

## 47—Acts 19.11-20—God’s Prodigious Power Prevails

- I. Introduction
  - a. There’s nothing like an unusual time change in the middle of the night to reveal our weaknesses. One third of our lives is spent asleep to remind us everyday that we are not God who never sleeps. And one less hour throws us off. It’s good to know that you are weak and in need because God is all-powerful to deliver us!
- II. Main Point
  - a. God is all-powerful and will prevail over all enemies through His word continuing to increase and prevail
- III. Outline
  - a. God’s deeds of power on display
  - b. Men attempting to do deeds of power
  - c. The Power of the word
    - i. Moving them to repentance
    - ii. Increasing and prevailing
- IV. Exposition
  - a. As we break into this next scene in Acts 19, Luke gives us a taste of what it looked like for God’s word to spread through Ephesus and throughout the region of Asia. Certainly, there were countless stories to tell. One of those stories out of the school of Tyrannus is most likely Epaphras planting a church in Colossae. But then there’s this one. One that is a bit strange and funny and amazing. In it, God’s prodigious power is on display as he performs these miracles through the hands of Paul. Let’s take a look.
    - i. As we recall from last week the persistent teaching of Paul at the school there in Ephesus, resulted in a massive spread of the gospel. It says that he taught daily for two years.
      1. Just think about the hours he put in to this which could have been as much as 3,000 hours of teaching.
      2. The slow erosive power of the word is amazing and something we need to give ourselves to.
      3. This is a common display of God’s power through teaching that we can now stand next to this uncommon display of power.
    - ii. But let’s first consider God’s power. In the Greek text, the first word of this section is the word translated miracles.
      1. It’s the word for power—δύναμις (dunamis). It is common to translate it as God’s power, wonders or miracles or more literally deeds of power.
        - a. This is an attribute of God called—omnipotence.
        - b. “God’s omnipotence means that God is able to do all his holy will. Whereas God’s freedom refers to the fact that there are no external restraints on God’s decisions, God’s omnipotence has reference to his own power to do what he decides to do.” (Grudem 216).
          - i. God’s word says
            1. “The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle” (Ps 24:8)
            2. “Is there anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen 18:14)
            3. Gabriel said to Mary, “With God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37)
          - ii. Is it completely accurate to say that God can do anything? Sometimes we say it that way.
            1. But there are some things God cannot do.

2. “He cannot lie, sin, deny himself, or be tempted with evil. He cannot cease to exist, or cease to be God, or act in a way inconsistent with any of his attributes” (Grudem 217)
3. That’s very good news for us!
2. It is very important that we remember that God is the Almighty and that he is also good. To have all authority and power to do as he chooses then we certainly find comfort for our souls knowing that God is in control of all things and he cannot act outside of his own nature.
- iii. Let’s take a look at God’s power on display in a very unique way. Even Luke describes what God did to be extraordinary—that is, outside the ordinary.
  1. As strange as it might sound, we must not miss the fact that Luke makes it clear that God is doing it.
    - a. Please read v.1 with me again—And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul.
      - i. This affirms what we’ve been saying about the book of Acts from the beginning. These are the acts of the risen, Lord Jesus, the acts of the Holy Spirit, and the acts of the Apostles.
        1. You might say, pastor, it says God was doing them not Jesus. Well, let’s take note of what happens after these things become known.
        2. Notice down in v.17 where it says that this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.
          - a. In other words, this is a clear claim here in Acts that Jesus is God.
            - i. We believe God eternally exists in the persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.
          - b. And when the miracles are performed, they are done in Jesus’ name which we will talk about more in a moment.
        - ii. We must conclude that the power and authority Jesus displayed while on earth continues on earth though he is seated in heaven!
  2. While it’s clear that God is doing these things, we must also wrestle with the fact that these things are prodigious.
    - a. Maybe for similar reasons, I chose the word prodigious to describe God’s power here.
      - i. It’s not a word normally used. Extraordinary is so common you might miss what the Lord is doing that is uncommon.
        1. Let’s go ahead and see what those prodigious things are. Luke says there in v. 12 that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul skin were being carried away to the sick to deliver them from their diseases and to cast out the evil spirits in them.
          - a. Normally, when God did this, Paul was present. This is not something we see happen very often.
            - i. I say often because of all the miracles that happened through Jesus; we do have the example of the woman with the issue of blood

for twelve years who touched the garment of Jesus and she was healed by faith.

