

## Another Weapon in the Arsenal

Acts 18:18-28

*<sup>18</sup> At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. <sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.*

*<sup>22</sup> When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.*

*<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. –*

Acts 18:18-28 ESV

When Paul left Corinth, he had Priscilla and Aquila with him. They made a stop in Cenchreae, just south of Corinth, and Luke indicates that, while they were there, Paul had cut his hair. This seems like a strangely personal note for Luke to add to his document, but the reason for it is found in the phrase, "for he was under a vow." Evidently, Paul had made a vow to God. We are not given the context or content of the vow, but simply informed that one had been made. The fact that Paul was cutting his hair was indication that the vow had ended. It was more than likely some sort of Nazarite vow. The details surrounding this kind of vow are found in the Book of Numbers.

*<sup>2</sup> "Speak to the Israelites, and tell them, 'When either a man or a woman takes a special vow, to take a vow as a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, <sup>3</sup> he must separate himself from wine and strong drink, he must drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from strong drink, nor may he drink any juice of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. <sup>4</sup> All the days of his separation he must not eat anything that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.*

*<sup>5</sup> "All the days of the vow of his separation no razor may be used on his head until the time is fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord. He will be holy, and he must let the locks of hair on his head grow long. – Numbers 6:2-5 NLT*

It was at the end of the vow, once it had been fulfilled, that the individual was required to cut their hair. But according to the Book of Numbers, there was more involved. Paul would have been required to return to Jerusalem, where he would go to the temple and “take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire where the peace offering is burning” (Numbers 6:18 NLT). Again, Luke does not tell us whether the vow Paul made was a Nazarite vow or not. But he had made a promise to God, setting himself apart for God’s use and had determined to seal that promise with a binding vow. It could have been that Paul, finding himself traveling on his own for the first time once Silas and Timothy remained behind, felt the need to make a vow, asking for His divine favor. As Paul prepared to leave Greece, he must have felt his vow had been fulfilled.

Paul sailed to Ephesus, where he went to the local synagogue, but without Priscilla and Aquila. They were Gentiles who had become Christians, but not Jewish proselytes, so they would not have been welcome at the synagogue. The Jews with whom Paul reasoned begged him to stay and he told them he would, if it was in God’s will. This provides a telling insight into Paul’s growing dependence upon God. He knew that any agenda he had would have to take a backseat to the will of God. There were many times in Paul’s life when he wished to go somewhere or do something but was prevented from doing so by God.

Paul left Ephesus, sailing all the way to Caesarea. This would have been a long and dangerous journey, and because of the time of the year, Paul would have been sailing on very rough seas. But he made it safely to Caesarea, and then on to Jerusalem, where he greeted the church there. It was probably in Jerusalem that Paul offered the sacrifice that fully fulfilled his vow. But from there he made his way to Antioch in Syria and then on to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, where, as Luke indicates, he strengthened and encouraged all the disciples that had been made there. Paul was circling back, revisiting those places where he had originally shared the gospel and seen people come to faith in Christ. We tend to think of Paul as an evangelist, but these verses give us a glimpse into his passion for discipleship. He was determined to see those who came to faith in Christ, grow up in their salvation. The apostle Peter shared this same passion.

*Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, – 1 Peter 2:2 NLT*

Paul would later write to the believers in Ephesus, reminding them that he expected them to grow spiritually.

*<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. <sup>15</sup> Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. – Ephesians 4:14-15 NLT*

While Paul spent a great deal of his time traveling and preaching the gospel to those who were lost, he also dedicated much of his life to writing letters to those places he had been, encouraging the spiritually immature to grow up in their faith. And, at times, Paul could be very blunt and harsh, as he was when he wrote to the church in Corinth.

*<sup>1</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready... – 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 NLT*

As Paul was making the rounds, revisiting all the places he had been before, the narrative takes us back to Ephesus, where he had left Priscilla and Aquila. They meet a man names Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt. Luke describes him “an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24 ESV). But more importantly, he was a believer who “had been instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25 ESV). This man, driven by his knowledge of the Old Testament and his newfound zeal for Jesus, was passionately speaking in the synagogue, sharing all he knew. But there were evidently deficiencies in his content, because Priscilla and Aquila pulled him aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26 ESV). One of the things that seems to have been missing from Apollos’ teaching was any knowledge regarding the need for the baptism of the Spirit. Luke indicates that all he knew was the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance. John the Baptist had been unable to offer the baptism of the Spirit because Jesus had not yet begun His ministry and, therefore, had not yet died and been resurrected. The Spirit had not come yet. But now, things were different. The baptism of John was not enough. Even John had told those who had come to him for baptism, “I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am--so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11 NLT).

Apollos was a gifted man, who had been chosen by God, not only for salvation, but for the ministry of the gospel. Greatly aided by the input of Priscilla and Aquila, he departed with their blessing and headed into the region of Achaia. Once there, “he greatly helped those who through grace had believed” and “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (Acts 18:27-29 ESV). God had just added another weapon to His growing arsenal, and He did so by selecting an Egyptian who had first become a convert to Judaism and then a follower of Christ. This reveals God’s incredible creativity and the growing diversity of the church. Paul and Apollos could not have been any different. And yet, God had chosen both of them for His service. And each would bring a different set of gifts and abilities, making them uniquely qualified to do what God had called them to do.



## True Repentance Made Possible

Acts 19:1-7

<sup>1</sup> And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all. – Acts 19:1-7 ESV

At the close of the last chapter, Luke had Apollos headed to Achaia, while Paul was beginning the first leg of his third missionary journey. Paul would circle back through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, eventually arriving back in the city of Ephesus. Apollos, meanwhile, was still in Corinth, having not yet left for Achaia. For time being, these two men would pass as ships in the night, but their paths would eventually cross.

