

Acts 19 | David Baumgartner

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Date: 01 February 2026

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everybody. It's good to be here. I always get a little nostalgic this time of year. Today would be my mother's 105th birthday.

! But even more importantly, a couple weeks ago, my wife and I celebrated our 49th wedding anniversary. So, I'm full of stories. I'll give you one here. When we were first married, we were part of a nationwide youth ministry. It was an offshoot of Calvary Chapel. It was called Shiloh. Shiloh had houses all over the country.

There was one in St. Louis, in fact. Mostly made up of young people. And I'll tell you what, mostly we were Jesus freaks. We were.

Jesus was everything to us. And we couldn't stop talking about Jesus. There was lots of zeal. And I'd say very low in maturity.

Jesus was everything. There was a, we had an elder board that was located in Eugene, Oregon. And one day, there was an accusation of financial mismanagement.

[1:20] Now, I gotta tell you, I don't know to this day if that was a real thing or not, that something happened. But even the very accusation caused the whole ministry to collapse.

So we were without a church. So we looked around and we found this local church. And it was mostly made up of older people, which we thought at that time was a really good thing.

It was an evangelical free church. And we started going to really nice people. And there was this couple there that invited us over for dinner. And they wanted to get to know us.

And so we were there for about an hour, hour and a half. And we noticed that they were just staring at us. Like we were from Mars or something.

And so it was kind of this silence in the room. And it's like, you know, what's going on? You guys are just so excited about Jesus. And so we kind of looked at each other and, well, yeah.

[2:23] Aren't all Christians excited about Jesus? I have come to find out that the answer to that is no.

Really, what happens oftentimes in the Christian's life is we forget how excited we once were about the Lord. We start compartmentalizing our lives.

We have our family life over here. We've got our jobs over there. We've got our hobbies over here. And our church life is over there. And Jesus becomes distant.

And somehow church becomes just a boring set of rituals. And I want to ask you this question this morning. Is that how it was for believers during the time of Acts?

Well, we are in a study in the book of Acts. We're looking at select accounts. And our passage this morning is found in Acts chapter 19.

[3:24] I'll be picking it up in verses 8 to 20. If you please turn there with me. This is a very busy chapter. In fact, Acts chapter 19 covers almost three years of Paul's life.

Well, the good news today is that this morning's time won't be quite that long. But the bad news is that we only have time to cover just a few of the things there.

A few of the events. Paul, the apostle, is on his third missionary journey. And he is in the city of Ephesus. Today, Ephesus is just a tourist attraction.

There's about two and a half million visitors each year that are looking at the museums. They're looking at various excavation sites. But in Paul's day, Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the entire Roman Empire.

They had at that time an estimated population of a quarter of a million people. You may remember the map that Tom gave out last week or a couple weeks ago.

[4:30] You'll remember Ephesus located on the west coast of what's now called Turkey. Ephesus was a port city. And as such, it was an important commercial center for that entire region.

Ephesus was also a hotbed for religious superstition and occultic practices and idolatry. Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis.

That's one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. Consider this. This building, that building was roughly the size of a modern-day football stadium.

About five stories tall. But what's important is what went in. What happened in that temple. Every evil imaginable.

Paul is in that place now. He's in Ephesus, but he's there for a reason. And the reason is this. God wants people saved.

[5:32] Amen? He does. This entire chapter shows what happens when the gospel collides with false religion, pagan idolatry, and with worldly power.

So we're going to enter that world of first century Ephesus. But first I'd like to go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer. Our dear Lord, we are so grateful for who you are and for all that you have done for us.

Lord, we are so blessed that you deal with us through Jesus Christ, Lord. Because it's in him that we have placed our faith and have finished work that he did on the cross.

And thereby, Lord, the wrath is gone. And we are so thankful for that. Lord, we pray that we would come to an understanding about that city Ephesus.

But even more importantly, how you used your servant Paul to make your gospel known. And we pray, Lord, that as we go through this, that we would be able to glean the things that you want us to have this morning.

[6:39] We thank you so much. In Jesus' name we pray. And God's people said, Amen. So let me set this up here, beginning in verse 8.

Notice, Paul entered the synagogue. Actually, this was Paul's second visit to this particular synagogue. We see that in chapter 18, verse 19.

Also, we see back in chapter 17, verse 1, we're told that whenever Paul went to a new city, we're told that his custom or his practice was to go to the local synagogue.

And as a former Pharisee, I would expect that he would be very comfortable in that circumstance. Wouldn't you think so? Well, verse 8, it says that he continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

I want you to notice here, what's his topic? What is Paul's burden at that time? It's the kingdom of God. And again, I would assume that Jews would be eager to discuss the kingdom of God.