- ii. At this point, the only reasons we are given for Jesus doing these things outside the norm is to deliver from diseases and to cast out evil spirits. These things are in this world and are dangerous because of the fall...because of mankind's rebellion and distrust of God.
  1. There's more to the story but we must affirm these two purposes. God uses his power for good to save and to rescue.
    - a. I'm reading through the book of Numbers right now and there was a display of God prodigious power in the story of Korah.
    - b. As you might know, Korah and company oppose God's choice for their leaders. Moses sends them to their tents and then says this to them: (Num. 16:28-30) <sup>28</sup> And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. <sup>29</sup> If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. <sup>30</sup> But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."
    - c. Obviously, the ground did open up and the Lord affirms Moses and Aaron as those he had chosen to lead and do those particular things.
  2. A similar thing happens here. God affirms the messenger he has chosen and sent.
  3. He affirms not only the messenger but the message. Vv. 11 and 12 display God's power to deliver from diseases and evil.
3. I can't imagine what you all think about this extraordinary display of Jesus' power.
  - a. I mean, we have many diseases in our day to be delivered from. Imagine going to the hospital for chemo treatment but someone met you on the sidewalk and said that Jesus Christ could heal you and they touched you with this handkerchief. What would you think about that?
  - b. I can imagine that you could be skeptical thinking, "Is this a real story?"
    - i. The answer is yes. It is real even though it is uncommon.
      1. You do not want to give your life fully to a god that has limitations. If the god you believe in is limited, then he cannot deliver you and he is not worthy of praise.
  - c. I can imagine someone reading this thinking we need to start a handkerchief ministry.
    - i. I'm sure some of you have received things like this in the mail. I know we have.
    - ii. Look, God certainly performs such powerful wonders to affirm this messenger and message but the pattern has been to do this where the gospel had not spread. This still happens in place that hear the gospel for the first time.

- iii. At some point the church becomes the witness not these types of miracles.
  - iv. The Lord affirms his messengers to the world how?
    - 1. By handing out sweaty aprons? No. (Jn. 13:35) <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
    - 2. Mailing out headbands is easier but less miraculous.
    - 3. May God do his amazing deeds of power through us to love one another that the world may know we are Jesus' disciples.
  - b. Let's move on to next scene in the story where some men attempt to perform powerful deeds.
    - i. I think Luke intends to set up a contrast between God doing deeds of power versus these men attempting to do deeds of power.
      - 1. The men are described as itinerant Jewish exorcists.
        - a. They traveled from town to town trying to cast evil spirits out of people.
          - i. It's not clear whether this group was legit or not. Certainly, evil spirits did not recently show up. They've been wielding destruction and influence since the beginning.
          - ii. My guess is they are fake. I say that because they have witnessed Paul casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus and they try imitate him.
            - 1. Notice there in v.13 that they attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits.
              - a. To invoke is to name. In other words, they named the name of Jesus over these spirits without any allegiance to Jesus.
                - i. Their statement proves it: I command you by the name of Jesus who Paul proclaims.
- b. Well, they may never try this again as the story turns very comical and sad.
  - i. The evil spirit answers them in v.15, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"
    - 1. This reminds me of the encounter Jesus had with the man who sat naked among the tombs and would break chain like they were nothing who knew him.
      - a. (Mk. 5:6-7) <sup>6</sup> And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. <sup>7</sup> And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."
        - i. The evil spirits know Jesus. (Jas. 2:19) Even the demons believe-- and shudder!
        - ii. They even know Paul.
    - 2. The evil spirit does not know the seven sons of Sceva even though they are of the high priestly family.
      - a. That seems to imply that evil spirits only know and are threatened by those who are joined to Christ by faith.
      - b. Luke makes a point to say that seven men were easily overpowered by this evil spirit.
      - c. They end up fleeing naked and wounded.
        - i. Total humiliation!

