



Sermon #5 Of the Acts Part II Series

Follow “The Way”

1 Forest Park Church

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Molly Brown was reading a book in her first-class cabin on the night of April 14, 1912, when the Titanic hit an iceberg. Brown had purchased a ticket on the maiden voyage of the "unsinkable" ship at the last moment, when she'd gotten word that her grandchild was ill. When the engines stopped, Molly put on six pair of wool stockings, a wool suit, fur coat, hat and muff. She put \$500 cash in one pocket, and a good luck amulet she had purchased recently on her Egyptian tour in her other pocket. She was busy helping other women load into lifeboats when she, herself, was pushed into Lifeboat No. 6 by two American merchants. She took control of the lifeboat, rowing it away from the sinking ship, keeping her group calm for six terrorizing hours, and then taking a key role in the rescue efforts once she was rescued by the Carpathia.

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was truly remarkable.

The stunning collection of the ruins of Ephesus give us a glimpse how important the city must have been in when Paul first came there.

- Two thousand years ago, Ephesus was the major port of modern-day Turkey, and the Romans called the city the crown jewel of Asia Minor.
- At its peak, 400,000 lived there, and the international trade that arrived daily made it one of the most famous cities in the world.
- It’s sports stadium, built by Nero, could seat twenty-five thousand.
- Only 10 percent of the ruins have been unearthed, and yet the area uncovered today stretches for miles near the coast of Eastern Turkey, southeast of modern-day Izmir.
- When it was in its prime, the city must have been a fantastic sight.

Into this pagan, metropolitan environment walked Paul, and his traveling companions.

- He had almost no money,
- No friends already living in the city,
- There had been no advance team preparing the people for his message.
- He certainly had no guarantee that anyone would listen to his message, or that he would find any measure of success there.

He had, after all, struck out in Athens, just across the sea, in Greece.

- In cities like Thessalonica and Philippi, his stay had been extremely brief.
- With so many people in Ephesus, it would take a miracle to get the message to the masses.

Acts 19 tells us Paul spent three months in the local synagogue before moving to a market-place ministry, where he spoke passionately for more than two years. The results? Ephesus and Asia Minor were profoundly changed because of one man's passion.

Acts 19 tells us that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord," (Acts 19:10) because of Paul's work.

- Undoubtedly, many of the travelers who passed through Ephesus took Paul's message to their next destination.
- From Ephesus, Paul had an international ministry.

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The way brings:

I. GENUINE CONCERN

Having met these people, Paul asked them a strange question, which he asked no one else in the Acts record:

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Acts 19:1

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 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." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into yJohn's

baptism.” 4 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.” 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

John had been sent by God to prepare the way for Messiah (Matthew 3:1-3).

- He made this clear (John 1:19-28), and his disciples understood this.
- Hearing John’s preaching, his disciples knew that the coming Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit.”
- Their claim that they had not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit should be understood, then, as an admission that they were unaware that John’s prophecy had been fulfilled.

Though John had actually pointed to Jesus as the Christ, they had not yet believed this. “If they did not know the Holy Spirit, they had missed the point of John’s baptism.”⁵ Because they had missed Jesus as the Christ, they had not experienced the baptism of the Spirit of which John spoke

- **Historical evidence points to the existence of such sects even into the second century.**

Paul meets some disciples; he asks if they received the Spirit when they believed;

- They say they haven't even heard the Holy Spirit is;
- Paul asks them what baptism they received, and they say it was John's;
- Paul clarifies their understanding, and they’re baptized in water,
- Then he lays hands on them; and they speak in languages and prophesy.

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The way demands:

II. REAL RELATIONSHIP

Acts 19:11

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And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

When Jesus performed miracles, He usually had at least three purposes in mind:

1. To show His compassion and meet human needs;
2. To teach a spiritual truth; and
3. To present His credentials as the Messiah.

The Apostles followed this same pattern in their miracles. In fact, the ability to do miracles was one of the proofs of apostolic authority.

- Miracles of themselves do not save lost sinners.
- Miracles must be tied to the message of the Word of God.

God enabled Paul to perform “special miracles” because Ephesus was a center for the occult.

- Paul was demonstrating God’s power right in Satan’s territory.
- But keep in mind that wherever God’s people minister the truth, Satan sends a counterfeit to oppose the work.
- Jesus taught this truth in His Parable of the Tares

Ephesus was notorious for pagan worship. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was there, the Temple of Diana, and people came from far and wide to engage in pagan ritual.