If you recall, Apollos had been in Ephesus. That is where he had met Priscilla and Aquila. They had found him there, teaching in the synagogue, where "he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25 ESV). That last point is important because, as we will see, upon his arrival in Ephesus, Paul will meet additional individuals, referred to as disciples, who knew only the baptism of John. This is important. Were these people believers or not? They are referred to as disciples, but that does not necessarily mean they were disciples of Jesus. In fact, in this context, Luke seems to infer that they were disciples of John the Baptist. They had been baptized with his baptism. But what is the difference between the baptism of John and that of the Holy Spirit? All the way back in Acts chapter one, we have recorded Jesus' command, given to the eleven just before He ascended back into heaven.

<sup>4</sup> While he was with them, he declared, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait there for what my Father promised, which you heard about from me. <sup>5</sup> **For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**" – Acts 1:4-5 NLT

Jesus mentioned the baptism of John, and he referred to it as a baptism with water. Why did he bring this up at that particular time? He appears to be contrasting John's baptism with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the disciples were soon to receive. But what is the difference? To understand that, we have to go back to the gospels and see how John himself described his baptism.

*“I baptize you with water **for repentance**, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” – Matthew 3:11 ESV*

His was a baptism of repentance. He was unable to offer the baptism of the Spirit because Jesus had not yet begun His ministry, and most certainly had not yet died, been resurrected or ascended. Therefore, the Spirit had not yet come. So, John’s baptism was limited in its scope.

John made the difference between their two baptisms clear.

*<sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” – Mark 1:8 ESV*

John’s baptism was reserved for those who repented. But what does that mean? To repent literally meant to change one’s mind, to change your way of thinking. John was demanding that they turn away from their sin and back to God. He was requiring people to prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah by changing the way they thought about their own sin. And John was also demanding that they change their behavior.

*<sup>8</sup> “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance....*

But listen to how he answers the questions of those who wanted to know what kind of fruit he was expecting.

*<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” – Luke 3:8,10-14 ESV*

John was demanding lifestyle change. He was requiring behavior modification. In other words, he was providing them with a list of works to perform to prove that they were truly repentant and turning from their sins and back to God. But how long could that kind of self-manufactured change last? Would any of those people be able to pull off what John was demanding, over the long-haul? No. But why? Because they lacked the very thing they needed to do it: The Holy Spirit. And John knew that what he was doing was temporary in nature, designed to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

*<sup>30</sup> “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” – John 1:30-31 ESV*

He also knew that his water baptism was not going to be enough. What the people really needed was the baptism Jesus would make possible: That of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>33</sup> *“I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” – John 1:33 ESV*

So, Paul arrived in Ephesus and met some disciples. They obviously knew about Jesus, but when Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they had believed, they had answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2 ESV). When Paul asked them what kind of baptism they had received, they told him, “The baptism of John” (Acts 19:3 NLT). They had been baptized because they had repented of their sins. And Paul pointed out the difference.

*“John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.” – Acts 19:4 NLT*

John’s baptism had been symbolic in nature. It was done to signify that the one being baptized had repented and agreed to change their behavior, to live a different lifestyle, all in preparation for the arrival of the Kingdom of God. These disciples anticipated the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God but had not understood that Jesus had been the fulfillment of those expectations. And they had no idea that there was a baptism of the Spirit of God awaiting all those who truly believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. And Luke records that, as soon as these individuals heard the truth that Paul shared, they believed.

<sup>5</sup> *As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. – Acts 19:5-6 NLT*

Their belief in Jesus resulted in the same outpouring of the Spirit that the disciples had experienced in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. These men exhibited the same miraculous manifestations of the Spirit’s indwelling power. Again, it is important that we understand that the events recorded in the Book of Acts are not meant to be prescriptive in nature, but descriptive. What happens here in Ephesus is not intended to be a hard-and-fast example of how the Holy Spirit comes. We have already seen that Cornelius and all those in his home who believed, immediately received the Spirit without the laying on of hands by Peter. Each of these events represent a specific circumstance with unique characteristics surrounding it. Paul was in Ephesus, a hotbed of demonic activity and idolatry. Apollos had been there before Paul, and Luke made it clear in chapter 18, that Apollos had also been baptized in water for having repented of his sins. But he had not yet received the baptism of the Spirit. He most likely propagated among the people what he knew and had experienced. It was Priscilla and Aquila who had come along and opened the eyes of Apollos to the truth. It seems that Paul’s laying on of hands and the subsequent pouring out of the Spirit was a way in which God confirmed the difference between mere repentance and true redemption, available only

through belief in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The arrival of the Holy Spirit by the laying on his hands also validated Paul's apostleship and authority among the people in Ephesus. Paul would later write to the believers in Ephesus, telling them:

*<sup>13</sup> And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory. – Ephesians 1:13-14 NLT*

The Holy Spirit came with belief in the name of Jesus. In the case of those in Ephesus, He came with a slight delay and by the laying on of hands. But that was not to be the norm or the required means by which the Spirit was received. It was only in this instance and under circumstances unique to those in Ephesus at that time.

The real issue is that, with the arrival of the Spirit and His indwelling of the believers in Ephesus, they received the very power that was going to make true repentance possible. Up until that time, they could only *hope* to live repentant lives. They could try, eagerly and sincerely, but they would ultimately fail, because they lacked the power to keep their promise to repent and live differently. And Paul would later write to these same believers, reminding them that their salvation and subsequent sanctification, was the work of God.

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> it is not from works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them. – Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT*

Now, for the very first time in their lives, they had the capacity to live truly repentant lives, marked by holiness and righteousness. And they could accomplish the will of God because they possessed the power of God in the form of the Spirit of God. Their lives would be radically different, but not based on anything they had done or would do. It was all the work of God.

## New Life in Christ

Acts 19:8-20

<sup>8</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

<sup>11</sup> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. <sup>17</sup> And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. <sup>18</sup> Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. – Acts 19:8-20 ESV

In Ephesus, Paul would have one of his longest and most spiritually prolific periods of ministry. He would remain in the city, ministering among its people for two years. And Luke tells us that, during that time, "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11 ESV), and he proceeds to describe just how extraordinary they were.

*...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. – Acts 19:12 ESV*

This is unlike anything we have seen up to this point in Luke's story. While both Peter and Paul had performed miracles of all kinds, including the healing of the lame, the exorcising of demons and, in Peter's case, the raising of someone from the dead, we have no previous mention of anyone being healed by handkerchiefs or aprons. But we do have a precedent established in Luke's gospel, when a woman was healed simply by touching the garment of Jesus.