[7:51] I mean, consider the prospect of someone finally being able to sit on King David's throne. Well, how did it go, brother Paul?

Verse 9, look at that. It says, some were becoming hardened and disobedient. The imperfect tense that's used there tells us that their resistance to the gospel was steadily increasing.

And then it reached a point where you have active confrontation. Notice verse 9 goes on. They're speaking evil of the way before the multitude.

That same word there is the word we use for cursing. Just imagine people going around town cursing Christianity. Who would do such a thing?

It's interesting that before coming to Ephesus, Paul went to at least 10 different synagogues. And we're told that some of the Jews believed when Paul was there.

[8:57] But get this, 8 out of the 10 times, there was either no response, or Paul gets chased out of the synagogue and even the city by a mob that's formed.

I don't know about you, friends. But you think about ministry that goes on here. Personally, if I got chased out of town like that, I would be bummed. Would you?

Yeah, I would begin doubting things. And getting kicked out of a synagogue, the place where I'm most comfortable in. It just seems like a setback. But look what happens.

Verse 9. Paul, it tells us, withdrew from them, and he took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Remember, friends, God is in total control. And Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, points out three truths for us in this section here.

[9:55] First of all, in spite of man's resistance, God's message will be proclaimed. Look with me. Verse 8 goes on here, where Paul began reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Well, here we meet a guy named after a dinosaur. I think he must have been a strong-willed child. His name literally means tyrant.

And if you're a parent, you know what I'm talking about. Well, what do we know about this Tyrannus guy? Actually, very little.

Well, he's a teacher. He was probably trained in Greek philosophy. He's probably not a believer.

But the key thing for us to see is that God arranged for Paul to be able to use this guy's space.

And friends, that's no accident. We know this because in 1 Timothy, Paul writes, God desires for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

[11:05] That's what God wants. That's what God desires, is for everybody to be saved. And look at the result here of what happened. The gospel message spreads like wildfire.

Verse 10 tells us, This took place for two years, so that, look at this, All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Consider that with me here. Paul went from preaching only in the synagogue, only on the Sabbath, only to Jews, to teaching daily to both Jews and Gentiles.

There's an ancient manuscript that dates back to some like 400 AD. It's called the Codex Beza. And in this, the scribe adds this little comment.

It says, Daily lectures were held from the fifth hour to the tenth hour. So today, that would be roughly between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

[12:10] That's the hottest part of the day in that section of the world. That's a time when people would be taking a break from their work because of the oppressive heat. How did Paul himself view this turn of events?

I'd like to read what he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 16, verse 8, he says, I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost.

Get this. For a wide door of effective service has opened to me. Wow. What a great way to put it. A wide door of effective service has opened to me.

You know, maybe that's how we should think about some of the ministries that we do here in this church. A wide door of effective service. Paul ends that section there by saying, And there are many adversaries.

And we're going to get to that here shortly. The main point I see is that even though Satan can and does try to hinder us, God's in control.

[13:18] And he can open doors that no one else can open. God's word will be proclaimed. And the gates of hell will not prevail against his church.

Amen. It won't prevail. Now, here's the thing about Ephesus. Ephesus is not short on spiritual activity.

In fact, their lives were steeped in paganism. I'm talking about religious, economic, and political paganism.

In that temple, for instance, there were animal sacrifices. Out in the streets, there were processions going on with people dressed wildly with a lot of sexual overtones.

There were festivals, there were theaters, there were feasts, there were games, wholly dedicated to pagan worship. Their temple, get this, was also their banking system.

[14:23] And that's where you would save your money as their system or their treasury. So, you have a, Paul has a pretty steep hill to climb.

How did everyone know that Paul's message was actually the truth? How did they know that it was from God? Well, here's a second point here.

To overcome man's doubts, God's message was confirmed. Notice in verse 11 here, important verse, God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul.

Now, I believe we see miracles here in our lives as well. I mean, right here at Bethel, I believe we see miracles. But let me ask you, what does he mean by extraordinary miracles?

Well, look with me, verse 12, handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from Paul's body to the sick. And what happened?

[15:30] Diseases left people and evil spirits went out. Though the root word there of the word handkerchief is the word actually we get sweat.

In other words, these are cloths that Paul would use to wipe his brow while he's probably making tents. He would also be wearing an apron while working with leather.

But the key thing to see here is that people somehow are getting hold of Paul's stuff. And they're sending them to people who needed them. What an amazing thing.

I mean, some people might think this is a great fundraising idea for a church. I want to ask you, how should we look at it? Well, the first thing, and I think Tom mentioned this last time we were together. We have to remember, Acts represents a transitional stage for this time of the church's existence. God did extraordinary miracles to validate the authenticity of what was being preached.

