or wandering, and there were certainly, in the 1st century, those religious folks who claimed to have power that was available for sale or were available for hire. You've probably run into the fortune teller places. We used to go down to the beach to Venice, and they used to (I don't know if they still do) have these fortune tellers set up on the boardwalk in Venice. And they would say, "For \$10, we'll tell you your future." So I would always kind of mess with them. I'd stop and say, "I'll make you a deal." I'd say, "I'll give you \$100 if you'll just tell me my name. All I want you to do is tell me my name. If you don't know it, I want you to give me ten minutes of your time so I can tell you about Jesus." And I never had one of 'em take me up on it. "Oh, no. We're not messin' around here." "Okay." They would never so, there are always folks selling their lucky charms for love and wealth and health and travel. You can get your own website and your Twitter account, get a following. These cultists really did reflect their day. But notice, in verse 13, that seeing the success of Paul, the unusual miracles that were carried by the Lord through his life, they began to try to see if they could somehow put that gimmick into their business so they could be profitable, into their arsenal and use it. But they had no

relationship with God, so all they could do was use "the name of the Jesus whom Paul preached." Isn't that interesting? You should know this. God has no grandkids. He only has kids. So unless you have a personal relationship with Him by faith, you're not gonna be able to mimic someone else who knows the Lord. To deal with the devil without Jesus is a big mistake. And these guys found out.

Well we're told, in verse 14, "Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest," (who were these fake itinerant exorcists) "who did so. And the evil spirit answered" (these seven) "and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." That's a great story, isn't it? (Laughing) The name "Sceva" is a kind of Hellenized version of a Latin word that means left-handed, but it isn't complimentary; it means to be sinister or untrustworthy. He was a chief priest in this cult. Notice, in verse 15, that the evil spirit of the man who they tried the formula upon answered in no uncertain terms, "I know Jesus." The word "*ginosko*" means, "I know Him by experience," literally, "I fear Him." "I also know Paul." The word there is not "*ginosko*," it's "*epistemi*," and it means to learn by observation or exposure. "I know the Lord. I know Him well, by experience. And we've come to know Paul, that God uses him, that he's to be feared and to be listened to, that God stands with him." But his third question is, "Who are you?" With no protection, these seven boys of this sinister man are now demon food. Right? One man with superhuman powers overcomes the second, who have no power at all, and the pretenders are last seen as New Testament streakers. Wounded, naked, running for cover.

The good thing is in verse 17. "This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." It left an awe and a fear and a respect for the name of Jesus when these phonies were exposed; it kind of happened with Ananias and Sapphira (remember, in Acts 5) how we read there "great fear came upon all those who heard these things" (verse 5), and there was a holiness that followed. Well that happened here as well. In the next few verses, the fence-sitters, the fringe-dwellers either made 100% stand for Jesus, or they moved away to not be associated with Him at all because the line was too clear; you couldn't play both sides of the fence.

So we read, in verse 18, "And many who had believed" (these were believers, now) "came confessing and telling their deeds." So, we presume that the believers were maybe watered down or shallow, but now this event kind of shook their hearts. Verse 19, "Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver." And it was in this manner, verse 20, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." So, convinced now that Jesus alone was to be worshipped, that He alone could give victory, many came - believers and maybe fringe-dwellers, fence-sitters - and let 'em all in. I mean, this work of God convinced them. The word "practiced," "*prasso*," is the word that means someone who engages in something regularly; so these magic "practicers," if you will, indeed did it a lot. By the way, the word "magic" here - the only place that it is found in the entire Bible besides here is in 1 Timothy 5:13. And you want to know what the translation of the word is there? Busybody. Isn't that interesting? By definition, the word means to go beyond the prescribed boundaries and do so without gain, though it costs you a great effort. You don't get anything out of it; it costs you a lot. But you cross the line. That's what the word, literally, for "magic" here means.

So, in Ephesus, Paul's just havin' Bible study and prayin' for people that are sick. And now they've got bonfires going, where sorcery books are being burned, and they're just bringin' 'em in, right? In droves. People want to separate from their past and burn their occult books, and the Ouija board doesn't survive, and the book of chance doesn't make it. The values of the books that they no longer had was counted up to be fifty thousand pieces of silver in worldly value. But in the life that it was replacing, it was priceless, wasn't it? God touched these lives. People were changed.

And the summary verse, in verse 20, is the powerful one, right? God's Word brought permanent, lasting victory. It still does. And it's written in the imperfect tense, "prevailed," which means it didn't just win today; it was also winning tomorrow and the day after and the day after. It's an imperfect verb.

So, God gives us this picture of the fruit in one city over a three-year period through the simple teaching of the Bible and through the simple discipleship of God's people. So, what should the church be today? We should be teaching the Bible. The Word changes us. The lost will take notice of us. God's power can fall upon us. And, at some point, hopefully the believers are challenged to make full

commitments. Because sometimes believers aren't so fully committed, and they don't do well as a result.

So that's three years. Beginning in verse 21, we get the last days of Paul's time there - the last few weeks of Paul's time there. Next week, we'd like to go to the end of the chapter. We've entitled next week's message, "All Hell Breaks Loose and God Is Glorified." Sounds like a modern-day title, doesn't it?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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