<sup>42</sup> As Jesus went with him, he was surrounded by the crowds. <sup>43</sup> A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure.

<sup>44</sup> Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.

<sup>45</sup> *“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.*

*Everyone denied it, and Peter said, “Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you.”*

<sup>46</sup> *But Jesus said, “Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me.”* <sup>47</sup> *When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees in front of him. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched him and that she had been immediately healed.* <sup>48</sup> *“Daughter,” he said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”* – Luke 8:42-48 NLT

The key to this woman’s healing was her faith. She believed that Jesus had the power to heal her but was only doubtful that she might be able to get His attention. So, she simply touched His robe and was completely healed, and Jesus commended her for her faith.

It would seem that the very same thing was taking place in Ephesus. We are not told why this particular form of healing seemed to be prevalent there, but it most likely had to do with the fact that Ephesus was a hotbed of demonic activity due to the large percentage of sorcerers and magicians who practiced their trade there. The people of Ephesus were used to seeing strange and inexplicable things take place. Some, no doubt, was the result of demonic activity, while much was the work of charlatans and religious fakes. So, it would seem that God was confirming Paul’s ministry and message through these out-of-the-ordinary signs and wonders. Luke even indicates that Paul’s reputation in the city had grown to such a degree that a group of traveling Jewish exorcists tried to improve their success rate at casting out demons by saying, “I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!” (Acts 19:13 NLT). Here were Jews, who didn’t believe in Jesus trying to use His name to further their own ends. And as Luke indicated earlier in this chapter, Paul had found the Jews in Ephesus resistant to his message, forcing him to abandon his efforts to reach them. He had spent three months ministering in the synagogue but had been met with met with unbelief on the part of some, who had publicly ridiculed Paul’s message regarding Jesus. As a result of the stubborn resistance of the Jews, Paul had moved his daily discussions into a public hall owned by a man named, Tyrannus. And, for two years, Paul would continue to use this facility to hold meetings with all who were interested in hearing His messages about Jesus. Luke indicates “that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10 NLT).

Paul’s presence was having an impact. His preaching, teaching, and miracles, all done in the power of the Spirit of God, were setting him apart and drawing crowds to hear him, in much the same way as the messages and miracles of Jesus had done. But some were drawn to Paul’s power, not his message of salvation. They were attracted to his miraculous ability to perform signs and wonders, not his offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ. And Luke describes the seven sons of Sceva, whose father was a leading Jewish priest. These men were attempting to cast out demons in the name of Jesus but had no relationship with Jesus. And it would appear that their efforts had been successful, until one particular occasion, when they met resistance

from the demon there attempting to exorcise. Now, their previous exorcisms were most likely nothing more than shams. They were simply utilizing the name of Jesus in their fake exorcisms in order to attract the attention of the people and prove that they had the same power Paul had. Since these men were not believers in Jesus, they had no power to cast out demons. And if their efforts were demonic in nature, it would have made no sense for them to cast out a demon. Jesus made this point clear when He had been accused of casting out demons in the power of Satan.

*<sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle, they said, "No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons."*

*<sup>25</sup> Jesus knew their thoughts and replied, "Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan is casting out Satan, he is divided and fighting against himself. His own kingdom will not survive. <sup>27</sup> And if I am empowered by Satan, what about your own exorcists? They cast out demons, too, so they will condemn you for what you have said. <sup>28</sup> But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you." – Matthew 12:24-28*  
NLT

These men had no power to cast out demons. Satan would not have empowered them to cast out one of his own. That would have made no sense. And, as unbelievers, they had no access to the Spirit of God, so they had no ability to cast out demons by the power of God. And when they eventually ran across a real demon, they were in for a real surprise. When they had tried to cast out the demon in the name of Jesus, it had responded, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15 NLT), and then, Luke records that the demon-possessed man attacked them. They ended up running for their lives, beaten and stripped of all their clothes. They discovered the true nature of spiritual warfare. It is not a show or a game to be played. And Paul would later write to the believers in Ephesus, warning them:

*<sup>10</sup> Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:10-12* NLT

Demonic activity must have been high in Ephesus. And with the increase in the number of believers, the resistance on the part of Satan grew in strength and intensity. The encounter of the seven sons of Sceva with the demon had made an impact. It left the people in even greater awe of Jesus. It attracted more people to the teaching of Paul. And Luke indicates that many of those who had placed their faith in Christ confessed their sinful practices, most likely a reference to their participation in sorcery and the occult. No doubt, some of those who had been involved in exorcisms, witchcraft and demonic activity, had a change of heart when they saw what had happened to Sceva's seven sons. And as these individuals came to faith in Christ,

they were moved by the Spirit of God to change their behavior. And Luke reports that their life change was tangible and costly.

*<sup>19</sup> A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. – Acts 19:19 NLT*

They were giving up their old ways. They were turning from darkness to the light. And Luke tells us that their visible signs of repentance and rejection of their former lifestyles caught the attention of others in the city. As a result, “the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect” (Acts 19:20 NLT). The message of the gospel was leaving its mark. Not only were people coming to faith in Jesus, they were experiencing remarkable transformations in the way they lived they lived their lives. It was not going to business as usual. The indwelling presence of the Spirit of God was empowering these people to experience new life in Christ. And Paul would later write about this life-transforming power.

*<sup>17</sup> ...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! <sup>18</sup> And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NLT*

New life. New nature. New hope. New power. The old life is gone; a new life has begun. That is the message of the gospel.

## Exposed by the Light

Acts 19:21-41

<sup>21</sup> Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." <sup>22</sup> And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup> For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. <sup>30</sup> But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him.

