

“On Mission: At War”

- Acts 19 -

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Acts 19 - 1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples **2** he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard

whether there is a Holy Spirit." **3** And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." **4** Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." **5** When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. **7** Now the men were about twelve in all. **8** And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. **9** 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. **10** And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. **11** Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, **12** 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. **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." **14** Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. **15** And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" **16** 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. **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. **18** And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. **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. **20** So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. **21** When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." **22** So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. **23** And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. **24** For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. **25** He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. **26** "Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. **27** "So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." **28** Now when they heard [this], they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians!" **29** So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. **30** And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. **31** Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. **32** Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. **33** And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. **34** But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians!" **35** And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the [image] which fell down from Zeus? **36** "Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. **37** "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. **38** "Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. **39** "But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. **40** "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." **41** And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.



We are living in unprecedented times. Not for history in totality, but certainly for us that are alive today. For so long we in this country have rode the wave of “the good times” wherein we indulged our flesh and every worldly desire. Sadly...and seemingly with a blind eye, that has included the greater church. That state of being has continued for so long that we have a generation of young adults who know no other way of life, and this pandemic is pushing people over the edge. Having seldom if ever experienced any push back from the world, people are crumbling and closing in...hunkering down in a ‘me against the world’ kind of self centered existence. We’re angry, bitter, and quite testy because we aren’t able to indulge in the world to the degree that we have in the past. It is becoming clear that because of this, many folks have essentially bought a ‘pig in a poke.’ They got into this Christian thing for something quite false...something to hedge their bets against difficulty and pain. Now that such is coming up empty, of course those folks have naturally begun to jump ship.

The concept of ‘easy life’ was not only an anomaly in the generations of humanity that has passed, but it is quite simply not a lifestyle that can be maintained in any generation. Certainly we as believers have never been promised such, and in fact, we have been promised the opposite. The only real effectual way to duck such hardships is to stay out of the fray. Many are finally finding out the cost of walking in Christ, and many are throwing in the towel. Oh...they were never actually “in” but they are just finally discovering that they are indeed “out.”

We have practiced worldly idolatry for so long, we have essentially lost track of the biblical faith that depends upon Christ, lives for Christ, and centered around the advance of the kingdom of God. We aren’t interested in going to war...we want a nice community club. But membership in that club will not gain us standing with God nor will end with eternal life.

When our star character of Acts 19...the apostle Paul, wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he began from the presupposition that all true believers are in a spiritual battle every day of their lives until they are taken to their eternal home. We use various vernacular phrases to encompass that scenario...*spiritual warfare, trials, testing,* and the like. But it all boils down to the same thing; if Jesus rules our life and destiny, *we can never quit, never rest, never let down our guard,* because Satan...the roaring lion, never will...

Yet our Father has not just left us to struggle in the quagmire of this issue, but has provided for us the tools and the resources we need to “walk in the Spirit” every day, but to do so successfully means we must always be in forward motion. Growing in maturity, dying to self, engaging humility and truly ‘in the battle’ for the gospel and kingdom. The ‘stuff for success’ is there for us, but we must be willing to step forward and ‘put on the armor’ God has provided for us, and then move out of our ‘realm of comfort’ and go to war!

John 16:33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.*

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Too often Christianity is presented to non-believers as the cure for all anxieties, difficulties, and trials and this so-called "gospel" results in false disciples and/or false expectations. But Paul's call to Timothy and all believers still stands true: *Take up your armor and join me in a lifelong struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.* A fruitful Christian life, inevitably, is accompanied by intense spiritual warfare and opposition. Matt 10:38-39 *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."* When I make a decision against scripture and all sound judgement of those around me, ...when I choose **me** over **you**, I am obviously *not* dead. I have not died to myself.

Perhaps the most effective advertisement ever written appeared in a London newspaper early in the 20th century: *"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful."* Those were the words written by Sir Ernest Shackleton, the famous South Pole explorer. There was such an overwhelming response that, Shackleton said, "It seemed as though all the men in Great Britain were determined to accompany us." Thankfully...not everyone is seeking the safe path

through life. There are still those who desire meaning above safety! And I pray that some of those men and women are here today...

Paul was that kind of man. The kind that runs *into* burning buildings, not *away*. He knew that to go on mission is to... was to, **go to war**. It was not a vacation! Having arrived in Ephesus, Paul promptly found some disciples. Now before we move on, let us make note that these folks in play were more than *believers*, they were *disciples*. I mention that because that dichotomy is going to make all the difference in how this first act plays out. A *disciple follows*. A *believer* may or may not, and in fact he or she may encompass a whole plethora of actions and responses, many of which are harmful and self-destructive.