[16:38] Paul would even write to the Corinthians in his second letter. He says that the signs of a true apostle were these, and that were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles.

We need to notice here, back in verse 11 of our text in Acts, that God is the one performing these miracles, not Paul. God allowed this distribution of Paul's sweaty handkerchiefs and aprons for a reason.

And that's to demonstrate God's authority, not Paul's. Notice here that diseases left people. We can see that as God's authority over the physical world.

But we can also see how even evil spirits left people. That's God's authority over the spiritual world. Today, we have no more apostles in the church.

But we do have the apostles' teaching. That's God's word. Paul would write in his second letter to Timothy, All scripture is inspired by God.

[17:51] I think the NIV uses the word God breathed. That God breathed his word. And his word is profitable for teaching and reproof and correction.

Training in righteousness. So that the man of God or the women of God will be adequate and equipped for every good work.

God is in control. And he does awesome things. Satan, he has no miracles. He's an imposter, in fact.

And he sends imposters like him to hinder God's work. You want to see an example? Look with me in verse 13. In Ephesus, it tells us that there were some Jewish exorcists who went from place to place.

Let me just stop right there. These are men who made their living by going from town to town, telling people's fortunes, and trying to cure diseases, and casting out demons.

[18:57] And here's what they would do. Verse 13. They would attempt to name over those who had the evil spirit. You see, the belief here is that if you could exert power over a spirit entity by calling out its name or calling out its master's name.

And so what they would do is that they would just have a laundry list of names that they would call out just to cover their bases. And verse 13, they added the name of the Lord Jesus to their list. And they're saying this, they're saying, I adjure you by Jesus who Paul preaches. Now, who's doing this? Well, in verse 14, it tells us that the seven sons of one Sceva, it tells us he's a Jewish chief priest.

The seven sons were doing this. Notice here, this guy is a Jewish chief priest. And in reading that, you wonder, how did the sons of a Jewish priest get involved in something like this?

Doesn't that seem a little odd? Well, apparently, there were some Jews doing this. In fact, in Matthew 12, when in this account where we read where Jesus is accused by some Pharisees of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, let me read what Jesus said in Matthew 12, 27.

[20:33] He says, if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So that was a common practice of Jews back then.

So getting back to these sons here of Sceva, apparently there's this occasion where they did this. Verse 15, And the evil spirit answered and said to them, I recognize Jesus.

I know about Paul, but who are you? And then in verse 16, 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 the house naked and wounded.

These guys didn't know Jesus. They're name droppers. I mean, to them, they're just, to them, Jesus is someone, or the one who Paul preaches.

The main point here to see is that the name of Jesus is not some magical word. Today, anybody can say the name of Jesus.

[21:47] But to represent him, to be his ambassador, we must have God's spirit in us. In fact, we need to be born again. In Matthew 7, 22, Jesus was speaking about his return.

And he's talking about those who will be rejected. And listen to what he says. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?

And in your name, cast out demons. And in your name, perform many miracles. Friends, I'll tell you, God will not be mocked.

He will not. Paul would write in his letter to the Philippians, At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. And those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Well, getting back to this incident here, this becomes the talk of the town.

[22:50] And in verse 17, it says, And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks who lived in Ephesus. And fear fell upon them all.

And the name of Jesus was being magnified. We see the gospel is proclaimed. The gospel is confirmed. And we also see that when sin abounds, the gospel changes lives.

Look with me in verse 18. Many also of those who had believed kept coming and confessing and disclosing their practices.

It appears to me that some of those involved in what we would call the magic arts, they themselves became Christians. But they continued practicing their magic and their fortune telling.

But now that they have the Holy Spirit in their lives, their eyes are opened. And now they see the error of their way. Notice they kept coming forward.

[23:56] They're publicly confessing these practices. Friends, this too is a genuine work of the Lord. The gospel changes lives. The key thing to understand is that there are some activities that are, frankly, they're just inconsistent with being a Christian.

Later on, Paul is going to be writing a letter to these very believers. And I think it applies to us as well. This is a letter to the church of Ephesus.

Chapter 4. And if you want to turn with me, chapter 4, verses 22. Look at what he says. What a great thing to tell people.

that are caught up in ungodly practices. You know, you think about those involved in child pornography. Those involved in human trafficking or the whole drug sales thing.

They got a lot of stuff to be forgiven for. But the Lord does it. And he has power to get them out of it. Back to our text here in Acts.

[25:31] It says that in verse 19. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all. Can you imagine at our next hayride people bringing all of their stuff and then having this big burning fest that we would see?

What a great thing that we would celebrate people getting free from the bondage of sin. And they're burned. Had they kept these books, maybe they would say, I'm just going to put them away.