<sup>31</sup> And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup> Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. <sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. <sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

<sup>35</sup> And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? <sup>36</sup> Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. <sup>37</sup> For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. <sup>39</sup> But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. <sup>40</sup> For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." <sup>41</sup> And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. – Acts 19:21-41 ESV

Paul had a burning desire to go to Rome. He expressed it many times in his letters and it remained a driving focus throughout his life. As we begin this final section of Luke's book, he confirms that Paul was desirous of making Rome one of his destinations, and Luke indicates that it was a desire given to Paul by the Holy Spirit. This urge to visit the capital of the Roman

empire was driven by the Spirit of God. Repeatedly, Paul had felt the compulsion to take His ministry to the great capital city of the Roman, but the timing had not yet been right. Paul expressed his intentions to visit Rome in the letter he wrote to the believers living there.

*<sup>13</sup> I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see spiritual fruit, just as I have seen among other Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> For I have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world, to the educated and uneducated alike. <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News. – Romans 1:13-15 NLT*

Paul was not interested in seeing the sights of Rome, but in spreading the good news about Jesus Christ, and building up the church. And Rome was not the only place Paul desired to visit. He took seriously Christ's commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, confessing to the believers in Rome that he saw their city as a stepping stone on his way to yet another distant land: Spain.

*<sup>23</sup> But now I have finished my work in these regions, and after all these long years of waiting, I am eager to visit you. <sup>24</sup> I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey. – Romans 15:23-24 NLT*

But while Paul had his heart set on visiting Rome, he did not neglect his responsibility to continue spreading the gospel throughout Asia. He sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, while he remained in Asia. Luke picks up the story in Ephesus, where Paul had been "reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9 ESV). It is obvious that the church was growing and the gospel was making an impact on the city, because Luke indicates that "there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way" (Acts 19:23 ESV). The transformed lives of the believers in Ephesus had made an impact on the city and its economy. If you recall, Luke made note of the fact that the new converts to Christianity had been led to give up their pagan practices.

*<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. – Acts 19:19-20 ESV*

It seems that the evangelistic efforts of Paul were making a real difference, not only in the lives of those who were saved, but in the community in which they lived. A local craftsman named Demetrius, who manufactured idols made of silver, had seen his business suffer greatly due to the increasing number of believers in Jesus. He contended that his business losses were directly attributable to Paul's assertions that idols were not really gods at all. Paul had no doubt shared his views on idols and had likely used passages like those found in Psalm 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Their idols are merely things of silver and gold,  
shaped by human hands.*

<sup>5</sup> *They have mouths but cannot speak,  
and eyes but cannot see.*

<sup>6</sup> *They have ears but cannot hear,  
and noses but cannot smell.*

<sup>7</sup> *They have hands but cannot feel,  
and feet but cannot walk,  
and throats but cannot make a sound.*

<sup>8</sup> *And those who make idols are just like them,  
as are all who trust in them. – Psalm 115:4-8 NLT*

When Paul had addressed the believers in Corinth regarding the debate they were having about eating meat sacrificed to idols, he agreed with the assessment of some, saying “we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one’” (1 Corinthians 8:4 ESV). There were those in Corinth who saw no problem eating meat sacrificed to idols, because idols were not really gods at all, and Paul had agreed with them. But he took it a step further.

*<sup>5</sup> For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—<sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. –1 Corinthians 8:5-7 ESV*

This was likely the sentiment he had shared in Ephesus, and it had made an impact on the people there. So much so, that the sale of silver statues of Artemis, their god, had plummeted. Demetrius, driven by his anger over the loss of revenue he suffered, tried to couch his words in spiritual rhetoric, accusing Paul of doing harm to their great god. And there is a subtle irony in this, because he implies 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.” (Acts 19:27 ESV). His statement begs the question: Is she a great goddess? If so, what do they have to fear? Can’t she defend herself? If not, why do they worship a goddess who can be so easily deposed, and due to nothing more than the words of an itinerant Jewish missionary?

But the words of Demetrius accomplished what he intended. The crowd, filled with other local craftsmen who also benefited from the notoriety of Artemis, were whipped into a frenzy by Demetrius’ little speech. They turned into a mob and grabbed the first Christians they could get their hands on, two men named Gaius and Aristarchus. We are not told where Paul was when all of this happened, but he must have been elsewhere in the city at the time all of this took place. Luke tells us that, when Paul heard what had happened, he wanted to rush to the aid of his fellow believers but was restrained from doing so. Even some of the local political leaders, referred to as Asiarchs, who had developed relationships with Paul, urged him to stay away.

The scene in the local theater, where the mob had grabbed the two men, had devolved chaos and confusion. Many in the crowd had no idea why they were even there. When Alexander, one of the local believers tried to address the crowd, he was drowned out by the voices of the crowd as they shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

But cooler heads prevailed. A local official finally calmed the crowd and warned them that they must have just cause for their actions. As far as he could tell, the charges against Gaius and Aristarchus were unfounded. He said, "you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess" (Acts 19:37 ESV). They had not destroyed any idols themselves. They had not said anything worthy of the charge of blasphemy. He warned them that they were close to violating Romans laws against rioting, which could warrant stiff penalties. If Demetrius had a legitimate legal case against Paul or anyone else, he would need to bring it to the local assembly. With that, he dismissed the crowd and Gaius and Aristarchus were released.

Why did Luke include this story? What was his point? Paul was not even directly involved in the affairs described in this passage. It seems that Luke was providing a glimpse into the lives of those who had placed their faith in Jesus. Their joy was real, but so were the dangers they faced. This story is a reminder that Christianity, in its purist form, is life-changing, and changed lives tend to make an impact on their environment. Christianity is not a threat to the government. It is not a movement designed to radically alter the status quo or disrupt the religious plurality of a community. Any influence it may have will come from the radical nature of the transformation of the lives of its proponents. Believers, indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God, are to exhibit the characteristics of their new natures and live in such a way that their lives impact those around them. The believers in Ephesus had not started a campaign to get rid of Artemis. They had simply shared the good news about Jesus. They didn't need to attack the false gods of the Ephesians, but simply share the truth about the one true God. And their lives had become the best testimony of what faith in Jesus can do. The light was dispelling the darkness, simply by its presence.

