

“The Word of the Lord Was Prevailing”
(Acts 19:11-20)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. The spiritual revival at Ephesus was gaining momentum.
 - a. The first time the Gospel came to Ephesus, nothing spectacular happened, but something important did: Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos all broke up the ground that been hardening for years.
 - b. With that ground broken, the second time through, we saw things began to move forward.
 - (i) The Lord converted twelve of John’s disciples through the Gospel.
 - (ii) The Lord brought about the evangelization of all of Asia through Paul’s ministry in the school of Tyrannus.
 - (iii) And the Lord confirmed His Word through extraordinary miracles.
 - (iv) It didn’t look like much to begin with, but the Lord blessed that work powerfully.
2. This should encourage us not to despise the day of small things:
 - a. Today, we would consider the conversion of twelve souls to Christ a revival.
 - b. Why? The ground is so spiritually hard:
 - (i) There are so many false Gospels, so many man-centered ministries, so many hypocrites in the church.
 - (ii) The Gospel many heard growing up wasn’t the pure and powerful Word.
 - (iii) There are so many false religions.
 - (iv) The world has grown so strong in its appeal to pleasure.
 - (v) Because of this, hearts have grown hard against the Word.
 - (vi) Humanly speaking, it doesn’t look like there’s much we can do, but thankfully, the work we’re doing isn’t merely human, but also divine.
 - (vii) The Lord can do whatever He wills; we just need to be faithful to do the work: He will use it to break up the soil, plant seed, and water.
 - (viii) Remember, He can still do today what He did in Ephesus so long ago.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we’re going to see how the Lord uses even those who aren’t His to advance His Gospel.
 - a. The miracles Paul was doing not only drew the attention of the general populace, but also of that small group of Jews engaged in exorcism.
 - b. Much like Simon the Magician, these exorcists believed they found a new way to accomplish their work: through the name of Jesus.
 - c. But they find out much to their chagrin that it doesn’t work that way.
 - d. Not only did they learn an important lesson, but the Lord used this event to advance the revival.

2. We'll look at two main things:
 - a. The first is, before we attempt to do spiritual battle in the Lord's name, we'd better make sure that we are His: the seven sons of Sceva tried to use the name of Christ to perform an exorcism, but were sadly disappointed with the results.
 - b. The second is, that when the Gospel is preached, lives are affected, and no matter how they are, God works all these things to advance His glory: the Lord overruled the actions of these men and the demon to fuel the revival.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, before we attempt to do spiritual battle in the Lord's name, we'd better make sure that we are His. "But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this" (vv. 13-14).
 1. The miracles the Lord was doing drew attention to Paul and the message.
 - a. "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out" (vv. 11-12).
 - b. They also drew the attention of the Jewish exorcists.
 - (i) These were vagabond Jews, traveling from town to town, making money by doing tricks.
 - (ii) Josephus says they claimed to originate with Solomon, who composed charms to cure diseases and to drive out devils; at least, this was the story they told to lend credence to their trade.
 - (iii) Jesus seemed to refer to them when He asked the Jews, "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? For this reason they will be your judges" (Matt. 12:27).
 - (iv) We don't know how successful they were – they may have been charlatans – certainly, they didn't know what they were doing.
 - (v) But they thought they had a new weapon in their arsenal: the name of Jesus.
 - c. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, attempted to use it.
 - (i) They sought to command an evil spirit to come out of a man in the name of Jesus, thinking it would respond as it did to Paul.
 - (ii) But the demon didn't comply: "And the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'" (v. 15).
 - (iii) Why didn't he submit? It was because these exorcists didn't have authority.
 - (iv) If it had been Jesus, or Paul who was commissioned by Christ – with His authority – the demon would have had to submit.
 - (v) But these men didn't have the power to command the demon; what's more, they had no promise of protection from God, since they were unbelievers.
 - (vi) This is why the demon-possessed man was able to attack them and overcome them: "And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (v. 16).

- (vii) They thought they would teach this demon a lesson, but they were the ones who learned – the hard way.
2. The point is we should never attempt to fight the enemy unless we are sure of Christ's power. We're not going to be able effectively to fight against him or his schemes if we're not equipped with spiritual power.
 - a. We're not talking here about fighting the demon-possessed as much as fighting against Satan's attempts to stop the Gospel from advancing.
 - b. The more we engage the warfare. The more he will attack us personally – seeking to tempt us, drag us down, make us ineffective.
 - c. He will attack those we attempt to reach with the Gospel – making them think it's foolishness, building arguments against it.
 - d. Before we engage in the battle, we must make sure we belong to the Lord and that we're equipped with His full armor (Eph. 6:10-20).
 - e. Otherwise, we may end up taking a beating instead, one we may never forget.
- B. The second thing we need to see here is that when the Gospel is preached, lives are affected; and no matter how they are, God works all these things to advance His glory: the Lord overruled the actions of these men and the demon to fuel the revival.
1. First, God taught both the Jews and Greeks the fear of the Lord. "This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified" (v. 17).
 - a. The failure on the part of these Jewish exorcists had the Lord's desired results: it evoked fear in the Ephesians.
 - b. It appears this was because the demons were subject only to Jesus and to those commissioned by Him, while the exorcists fell prey to one of them: this showed that the true God was working among them, and it provoked fear.
 - c. The fear of the Lord is a good thing:
 - (i) Solomon tells us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).
 - (ii) "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (8:13).
 - (iii) "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death" (14:27).
 - (iv) The fear of the Lord – to stand in awe of Him – is good; though many today almost consider it a sin to fear Him or to teach that we should fear Him, it points us in the right direction.
 - (v) Solomon tells us we haven't learned anything until we've learned this.
 - (vi) The Lord used this event to teach the Ephesians this fear.
 - (vii) This doesn't mean all of them had the kind of fear that makes one turn to the Lord, but many of them did. This is what we see next.
 2. Second, God brought many to repentance through this. "Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices" (v. 18).
 - a. Where there is true conversion, there is true repentance, beginning with confessing our sins to Christ.

- (i) Those who believed came and confessed their sin to the Lord and received His pardon.
 - (ii) John tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:9-10).
 - (iii) If we’re too proud to admit our sins, we not only call God a liar, we show ourselves to be unconverted.
- b. And course, where there is true repentance, there is the fruit of repentance: “And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (v. 19).
- (i) When John the Baptist saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:7-9).
 - (ii) He wasn’t telling them merely to change their mind about Jesus, or about their previous sins, but to change the direction of their lives.
 - (iii) That’s what these did: they brought their magic books and burned them in front of everyone – not only to get rid of these things that were an affront to God, but to show the genuineness of their repentance: apparently, there were many people who brought many books – fifty thousand silver pieces worth.
 - (iv) Where there is saving faith, there is genuine repentance and the fruits of that repentance will be a complete change of direction – from evil to righteousness.
3. Finally, the name of Jesus was being magnified. “This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified” (v. 17) and “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (v. 20).
- a. Through the teaching and preaching of the Gospel, the miracles done by Paul, and the failure of the Jewish exorcists to reproduce those miracles, the Lord was fueling the revival.
 - b. Though the Gospel had different results, the Lord used all of them to advance His kingdom: He caused fear to fall on them all, with the result that many were turning to the Lord, repenting of their sins and bringing forth the fruits of repentance.
 - c. When the Gospel is preached, lives are affected, and no matter how they are – whether they genuinely repent and believe, are just afraid, or even try to take advantage of it for monetary gain – God still works all things together for His glory.
 - d. This can be a great encouragement as we set our hearts to do the Lord’s work. Amen.