- We know, from both secular history and the biblical account in Acts 19, that Ephesus was overrun with demonic possession.
- Her sorcerers, as Shakespeare wrote were ‘dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, soul-killing witches that deform the body.’
- In fact pagan and Jewish exorcists regularly plied their trade, seeking to deliver people from the terror of demons.
- Exorcists had developed a book of incantations they chanted when exorcizing demons, known in antiquity as the Ephesian writings.

Acts 19:13

6 *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.*

The seven sons of Sceva were not interested in Jesus. They were interested in themselves.

- They were not concerned about what they could do for Jesus.
- They were concerned about what Jesus could do for them.
- Jesus was nothing more than an Aladdin's lamp that could be used to promote their own welfare.
- They wanted to use Jesus.

There was a tradition in ancient Judaism that engaged in occult practices – in witchcraft – and by the first century, there was a great interest in the occult – witchcraft was respected and practiced among the people – even among the Jews – in clear violation of God's Law:

7 **Deuteronomy 18:10-12**

"Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you."

The demons are not omniscient – they don't know everything – but they can tell a believer from an unbeliever.

- A believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.
- The unbeliever has only himself – God does not indwell him.

It is dangerous to play with the demonic world.

But is it even more dangerous for a non-believer to play with the things of God.

The sons of Sceva did not take the Name of Jesus as Holy. He was not their savior that we know of.

- Rather they tried to use His Name against the demon
- Just one more magic spell – one more amulet in their bag of tricks

And the demon – inside of the man he was controlling – jumped on the seven sons of Sceva and beat them and tore off their clothes and sent them running from the house.

That’s one thing Hollywood gets right – demons are strong – not stronger than God – but they are strong – they are nothing to fool with.

8 The way produces:

III. A POWERFUL IMPACT

9 A: First Among the Believers

Acts 19:17-18

10 *When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.*

First, all of the Jews and all of the Greeks in Ephesus heard what happened.

- This was big news, and it spread fast.

Second, fear fell upon all of the Jews and all of the Greeks, and the believers held Jesus name in high honor.

- The non-believers were in fear because they had just seen seven of the best-known exorcists beaten, stripped, and thrown out of a house by a demon.
- The believers were in fear recognizing how critical a real relationship with God truly is.

Third, The Believers Got real.....

Acts 19:18

Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

These books were valuable because books were rare,

- and these books – of witchcraft – would have been even more rare.

Luke tells us that they estimated the value of what was burned at fifty thousand pieces of silver.

- Now, if it were the more common piece of silver, fifty piece of silver equaled three months pay.
- So, fifty thousand pieces of silver, would equal three thousand months pay
- or about two hundred and fifty years pay.

They took the Holiness of God seriously enough to burn two hundred and fifty years pay. Today that would mean approx \$25 million.

And due to this response, “the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

When the Church got real, the revival spread to the community around it!

B: Then in the whole Community.

12 Acts 19:23

About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. 24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. 25 These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. 26 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. 27 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."

1 Conclusion:

Though Molly Brown became a famous political activist and war hero (she was named to the French Legion of Honor for her work with wounded soldiers) in World War I, few know that she also survived two more ship disasters, and a hotel fire to boot!

Paul moved from Ephesus to other stops along his path, but he never lost interest in the young church he'd started there.

- As Paul reached his last years, he wrote a great number of letters, including a very detailed letter to the church in Ephesus.
- And among his very first words to Timothy was a very clear instruction concerning the church in Ephesus in 1 Timothy 1:3-4

His letter to Timothy, therefore, is a crystal-clear, passion-filled instruction manual for not only Timothy, but for the church he'd left behind in Ephesus.

For Paul, prison was a life circumstances in his last years.

For many people, aging leaves a prison of a different kind.

- Illness or disability makes it impossible to work or minister as in the past.
- A lack of finances might be the constraining factor.
- No matter the constraint, it's possible that all of us would come to the same question Paul must have faced. "In the light of my present, less-than-ideal circumstances, what can I do now?"

Paul decided to write letters. He acquired or made his own paper and ink. In those days, the expensive materials for such writing was extremely difficult. But Paul made it work, and right until the end, he continued to work.

- His passion never retired.
- His passion never slowed down.
- The way he expressed that passion changed

- But the passion itself only glowed brighter with time.

And because Paul left the results of his last years' work to God, God used that work - his letters - as the most effective work of Paul's entire life.

What's your passion? What did God plant in you?

- Have you let an excuse stop you from expressing that passion?
- Passion simply never retires. It can't quit.
- It drives the people who own it until they've squeezed every last ounce out of life into the passion that continues to call them.