## The Seven Sons of Saul

Acts 20:1-6

<sup>1</sup> After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. <sup>3</sup> There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. <sup>5</sup> These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, <sup>6</sup> but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. – Acts 20:1-6 ESV

After the highly tense episode at the theater in Ephesus, when things had finally cooled down, Paul left the city and made his way north to Troas. We know that he stopped there from a comment he made in one of his letters to the believers in Corinth. He told them, “When I came to the city of Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord opened a door of opportunity for me. But I had no peace of mind because my dear brother Titus hadn’t yet arrived with a report from you. So I said good-bye and went on to Macedonia to find him” (2 Corinthians 2:12-13 NLT).

Paul crossed the Aegean Sea and arrived back in Macedonia where he revisited many of the cities he had been to on his second missionary journey. We know from that same Letter to the Corinthians, that Paul was reunited with Timothy while in Macedonia.

<sup>5</sup> When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside. <sup>6</sup> But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. – 2 Corinthians 7:5-6 NLT

Luke indicates that Paul eventually made his way from Macedonia into Greece, which refers to the area then known as Achaia. During his three months of ministry there, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, informing them of his desire to some day visit them on his way to Spain.

*I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey. – Romans 15:24 NLT*

But Paul’s immediate plans had been to sail from Greece to Syria, where he would make his way to Jerusalem. But he was informed of a plot by the local Jewish leadership to do him harm, so he altered his plans, deciding instead to return through Macedonia. But Paul did not make the journey alone. We know that Titus had rejoined him in Macedonia, but when he made his return trip back through that region, he had another six men as his traveling companions. Luke

lists them as Sopater the Berean, Aristarchus and Secundus, who were Thessalonians; Gaius of Derbe, Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus from the region of Asia. The only name in this list that is familiar to us is that of Timothy, the young man who had become a regular on many of Paul's previous journeys. Along with Titus, they are the best-known disciples or young proteges of Paul. He ended up writing two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, that each bear their names. But the other men on this list are relatively unknown to most of us. Together with Timothy, they make up a team of seven men, who accompanied Paul on his trip through Macedonia. It seems likely that these men represented the various congregations throughout Achaia and Macedonia who had contributed money for the needs of the saints back in Jerusalem. The various nationalities of these men reveal the cross-cultural nature of the gospel and how Paul's ministry had mirrored his belief in its inclusiveness. In his letter to the church in Colossae, he wrote: "In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us" (Colossians 3:11 NLT). There's a Macedonian, two Thessalonians, two Asians, and two Galatians. Quite an eclectic group. But they all had one thing in common: Their indebtedness to Paul for his ministry in their lives which had resulted in their saving faith in Jesus Christ. He was a mentor to them, and his dedication and determination to take the gospel to the Gentiles had resulted in their lives being radically changed forever. He had been a difference-maker in their lives. And I can't help but think about the seven sons of Sceva, whom Luke introduced us to in chapter 19. These itinerant Jewish exorcists, all sons of a high-ranking Jewish priest, had attempted to mimic the supernatural work of Paul by trying to cast out demons in the *name* of Jesus, but without having a *relationship* with Jesus. They failed. No doubt, these men had been mentored by their father. Perhaps they had learned to exorcise demons from him. But their attempt to use the name of Jesus for their own personal use and career advancement, left them beaten and stripped naked by the very demon they had tried to cast out.

What a stark difference between these seven sons and the seven spiritual sons of Saul, or Paul. He had poured truth into these men and it had taken root, manifesting itself in fruitful ministry. Paul had been confident enough in these men to send them on ahead to the city of Troas, without him. Paul was constantly expanding his ministry by exposing others to leadership opportunities. But not before he had trained and equipped them for the tasks they would face. Paul had taken Jesus' command to make disciples quite seriously. And he wasn't content to simply make converts. He wanted to raise up men who were mature in their faith and bold in their witness. We don't know the ages of the seven men listed in this passage, but for Paul, age would not have mattered. The words he wrote to Timothy would have applied to them all, regardless of their age.

*<sup>11</sup> Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them. <sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.*

*<sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you.— 1 Timothy 4:11-12, 16 NLT*

Each generation should be about the spiritual training and preparation of the next generation. The psalmist wrote:

<sup>4</sup> *We will not hide these truths from our children;  
we will tell the next generation  
about the glorious deeds of the Lord,  
about his power and his mighty wonders.*  
<sup>5</sup> *For he issued his laws to Jacob;  
he gave his instructions to Israel.  
He commanded our ancestors  
to teach them to their children,  
<sup>6</sup> so the next generation might know them—  
even the children not yet born—  
and they in turn will teach their own children.*  
<sup>7</sup> *So each generation should set its hope anew on God,  
not forgetting his glorious miracles  
and obeying his commands. – Psalm 78:4-7 NLT*

God warned the people of Israel:

<sup>18</sup> *“So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands  
and wear them on your forehead as reminders. <sup>19</sup> Teach them to your children. Talk  
about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to  
bed and when you are getting up. <sup>20</sup> Write them on the doorposts of your house and on  
your gates, <sup>21</sup> so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children  
may flourish in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors. – Deuteronomy 11:18-21  
NLT*

And yet, one of the saddest passages in all of Scripture is found in the book of Judges, where we read what happens when these commands of God to prepare the next generation are ignored.

*After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the  
LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel. – Judges 2:10 NLT*

Disciple making is not just about increasing the number of believers and growing the size of the church. Seeing people come to faith in Christ is wonderful, but it is only part of the process. Spiritual maturity is to be an equal and non-negotiable aspect of making disciples. The seven men who accompanied Paul were not just believers, they were maturing, Spirit-empowered ministers of the gospel who were equipped to do the work of the Lord. In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul wrote:

<sup>28</sup> *So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the  
wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship*

*to Christ. <sup>29</sup> That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. – Colossians 1:28-29 NLT*

Paul wrote similar words to the believers in Ephesus, once again revealing his passion to see believers grow up in their salvation.