- ii. What are we to learn from this?
    - 1. Satan and evil spirits are no myth.
      - a. They are not the evil influence of organizations “structures” in our society today—evil governments and powerful corporations.
      - b. Scripture teaches they are part of the reality of this world.
      - c. To deny that reality is dangerous.
        - i. Let me give you one example of how dangerous it is.
          - 1. (1 Tim. 4:1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons
          - 2. You might think, well that will be obvious when that happens. But that’s just the problem.
            - a. These who walk away from the faith would lead to what? (1 Tim. 4:3) <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created.
        - ii. We must not deny the reality of satan and evil spirits. We must be diligent to arm ourselves against such attacks.
          - 1. (Eph. 6:14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:16) <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one
- c. Well, all of that was to show the main point. God’s power prevails as we see his powerful word prevail.
  - i. The story of God’s powerful deeds through Paul and the failed attempt of powerful deeds by the sons of Sceva become known to all the residents of Ephesus there in v.17.
    - 1. Three results from this:
      - a. Fear fell on all of them
      - b. And the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled or praised.
        - i. The name of Sceva is NOT praised for obvious reasons.
          - 1. All the residents of Ephesus seem to know where the power came from. They don’t praise the evil spirit for his power overpower seven men.
          - 2. “They see that Jesus is stronger than the demonic.” (Schreiner)
          - 3. They saw that they could trust in Jesus to deliver them from all their enemies—especially the evil of sin itself.
    - c. I want to linger over this third response.
      - i. Those who had believed came confessing and making known their deeds of darkness. They had secret sins they brought out into the light.
      - ii. Jesus came to save them from their sins. Jesus came to rescue them from their darkness.
        - 1. One of those deeds of darkness and inferior power was their practice of magic.
          - a. I’ve said this several times but it needs to be said again. This is not the kind of magic you watch on TV where it is a slight of hand. A better name for them would be illusionists.
          - b. No...these things are real and these things are prohibited by God.

- c. (Gal. 5:19-21) <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
  - d. These are the kind of things you read about when Moses was opposing Pharaoh who used his magicians to perform the dark magic to mimic God's plagues.
  - e. It would like the medium at Endor who King Saul used to summon Samuel.
  - f. Or as we say earlier in Acts of the likes of Simon Magnus.
  - g. One of the great dangers of these things is that they deceive people into thinking they can rescue and save when the truth is only Jesus can do that.
- 2. As a result of seeing that Jesus' power is sufficient to save, they remove their books about the dark arts and they have a bonfire.
    - a. The value of the books was estimated at 50,000 pieces of silvers.
    - b. I recall that after Kimberly and I became believers that we did a similar thing. Movies and music that was dishonoring to our Savior got thrown into the trash, not sold.
  - ii. I wonder, have you made a break from your secret sins like this?
    - 1. And you might say, I've never had that kind of stuff in my house. Praise the Lord.
    - 2. You might also say that you have never dabbled in magic either. But I would like to go deeper still. While magic is a formula of sorts to get what you want, we often use church attendance and bible reading and praying as mere formulas to get what we want.
      - a. If your coming to church and reading your bible and praying isn't for meeting God then it could merely be a formula you are attempting to use without allegiance to Jesus like the sons of Sceva.
      - b. You can't overpower your own evil like that. That only come through the name of Jesus.

## V. Response

- a. To state the obvious—we are not omnipotent.
  - i. In fact, there are many things we would like to change but do not have the power to do so.
    - 1. We see and feel this most often when diseases like cancer show up.
    - 2. We can also see this when we wish we had the will power to change this or that about ourselves. Evil seems to prevail.
  - ii. You cannot defeat diseases and evil but God can. And we got to see that first hand in this story today.
    - 1. This scene should encourage you to run to Jesus and trust in him because even if disease takes your life, you are safe in him and will have eternal life with him.
  - iii. God has defeated evil too and that arch enemy satan will be forever bond to the lake of fire.
  - iv. For those who have repented and turned to Jesus, we will be delivered from all our enemies, especially sin itself.