Paul took the opportunity to pose a very crucial question to these disciples: "*Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?*" These disciples understood and received Christ as Savior, and had even committed themselves as His disciples. Yet they were still missing a critical element in their maturity and therefore their success as followers and servants of Christ.

Notice that Paul was desirous to do more than further evangelism and salvation, however wonderful those pursuits may be. He was more than just an evangelist, he was a teacher and an earthly "father." He wanted these newly reborn individuals to know and experience all there was about God and the abundant life. How I can relate to that passion! Upon salvation, an individual receives a presence of God as they have not known previously. The Holy Spirit prompts and even protects prior to salvation, but only upon salvation does the Spirit of God come into the believer to unite our Creator with the created. However, even then, just because the Spirit is in us does not mean he is in control. Therein lies the problem!

In the Old Testament we see a picture of this as essentially the width of the Jordan River between the "desert wanderings" and the Promised Land. As the children of God roamed around in circles in the desert for 40 years, they were indeed God's children. They were provided food, water, and care, but they were still in the wilderness! The Promised Land on the other side of that river held battles and held giants. It was not until they finally made that total commitment to face that enemy head on, *along with all the battles and blessings*, that they passed from child to adult. It was only then that they understood all there was involved in this "following God" thing. It was only then that they were in that "sweet spot" of living in the kingdom of God.

(19:5-7) These disciples that Paul found in Ephesus were committed to the Lord. They found the path forward at the hands of John the Baptist, and had embraced the things they had been taught and shown through the Scriptures. Yet they had not yet come to know the baptism of the Spirit that first came to the apostles at Pentecost in that "upper room." It was not that they had ignored the issue, but rather they simply had not known the fullness of God's design. They had known John's water baptism, the baptism of repentance and public testimony of their salvation. But the baptism of the Spirit was a whole other experience and commitment. This event was and is nothing short of the wholesale surrender to God's control of our lives, our actions, decisions, and passions. Many many "*believers*" will never in their lifetime move into this realm.

Once these disciples came to this knowledge, they were ready to pass over that river and live in the "Promised Land." It wasn't Paul's "hands" that brought the Spirit of God unto these believers. It was simply their desire to have all of God and all that He encompassed. Yes, they had to know that where they were going would bring battles, difficulties, trials, and testings...for again, there were "giants in that land." But there would also be anointed blessings, victorious triumphs, and moments in which, like Moses on the mountain, we would have God pass by so close we could reach out and touch Him!

In verses 8 through 10, Paul was clearly on a roll. No doubt filled with the Spirit of God himself, Paul preached the Word. This special gift came as a “package deal” with his own Spirit “anointing,” which followed his fateful journey on that Damascus road so many years before.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized... Immediately he preached the Christ...
Acts 9:17-18, 20a

Once again, those of the synagogue in Ephesus ultimately rejected the message of Christ, “hardened their hearts,” and refused to believe. There always was and will always be those who have “*tasted the heavenly gift, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...*” (Heb 6:4-5) that will still turn back or turn away. The cost, *in their eyes*, is still too great, and they are unwilling to surrender their future and the personal control of it to their Creator. Eventually they will hate those who do. As their hatred grew, Paul departed and focused the next two years on discipleship of the faithful. Paul would further the gospel through whatever door would open, just as we should. God was in control, and Paul moved to follow **His** lead. What Paul could not humanly do himself, he participated in by raising up others to move out and minister to the world at large. Paul began his “School of Ministry” and because he did, “all of Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus.”

(19:11-12) The original King James uses the word “special” here in this passage as in “*special gifts*.” *Unusual...special...* what does that mean? I don’t know precisely, but it is interesting that the text added that word. It is generally understood that these miracles that were manifested at the hands of Paul were not “normal” miracles, *if there are any miracles that are “normal!”*

The idea is that miracles like these had not been seen until this point, and from the language were not likely seen again to this degree. Ephesus was a city full of superstition and belief in the supernatural spiritual realm. Perhaps this was simply God’s way of keeping one step ahead of the activities of Satan. Special or not, **God** was glorified through these actions, *not Paul*. And that is the final word on the handling of miracles! Both scriptural history and my own experience is that God manifests His power in whatever particular way is needed for any particular situation.

(19:13-15) Not to be outdone, those outside the family of Christ attempted to pull off their own miraculous events, and attempted to use the name of Jesus as their own “magic.” The world still does this, using the name of Jesus to fire up various and purely social endeavors and morality pursuits. And such is not uncommon in the spiritual warfare that is found out on the street. What we learn quickly and very dramatically is that the name of Jesus holds power for those who know Him, but it’s nothing to attempt to throw about like a magic power if you don’t.

You see, Satan doesn’t care if you know someone who knows Jesus. The “God of Pastor Tim” will hold no power for anyone but Tim. I cannot overemphasize the importance of the personal relationship that one must have with Christ in order to know the power of His being. That doesn’t mean he is a different God for different people...a “God of our own design.” But no one gets to live vicariously through someone else’s spiritual walk.