No. There's a danger that in the day that the temptation would overcome them, they might go back to them, return in their ways. So this is kind of an interesting thing here.

If you look in verse 19, it says they counted up the price of them and they found 50,000 pieces of silver. One commentator estimated that that's about \$6 million in today's currency.

Six million. But here's the point. Verse 20. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and it was prevailing. What a great thing to read.

[26:53] I want to ask you, what are some of the takeaways from this chapter here? We didn't get to look at the whole chapter. But this morning, we were able to see a snapshot of Christianity in first century

Ephesus .

And I came away with three things here. We see the good news spreading like wildfire. People are coming to Jesus. Jesus, they are making him known.

And what a blessing to see God's word growing and dominating as it did here. And isn't it great to see evil in retreat?

In retreat for, maybe for a change. And to see Satan's hold on this world to be weakened. And yeah. I was asking myself, where is Christianity growing today?

And so I did look this up. You know, it's kind of interesting. Where is Christianity growing today? It's growing in Africa. Here's a list of countries. Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[28:03] It's also growing in Asian countries like Nepal, China, Indonesia, and Vietnam. It's also growing in Muslim majority countries.

The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman. What about Europe? What about North America?

No. It's the, the Christianity seems to be stagnated or declining. Yeah. But God's not through with this.

He's not. The second thing, not only do we see God's word being spread, we also see that there's a battle raging on. And if you, brother and sister, if you, you are believers, there's a battle raging in your life.

One of, and one of Paul's most favorite teachings is on spiritual warfare. Isn't that right? He says, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against powers, against world forces of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.

[29:17] Where was that? Information sent. That was sent to Ephesus. Yeah. Chapter six, verse 12. It was sent to Ephesus, the Mecca of spiritual and demonic activity.

But God was there too. And he bore witness to his work and to his workers. Chapter three though. I'm sorry.

The third thing I see in this chapter is that what was refreshing to me is the reminder that Christianity is not a boring religion.

No, there's power in the gospel. Christianity is based on miracles, right? You have the virgin birth, you have the resurrection. And the New Testament is always pointing us toward those eternal and unseen realities.

Paul would write in his second letter to the Corinthians, we look not on the things that are seen, but at things that are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

[30:28] If I can invite the musicians to come up here, this is a real pivotal thing for us to take home just about, you know, who God is and what he has done for us.

There's this Christian philosopher. His name is Kierkegaard. And he lived during the mid-1800s. He tells this story that kind of piqued my interest.

It's about a wild duck. Of all things, a wild duck. This wild duck, he would be flying in formation across Europe.

And he could see the beautiful sunrises and the beautiful sunsets. And he'd be there with his duck buddies and just enjoying things.

Well, one day, he looked down and he saw this barn. And he saw some, what you may call, some tame ducks by this pond.

[31:33] And they're enjoying some delicious, it looked like delicious corn. So he swooped down to join these ducks. And they welcomed him and they were very eager to share their delicious corn.

They wanted to hear some stories. And so he planned to only stay for an hour. Well, that hour turned into the whole afternoon. And then the whole day.

And that day turned into a week. And then it turned into a month. And he's enjoying the good food and the safety of the barn. And one day he looks up and he sees all his old buddies flying in formation.

And so he got really excited. And so he begins flapping his wings and he gets up there. But he fell down. He could not keep himself up.

And so what had happened is that his new life had made him soft and heavy. And he couldn't rise above the barn.

[32:36] So he dropped back again to the barnyard. And he said to himself, well, my life here is safe. The food is good. And I'll stay here for a while longer.

Well, every spring and summer when he heard his old buddies honking up there, up in the sky, his eyes would gleam. He'd start flapping his wings.

And then he'd try to move, but he couldn't do it. And finally the day came when the wild ducks flew above him and they'd utter their cry. And he just paid no attention to them.

I want you to imagine here that there's a Super Bowl that's going to be played next weekend. And people are going to be hooting and hollering all in every city of this country.

And you think about how excited are we about Jesus? How excited are we? Let that story about that duck not become our story.

[33:43] And that's because we should be excited about Jesus. And that's because we worship a powerful God. Let's see the gospel spread like wildfire.

Let's believe all the truths that he has given us in his word. Let's stand behind him in every battle and rely on his strength and his power.

Let's worship and serve and glorify an all-powerful almighty God. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for all that you have done for us.

And we are especially grateful, Lord, that you have saved us and that you have given us your word.

And we can see in this in this account here in Ephesus, we're not much different from Ephesus.

But Lord, we serve an almighty God. And we should be excited about that. Let that excitement just take hold of us, Lord, and just to remember who we are and what you have done for us.

[34:54] We thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.