*<sup>11</sup> Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup> Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

*<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. <sup>15</sup> Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. – Ephesians 4:11-15 NLT*

Christ-likeness was the goal for Paul, not just coming to faith in Christ. Raising up workers to send into the harvest was his life's mission, not just signing up future residents of heaven. For Paul, it all began with the perspective of a father to his children. He referred to Timothy as "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2 NLT). He called the Galatians believers his dear children, informing them, "I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives" (Galatians 4:19 NLT). He was suffering because they were not growing as he knew they should. He opened his letter to them with the following words of disappointment and admonition:

*<sup>6</sup> I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News <sup>7</sup> but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. – Galatians 1:6-7 NLT*

Paul wanted mature sons and daughters in the faith. He would not accept mediocrity or settle for anything less than visible and tangible signs of increasing maturity. Paul had poured his life into Titus and Timothy. Now he had added another list of names to his ever-growing list of sons in the faith. How many spiritual sons and daughters will you leave behind? Who are you raising up to take your place when you're gone?

## Expecting the Unexpected

Acts 20:7-12

*<sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. <sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. <sup>9</sup> And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. <sup>10</sup> But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." <sup>11</sup> And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. <sup>12</sup> And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. – Acts 20:7-12 ESV*

Paul had sent his seven sons in the faith on to Troas, while he traveled back through the region of Macedonia. When and Luke arrived in Philippi, they set sail for Troas where they reconnected with Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus.

In this small section of Luke's eye-witness account, he reveals something of great significance that can easily be missed due to the remarkable nature of the day's events. He records that they had gathered with other believers in Troas "on the first day of the week." This is first time in Scripture where we find a reference to the early church meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week, rather than on the traditional Jewish sabbath. The change in worship days was related to the believers' desire to honor Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. It also helped separate and distinguish the Christian faith from its Hebrew roots. In the early days of Christianity, it was commonly viewed by those outside of Judaism as little more than a sub-sect of that religious tradition. But with its rapidly diversifying ethnic makeup and teaching that the traditional rite of circumcision and strict adherence to the Mosaic law were not required for its adherents, Christianity was becoming a distinct religious practice and belief system.

One of the distinctives of the early church worship service was its practice of what the New Testament author, Jude, referred to as the "love feast." It seems that the church made a habit of sharing a meal together as part of their worship experience and, with that meal, the Lord's Supper was also celebrated. When Luke records that the believers in Troas had gathered to "break bread", he is not referring simply to the celebration of communion or the Lord's Table as we might call it, but with their sharing of common meal, part of which would include their taking of the Lord's Supper. Paul describes just such a gather in his letter to the believers in Corinth.

*<sup>20</sup> When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. <sup>21</sup> For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. <sup>22</sup> What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What*

*am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!* – 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 NLT

In their case, they were destroying the nature of their communal gathering through acts of selfishness and insensitivity to the needs of their fellow members in the congregation. Jude refers to this meal as a love feast because it was to be an expression of their love for Christ and for one another. Paul was upset with the Corinthians because they denigrated the whole point of the Lord's Supper, a celebration of Christ's selfless sacrifice on behalf of man, by focusing all their attention on themselves and their own self-centered needs.

Along with the meal, the worship service of the early church included singing, prayer and instruction in the Word. Paul describes this in his letter to the Corinthians.

*When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given...* – 1 Corinthians 14:26 NLT

It was in just such a setting that Paul addressed the believers gathered together in Troas. And while Paul had plans to leave the next morning, his sermon extended well into the night. No doubt, he addressed many issues with the believers there, recounting his missionary travels and all that he had seen God accomplish. But there was probably a fair share of biblical instruction, with Paul unpacking Old Testament passages and prophecies regarding Jesus. Much of what Paul wrote in his letters to the congregations he had helped start in Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, and Ephesus reveal the kinds of things Paul might have shared with the believers in Troas. As we have seen, Paul was a disciple maker. He was out to see the people in Troas grow in their faith and in their knowledge of God and His Son. He was seeking to make mature believers, not simply converts.

It was in Paul's lengthy address to his audience that something very unfortunate and unbelievable happened. A young man named Eutychus, sitting on the sill of an open window, fell asleep and plunged three stories to his death. Most likely, the combination of the late hour, Paul's lengthy talk, and the aftereffects of a large meal contributed to this tragic scene. It is important to note that Luke, a physician and an eyewitness to this event, pronounced the young man as being dead. The truly remarkable part of this story is not so much that the young man died and was raised back to life, but that it is all treated with a kind of faith-filled flippancy by Luke. He treats this incredible scene with a surprising calm and sparsity of words. He simply says, "Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. 'Don't worry,' he said, 'he's alive!'" (Acts 20:10 NLT). There is no description of the shock, sorrow and chaos that must have accompanied this tragic accident. Luke gives us no insight into how the crowd responded and he provides no sense of urgency. Paul simply went down, bent over the young man and then announced him as being alive. And then Luke matter-of-factly records, "Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left" (Acts 20:11 NLT). No rejoicing, celebrating, praising of God or description of shock, wonder or awe on the part of the people. This has led many to conclude that Eutychus had not been dead but had just swooned and had been misdiagnosed as dead by

those who first examined him. But again, Luke the physician seems to indicate that the prognosis was clear – Eutychus had died as a result of his fall.

Why else would Luke have included this story? What benefit is there in describing a young man who fell asleep, plunged out of a third-story window and was mistakenly pronounced to be dead? Why does Luke describe Paul bending over the young man and holding him in his arms? He described another, very similar scene, in his gospel. It involved Jesus and His miraculous raising of a young girl from death.

*<sup>51</sup> When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn't let anyone go in with him except Peter, John, James, and the little girl's father and mother. <sup>52</sup> The house was filled with people weeping and wailing, but he said, "Stop the weeping! She isn't dead; she's only asleep."*

*<sup>53</sup> But the crowd laughed at him because they all knew she had died. <sup>54</sup> Then Jesus took her by the hand and said in a loud voice, "My child, get up!" <sup>55</sup> And at that moment her life returned, and she immediately stood up! Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. – Luke 8:51-55 NLT*

In this account, it is clear that the crowd knew that the girl was dead. They had already begun to mourn her death. But Jesus described her as being asleep. Was He contradicting their prognosis? Was He claiming that they had been wrong in pronouncing her dead? No. He was revealing that the power of death was nothing to Him. It was no dangerous than sleep. He would revive her from death as easy as one awakens someone from a deep sleep. Jesus took her hand and she revived. Paul took Eutychus in his arms and he was restored to life.

