

Text: Acts 19:8-20

My purpose for this message: To highlight the powers in the universe and show that in God's kingdom is power.

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[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

Powers of Light & Darkness: Miracles, Mystics and Magic

Today's message is about the power of God. In the universe, there are only 2 authentic powers; all others derive their power from these two sources.

- Powers of light and darkness
- Power of God, power of the devil.

But when God is in the picture, the devil is an “also-ran.” He always comes in second. In fact, a number of times in Scripture, the curtain is pulled back for us to see that though the devil did something for an evil purpose, he was little more than an errand boy serving God and his *good* purposes. *God* is where the power is.

How have you seen God exercise power in *your* life or around you? (or maybe I should ask, *have* you?) [REPEAT] Certainly we see His power in a violent storm or a beautiful dawn. But I'm thinking not about power in creation, but power in people; power demonstrated in the lives of people—like you, like me.

There is a common misunderstanding that Christianity is little more than a collection of beliefs (a misunderstanding not limited to unbelievers). Christianity *is* that, but it's much more: it is a kingdom in which God is king, we are his subjects, and in this kingdom God exerts His power for His glory, and for His subjects' benefit: moving, shaping, correcting, exalting, healing, transforming people, delivering. FIND Acts 19:8-20. As we read these verses and then unpack them, see if you can identify all the displays of God's power in them. READ. PRAY.

The title of my message is *Powers of Light & Darkness: Miracles, Mystics & Magic*. Let me identify the 2 main power carriers in this text. And I'll make 2 observations about each carrier.

1. God's Power in the Apostle **a. Paul's preaching had results**

The first power carrier we see is Paul. And God's first display of power *in* him is through his preaching. This missionary was in the middle of a 2 + year ministry in Ephesus. You may remember from chapter 18 that he had stopped there briefly on his way back to Jerusalem, perhaps a **year or 18 months** before. Just long enough to speak at least once at the synagogue where an intrigued audience begged him to stay. He couldn't at the time, but promised he'd do so someday if God willed it.

Now he was back fulfilling that promise. Day after day he made his way to the Ephesian synagogue to talk about Jesus. The response was respectable, but a Jewish faction became resistant, and would gather in the back, whispering in hushed tones about the newcomer and his odd teachings.

The critics eventually went public, slandering Paul's ministry. After 3 months the situation was so intolerable that Paul moved his pulpit to the lecture hall of a local philosopher. He'd make tents in the morning and evenings, then preach during the heat of the day when the hall was not in use. Crowds of residents, merchants, and travelers

would gather and as a result, Jesus became known far and wide. In fact, v.10 says that all Asia heard.

You may remember that Paul once so much as admitted (2 Cor.10:10) that he wasn't an especially talented preacher. So how could he attract Asia's finest? Why so many affected? READ 1 Cor.2:4-5. It is not enough to be a good preacher. A good preacher can draw crowds, but a powerful preacher sees people changed. His message takes root not from the ability to speak, but from the power of God at work in him.

b. Paul could do miracles

God's power surfaced in Paul in ways other than preaching: miracles. Cancers were healed, paraplegics walked (*without* embryonic stem cell research I might add!). Demons were sent packing. And not just when Paul placed his hands on people, but when concerned friends took his used sweatbands and aprons to the sick. Even through these items healing flowed.

Doesn't that sound like a televangelist gimmick ("Send me \$100 and I'll send you this powerful prayer cloth!")? And yet, God worked in similar fashion not only through Paul, but Peter (his shadow in Acts 5:15) and Jesus (diseased woman who touched his cloak; Mk.5:27-34). For signs and wonders especially identified the apostles. READ 2 Cor.12:12. Did miracles happen through other Christians? Sure. Do they happen today even though the apostles are gone? Sure. But in these especially anointed, especially appointed men, God *concentrated* His power in their lives for the launching of the church.

You see, the key to the presence of power was not the presence of Paul; the key was the presence of God. REREAD v.11. And the same is true today. Power is at work all around you, or at least held in reserve all around you, because God is *still* present.

2. God's Power in Jesus' Name

The second power carrier is a name: Jesus. Phil.2:9 says: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.*

But the power in Jesus name is available only to His own. Give \$50 to a crook or to a saint and either can buy \$50 worth of goods. I can use my credit card at Wal-Mart or someone can find my lost card and forge my name; either of us could use it to get the goods.