In this case, we also see the power that the dark side wields. We see what we are really up against in spiritual warfare. Satan is not merely some affable guy in a red suit and a pointed tail! He is a very powerful created

archangel that has a host of followers, both human and angelic. They are not afraid of you or me, that is for certain. Apparently, they weren't afraid of these guys either.

So what does make these demons shake? Well apparently Jesus does. And apparently, the name of Jesus only counts if He is dwelling inside of the one using His name. These guys found that out the hard way. How many are finding that out yet today? Saying His name is one thing, but living it is something very different! So many folks wonder why this Christianity thing isn't working so well, when they have never personally known the supernatural of God "up close."

This "power" is not the primary aspect we should seek to develop with God. Jesus isn't a big stick to carry around with you. He is the indwelling Spirit that **carries the big stick!** But God does have the power over the dark side. Thus, if we are to have dominion over that dark side, we better have Him living inside us before we start throwing His name around.

(19:16-18) These seven brothers got whooped by just one of Satan's horde. He beat them all so badly that they ran out of the house naked. It is strange that God could be glorified through this as verse 17 reflects, but it was actually the awe and the power that was inspired by these events that gave God the glory. Through the witnessing of this event, many believed. On the heels of their belief was born "confession and testimony" of the power of Christ. In a town that was full of the occult and magical arts, these folks had never seen anything like this. Satan made his move and the Lord presented a first-hand lesson of His sovereignty, as well as the meaning of "*greater is he that is in me than He that is in the world.*" (1 Jn 4:4)

(19:19-20) What occurred here was not a directive to pursue the practice of public bonfires full of worldly books...despite what has happened in modern history. For Ephesus, as we already mentioned, the occult and magic were major issues. The average man gave a lot of credence to these things, so a public renouncement was necessary in order to still public fears. Certainly a public confession of rebirth is both a wonderful and important thing. Whether that occurs in a dramatic way, like presented here in the text, or in a quieter way between friends, it serves as a concrete point of repentance and our "turning away from the world and to our Redeemer."

Mt 10:32 *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven."*

Because of the turning away from these elements of false worship, God was given free movement to advance the Kingdom. It is not that we somehow restrict God's hand, but He has so often chosen to operate within the realm of our free will. This is the battle...the war that is the spirit filled Christian's life.

(19:21-22) Like Superman, Paul's "work here was finished." He then "purposed in the Spirit" to travel on to new territory. There are those who "purpose" to do something, and there are those to whom the Spirit actually **calls** to do something and the individual responds. Those who, in that call of the Spirit, set their sights, their purpose, upon that worthy goal or aspiration. When we try to affect the same result without the Spirit's call we operate in the flesh and in our pride, and it will be sure to be a bust. Unless the call of the Spirit and the desire of the heart are both unified, "*those who build, do so in vain.*" Psalm 127:1 says, "*Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.*"

Paul had a plan and God was behind him. With that going on, there was nothing that could stop him! He sent a couple of his team members on to another field of ministry, but what he had to do, he must have felt he needed to do himself.

(19:23-34) Real and faithful Christianity is always an affront to those who are lost in the quest for the material, the positional and the status. There are two things we can gather from the text. First, these “craftsmen/god-makers” made a good living off of snoring folks. And two, the Word of God had apparently made some substantial headway in Ephesus. Enough momentum to ruffle those who had made every effort to avoid the whole Jesus thing altogether. Finally, out of desperation, these “craftsmen” had enough. Nothing like a good riot to vent some steam! We certainly have been seeing a lot of that lately! Why talk and discuss when you can pillage and burn?

Paul’s ministry was bearing fruit. Paul was preaching the truth and the Kingdom was prospering, but the prosperity was at the expense of sales for little statues of false gods. Imagine that! Diana was the pseudo-deity of Ephesus at the time. She was a multi-breasted figure who signified fertility. Her temple was impressive, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. These that began this civil unrest did so under the ruse of standing up for their goddess, but in truth it was money, *the greatest of all motivators*.

Paul’s friends immediately saw that things were getting quickly out of hand and kept him out of the fray. Moving into the amphitheater, the crowd got bigger and more confused as time went along. The Jews wanted no part of this hoopla and they attempted to declare their innocence through this “Alexander,” but the crowd wouldn’t hear it.

(19:35-41) The only voice of reason was the City Clerk. We don’t have his name, but he was the only one with the clout and maybe the voice to get them all calmed down. He reminded them that it was they who were in the “danger zone.” They had no proof of their claims, and if they did, the courts were open to their complaints. Knowing they were beat, the mob got out of there. There would be another day...and another battle...