

## Unstoppable...Spiritual Warfare

8/18/19 – Pastor Randy

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*Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. – Acts 19:1-6*

This is the fourth occasion in Acts where Luke records believers being baptized in the Spirit as promised by Jesus in Acts 1:5-8.

In Acts 2 tongues was the sign that the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that his disciples would soon be baptized in the Spirit.

In Acts 8 tongues are not mentioned, but Luke does indicate that there was an observable supernatural manifestation that occurred.

In Acts 10:46 the sign was tongues and praise.

In Acts 19:6 the sign was tongues and prophecy.

Speaking (i.e. Praising/Praying) in tongues was the one consistent manifestation of the Spirit experienced by groups of believers upon being baptized in the Spirit.

In Acts, Luke says nothing explicitly about the purpose of this supernatural manifestation we call "tongues". He does communicate implicitly that it served as a sign of the baptism of the Spirit. (Acts 2:16,17; Acts 10:46)

In 1 Corinthians 14, the only chapter in the NT that provides us with detail instructions about 'tongues', Paul clearly indicates that as a private prayer language it is desirable and available for all believers. (1 Corinthians 14:5, 23)

There is no biblical reason to suggest that praying and praising in tongues was only for the NT era Christians, and not for us today. On the other hand, tongues should not be elevated to a place of special status, as a sign of superior spirituality. Neither should anyone try and make someone pray in tongues. It is because I believe that praying in tongues, also described as

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praying in the Spirit, is a genuine gift from God which strengthens the believer, that I don't try to cajole, plead, or teach people to pray in tongues. To do so would betray a lack of confidence that God is just as willing and capable of imparting this gift today as He was in the early church.

The purpose of the baptism in the Spirit is power. The purpose of praying or praising God in tongues, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, is spiritual edification (strengthening). They are closely related!

Our attitude towards tongues should be one of expectation and anticipation. Recognize the value scripture gives to it as the confirming sign of the Baptism and as a means of personal spiritual edification. Then ask God to fill you with His Spirit. Worship Him. Open your heart and surrender yourself, your mind, your heart, your ears, and your mouth to Him. Paul's instructions about spiritual gifts are simple: Don't despise them; desire them!

In verses 8-10 Luke tells us that for three months Paul went weekly to the synagogue in Ephesus. From these verses three things warrant our attention.

1. He reasoned and persuaded those present. We should not expect people to believe right away, but be willing to walk with them and help them overcome their honest questions and struggles with coming to faith.

2. Some were stubborn and persisted in their unbelief. The will of the individual is involved in his/her decision to believe; to trust in God's Word!!

3. Some became hostile to the gospel, took an adversarial posture towards it, and tried to influence others against it. Paul's response was to walk away and focus his attention on those who were teachable. He didn't continue to argue with those who were hostile. He decided not to bang his head against a wall!!

In verses 11-20 Luke tells us that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Aren't all miracles? Yes, but Luke was emphasizing that these miracles were extraordinary even among the miracles that God had performed through the apostles in the past.

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These miracles were atypical. They were not the miracles God did on a consistent basis, so they are not miracles we should expect to duplicate. Don't turn this atypical experience into an expected model for healing in the church. In other words, don't send a \$1000 to someone who promises you that they have a cloth or some water that has a powerful anointing on it because of where it came from or who has touched it. Paul didn't exploit this unusual work of God by setting up a store to sell clothing and tools that had touched his anointed body with the promise that they would bring healing or deliverance. Luke's account pictures Paul as being personally detached from what was happening.

In response to the amazing power of God operating through Paul, bringing healing to the sick and deliverance to those with evil spirits, a group of men who were the sons of a Jewish high priest decided they would try to deliver a man who was controlled by evil spirits just like Paul did. The leader of the group said, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."

It didn't go so good for them. The man under demonic influence said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" He then proceeded to assault them and he gave them all a beat down.

What was the problem? They thought the power was contained in certain words. Invoking the name of Jesus is not a magical incantation. It only has power when the person using the name Jesus is actually "in Christ", operating under and with the authority of Christ. Confronting demonic powers must be done in the power of the Spirit.

The rest of chapter 19 records an incident of opposition and persecution against Paul and the church. This is the second instance where Paul experienced persecution by Gentiles. The first was recorded in Acts 16, but I skipped that story last week. There was a slave girl controlled by an evil spirit that gifted her to engage in fortune-telling. When Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of her she lost her ability and her slave owners lost the profit that they made off of her demonic inspired ability. Luke wrote, "when

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her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone” they had Paul and Silas arrested on trumped up charges. Look at this second instance at Ephesus.

*About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”*

Demetrius stoked the fears of the people on two levels:

He convinced them that if they allowed more of this Christian evangelism to take place they would all lose their livelihood as manufacturers of idols. The second fear he appealed to was that Christianity would undermine their whole cultural way of life. Demetrius’s concerns were not imaginary!!

In response to these fears the people grabbed two of Paul’s companions and took them into the 25,000 seat arena in Ephesus where the a massive crowd was gathered for a public demonstration against these Christians.

The gospel makes truth claims. It calls people to turn from sinful lifestyles and false belief systems. This repentance almost always has a negative impact on someone’s material prosperity, social status, comforts, and relationships.

But no matter what you lose for the sake of Christ, what you gain is so much greater. These idol makers didn’t understand that Christ was more valuable than their trade. Neither do many people today. As a result, they will become hostile towards Christianity when it disrupts their traditions or threatens their treasure and territory.

Years ago I was involved in ministry in Dearborn Michigan, a strong Muslim community. We learned of converts in the community whose lives were in

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danger due to their conversion. Some young people from the community threatened our youth during an outreach in a park because of our message.

When my mother-in-law came to faith in Christ and became a member at an Assembly of God church, her mom told her she wasn't Polish anymore because she joined a protestant Pentecostal church. Her mom rejected her daughter even though her conversion radically altered her life, and her family's life, for good!!

The great English evangelist John Wesley wrote what is believed to be his last letter to William Wilberforce, the key member of Parliament in the fight for the abolition of slavery. He wrote this during a time when the efforts of the abolitionists seemed destined to fail. This letter is credited with energizing Wilberforce in his fight.

*Unless the divine power has raised you up...I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy...Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.*

We are engaged in spiritual warfare and we need the power and courage of the Spirit to stay faithful. The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in our life. We need him in order to overcome the spiritual battles we will face, but we ought to want Him just for Him! No matter what you lose or suffer for the sake of Christ, what you gain in knowing Christ is worth the loss!

Paul wrote, "All the stuff of this world that I had considered valuable I now consider worthless because of what Christ has done. He said, "everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him!"

That was true for him and it is true for you and me as well!

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