Luke's rather blasé description of this scene reveals his growing sense of expectancy and the lack of surprise he felt at witnessing these kinds of remarkable miracles. He was becoming used to such scenarios and tended to describe them as if they were simply a part of doing business as a follower of Christ. In his travels with Paul, he had seen some incredible things take place. He was no longer shocked or surprised at what he saw God going through Paul. The raising of Eutychus from the dead, while spectacular in nature, was not unexpected. And the fact that the entire congregation returned to the third floor and continued their time of worship, listening to Paul teach, reveals that, even they were growing to expect the unexpected.



## The Incredible Non-Shrinking Man

Acts 20:13-27

<sup>13</sup> But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. <sup>14</sup> And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. <sup>15</sup> And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. <sup>16</sup> For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

<sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

<sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them:

*“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. – Acts 20:13-27 ESV*

After Paul miraculously raised Eutychus back to life, he and his traveling companions left Troas. Luke indicates that he, Timothy and the other six men who were accompanying Paul back to Jerusalem, took a ship from Troas and headed for Assos, while Paul determined to go by land. Traveling by ship required that you sail around Cape Lectum, which added considerable time to the journey. It was only 20 miles by land from Troas to Assos, so Paul’s decision to take the overland route allowed him to extend his stay in Troas. But eventually, he and the others met up in Assos, where he joined them aboard their ship and continued the journey, arriving some days later in Miletus. For whatever reason, Paul made the determination to sail past Ephesus, perhaps worrying that it would present too lengthy of a delay in his travel plans and prevent him from reaching Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost.

Paul still had a concern for the well-being of the church in Ephesus, so he came up with an alternative plan, sending for the elders of the church and inviting them to join him in Miletus. It had been in Ephesus that the gospel had made a huge impact, transforming the lives of many who once worshiped false gods and dabbled in the occult. Luke records:

<sup>19</sup> *A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars.*

<sup>20</sup> *So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect. – Acts 19:19-20 NLT*

These changes had not set well with all those living in Ephesus. The local tradesmen, who made their living selling statues of the god, Artemis, had whipped the people into a frenzy, inciting a riot and causing “no little disturbance concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23 ESV). The situation for the believers in Ephesus had become intense and potentially dangerous. So, Paul had invited the elders to come and meet with him so that he might encourage them. But Paul used an interesting tactic to accomplish his goal. He most likely knew that those in Ephesus might have viewed his leaving of them as a form of abandonment. Just when things had gotten not, he had bailed on them. So, Paul reminded the elders that he had spent a great deal of time in Ephesus, ministering to them, even in the face of the hostile threats of the Jews, who opposed his teaching.

<sup>19</sup> *I have done the Lord’s work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews.* <sup>20</sup> *I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. – Acts 20:19-20 NLT*

It’s important to remember that, at this point in his ministry, Paul had already been stoned and left for dead. He had faced tremendous opposition and intense hatred. But he had refused to shrink back. Even in the face of adversity, Paul had stood his ground and remained faithful to his calling by Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> *I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. – Acts 20:21 NLT*

That had been Paul’s persistent passion and he had pursued it with an unwavering commitment. And his departure from them had not been driven by fear or self-preservation, but by the Spirit of God. He was convinced that Jerusalem was the next stop on his itinerary, and he was going there, even though he had no idea what awaited him when he arrived. He knew that the Judaizers, those Jewish Christians who had been demanding that all Gentiles be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic Law, would be there. He was well aware that they would still be questioning his ministry and accusing him of violating both the law and the religious heritage they held so sacred. Paul informed these men that “the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead” (Acts 20:23 NLT). If you recall, when Jesus had instructed Ananias to go to Paul, then known as Saul, and minister to him immediately after his conversion, He had said:

<sup>15</sup> *“Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.* <sup>16</sup> *And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” – Acts 9:15-16 NLT*

Paul was well aware that his ministry was to include suffering. He had experienced it. And he knew that every trip he took could be his last. He had been an eyewitness to the stoning death of Stephen. He had been stoned himself. And, on more than one occasion, he had been forced to flee for his life, sneaking out of a city in the dark of night, like a common criminal. And in the very next chapter, we will see Paul received numerous warnings from others, prompted by the Holy Spirit. When he met with the disciples in Tyre, Luke records that “through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4 ESV). While in Caesarea, a prophet from Judea named Agabus, came to visit Paul and warn him. Luke writes that he “took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”’” (Acts 21:11 NLT). The disciples who witnessed this event begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he responded: “I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13 NLT).

Paul told the elders from Ephesus, “my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God” (Acts 20:24 NLT). Paul was more than willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, and he already had. He was also willing to die, if necessary. He would later write to the believers in Philippi:

*<sup>16</sup> Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ’s return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. <sup>17</sup> But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God... – Philippians 2:16-17 NLT*

And Paul would encourage the Philippian believers to have the same attitude, seeing their relationship with Christ as of more value than life itself.

*<sup>8</sup> Yes, 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 <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. – Philippians 3:8-9 NLT*

*<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! – Philippians 3:10-11 NLT*

Paul had no regrets. He felt no compulsion to apologize for his efforts or to excuse his actions. He had been faithful.

*<sup>26</sup> I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it’s not my fault, <sup>27</sup> for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. – Acts 20:26-27 NLT*

If someone died without knowing Christ, it was not Paul’s fault. He had done his job. He had faithfully declared the gospel and clearly articulated God’s plan of salvation. He had preached

the Word of God unapologetically and fearlessly. And now, he was going to be heading to Jerusalem knowing that he might never see these brothers in Christ again. He had no idea what the future held. He lived with a sense of dependency upon the Spirit of God, that let him take one day at a time. He took nothing for granted. He savored every moment and made the most out of every minute given to him by God. Paul's views regarding his ministry can best be summed up in the words he wrote to the believers in Philippi.