But the NAME is *not* a transferable currency. No one without a relationship to Him can use the power. These 7 brothers learned that the hard way. Sceva's sons earned a livelihood trying to expel demons from people. Probably no more than hucksters who sometimes *looked* successful. But after watching Paul cast out demons they probably realized what he was doing was the real deal. They saw that he always did this in Jesus' name and decided *they* would try that magic spell. To them it was an incantation, a magic phrase to use to get power.

This is an old problem. Remember the sorcerer Simon from Acts 8:19? He wanted the same thing. He'd watched the Holy Spirit come upon people as the apostles laid their hands on them and he offered to buy the power. The problem is no one can tap into the power of Jesus' name without first coming in faith and repentance *to* Jesus. In battle, you can't count on someone you are not aligned with.

So when 7 strong men confronted one demonized man, the demon demanded, "Jesus I know, Paul I respect, but who are you?" 7 men without any allies are no match for *one*

man allied with the king of hell. The fighting was brutal and bloody, so fierce that the brothers even lost their clothes.

The **NAME**. They couldn't use it but that *is* where the power is. In Lk.10, Jesus sent out 72 missionaries to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons. When those men got back, they could barely believe their own report to the Master: "Even the demons submit to us in your **NAME!**" (v.17). Before Jesus died, he explained to his disciples that once he was gone, through His NAME, they would ask His Father for things. And *what* they asked for in His name, the Father would do. (Jn.16:23-24).

When people heard about what happened to Sceva's sons, there were 2 unexpected results.

a. Unbelievers Gripped by fear

The first one affected unbelievers, and the second one affected Christians. One demonically empowered man defeats 7 others. If *anything*, you'd think people would be attracted to the powers of *darkness*. Not so. Look at vv.17-18. Everybody in the city whether they were monotheists or pagans, were "seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor." Impact #1 is that unbelievers are gripped by fear and honor Jesus. Why? After all, His power was never even used. But people realized from the demon's testimony that perhaps all that *could* have withstood his power, was the NAME of Jesus.

Here's how you can have access to the power in Jesus' name: John 1:12: *...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* Turn from *from* your sin and turn *to* Him in faith.

b. Believers convicted of sin

Impact #2 that the jr. Sceva's had was on Christians: they repented of secret sins. I guess this is the most common demonstration of God's power I get to see as a pastor and no healing of cancer could thrill me more. But you know sometimes, the catalyst for brokenness is fear. They weren't afraid of some demonized fellow; they were afraid of God. The writer to the Hebrews writes, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:31). 61 times the Bible mentions the fear of God. It's true that this fear includes awe, wonder, reverence, worship; but it also includes an element of being afraid, being scared of God's great power.

When Christians heard what happened to men trying to hijack Jesus' name, they came forward to confess their secret sins. Some went home to clean out their libraries. In this occult-ridden city even Christians still owned and used magic books of incantations, spells, and the like (not magic as in illusion or sleight of hand tricks; occult magic).

2 Cor.6:15: "What harmony is there between Christ and the devil?" How can Christians work hand in hand with the powers of darkness? For these book owners, maybe it was greed. Their total value would have paid the annual salaries of 137 people.

Or maybe it was the power. After all, new Christians would still have to handle mundane things like the person who wronged them. No, not forgive him, cast a spell on him! These believers were trying to walk on both sides of the street but then they heard about the *power* of the name—that it wasn't just a set of beliefs, they decided to walk just on God's side of the street.

Concl

In a well, a jet pump pulls water from many feet below the surface of the ground. The pump is entirely out of sight so you don't see it's work day in, day out. But it's *doing* it. Even *without* seeing it you know it every time you get a drink from the tap, or take a nice shower.

Have you seen God's power? It's there, even when you don't see it. Perhaps..., perhaps the problem is not that it's invisible like your pump, but that you haven't noticed his power because you're looking in the wrong direction. I've discovered that's especially true if I'm demanding God exert His power in a certain way, unaware that while he refuses *there*, He is flexing his muscles in many other ways in my life.

I've seen God's power in an unlikely sinner, coming to faith in Jesus Christ. I've seen it in an inconsistent Christian who finally gives up and repents of her secret sin. I've seen it in a reluctant disciple who finally agrees, "OK God, *whatever* job you have for me, I'll do." I've seen it in *one* open door that followed many closed ones. I've seen it in a man healed after years of being controlled by back pain. I've seen the power of God when bitter enemies reconcile. Have you seen His power?