*<sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* – Philippians 1:20-21 ESV

Paul was encouraging these men by sharing with them his personal outlook on life. He knew that their ministry would be difficult, just as his had been. He realized that they would face times of uncertainty and fear. He had as well. He was well aware that they would be going back to Ephesus where they would face opposition of all kinds, both inside and outside of the church. But he was well acquainted with these things. These men were the God-appointed leaders of their local congregation. They had a huge responsibility and Paul wanted them to take it seriously. And his words would echo those of the apostle Peter, who also delivered strong words of encouragement and exhortation to elders of the churches to whom he had ministered.

*<sup>1</sup> And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: <sup>2</sup> Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. <sup>3</sup> Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. <sup>4</sup> And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.* – 1 Peter 5:1-4 NLT

## Godly Leadership

Acts 20:28-38

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

<sup>36</sup> And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship. – Acts 20:28--38 ESV

Paul had stopped in Miletus on his way to Jerusalem and, while there, he had invited the elders for the congregation in Ephesus to come visit him, so that he could impart some words of encouragement to them. Paul was well aware that he might never get to see these men again and wanted to challenge them to take seriously their role as the spiritual shepherds of the flock over which God had placed them. Paul used his own life as an example of selfless service, declaring "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27 ESV). He was confident and content with his efforts on their behalf, having served "the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials" (Acts 20:19 ESV). Now, he was passing the baton on to them, and challenging them to "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28 ESV). Notice that he began with a warning for these men to pay careful attention to themselves. Their personal lives were to be closely monitored and the state of their own spiritual health was to be constantly assessed. In one of his letters to his young protégé, Timothy, Paul described the qualifications for an elder.

<sup>2</sup> So a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. <sup>3</sup> He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. <sup>5</sup> For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? – 1 Timothy 3:2-5 NLT

These men had a grave responsibility, and they would one day answer to God for the manner in which they cared for His sheep. They needed to see themselves as overseers, or guardians over those under their care. The Greek word Luke used is *episkopos* and carries the idea of someone who cares for and watches over the well-being of others. But Paul knew that it would be difficult for them to properly provide for and protect those under their care if they themselves were not adequately fit for duty. Spiritual deficient leaders will always result in spiritual anemic followers. Men who were unfaithful to their own wives, lacking in self-control, unable to manage their own households, quick-tempered, quarrelsome, greedy, and unable to teach the Word of God, would make lousy shepherds and do more harm than good to the flock of God. And Paul made it clear why they had to be spiritually prepared and properly equipped for their roles as shepherds.

*<sup>29</sup> I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. <sup>31</sup> Watch out! – Acts 20:29-31 NLT*

The dangers were real. Paul would have fully concurred with the statement made by Peter: “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8 NLT). For Paul, the thought of false teachers slyly infiltrating the ranks of God’s people and leading them astray with clever-sounding words, was more than he could stand. The subtle, yet sinister reality of false doctrine was going to be a constant threat to the spiritually well-being of the church. It remains so today. Half-truths and watered-down doctrine are always more dangerous than outright lies. Frontal assaults, while always a possibility in spiritual warfare, are rare. The enemy tends to inflict his damage in more subtle and deceptive ways. But elders must understand that distortion of the truth can be just as dangerous and deadly as the denial of it. But to be able to recognize the lies of the enemy, God’s leaders must know the truth of His Word. That is why Paul told Timothy:

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT*

Those who remain ignorant of God’s Word will be unable to live or lead well. They will find themselves living like “infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14 NIV). Leaders can be appointed, but their ability to lead is God-given and a byproduct of their time in the Word and the degree of their dependence upon God. Which is why Paul stated, “I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself” (Acts 20:32 NLT). Their capacity to lead was going to be directly tied to their reliance upon God. They would need to daily lean on the grace of God and recognize that He alone could provide them with the strength and wisdom required for their role as shepherds of His flock.

Paul closes out his discourse with these men by using himself as an example. He was not speaking pridefully but was confident that his own life could be used as a model for godly leadership. Paul had never been in it for the glory. He didn't serve for any kind of recognition or financial remuneration. He plainly states:

*<sup>33</sup> "I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. <sup>34</sup> You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. – Acts 20:33-35 NLT*

And Paul's life fully reflected the teaching of Peter concerning godly leadership.

*<sup>2</sup> Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. <sup>3</sup> Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. <sup>4</sup> And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. – 1 Peter 5:2-4 NLT*

Godly leadership is not about power, position, or prominence. It has little to do with matters of superiority or control. Being a leader in the context of the church of God is all about service, not authority and power. In fact, Jesus provided His disciples with some fairly stunning words about this very matter. He spoke them immediately after James and John had made their rather arrogant and self-centered request to be given positions of power when Jesus established His Kingdom. Jesus simply said:

*<sup>25</sup> "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>26</sup> But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. <sup>28</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Matthew 20:25-28 NLT*

And Paul added his own little twist, reminding the elders in his audience of some other words spoken by Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35 NLT). Paul was expecting these men to lead like Jesus. He wanted them to lead by putting themselves last and others first. They were to lead by selflessly sacrificing their lives for the sake of the flock. All of this recalls the words of Jesus, spoken to the apostle Peter in the days immediately after His resurrection. Three times Jesus questioned Peter's love for Him. And three times Peter assured Jesus of his love. And each of those times, Jesus responded with three simple, yet profound statements.

*"Then feed my lambs." – John 21:15 NLT*

*"Then take care of my sheep." – John 21:16 NLT*

*“Then feed my sheep.” – John 21:17 NLT*

The greatest way a leader can prove his love for Jesus is to love those for whom Jesus died and for whom the leader has been called to serve.

When Paul had finished his meeting with the elders, they prayed together, then parted ways. There were many tears and much sorrow because, of all the things Paul had said to them, the one thing that had stood out the most was his announcement that he might never see them again. It is obvious that they loved Paul dearly. They clearly saw him as a loving and godly leader. He had been for them what he was asking them to be for those under their care: A selfless, sacrificial shepherd who had always been willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Now, they were to return to Ephesus and do the same.