

The Power of the Spirit

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Happy New Year. Those of you who, like Sonny, came up to me this morning asking for red pockets. I grew up in England, so very westernized, so please do not come to me.

My kids, however, grew up in Hong Kong, so you can give them all the red pockets that you want to. We're going to actually have the ladies pass the Bibles around. Just put up your hand if you would like one.

If you don't want one, you still need to take one. So it is the only way to be saved. We had a great baptism this morning. It was really good. I'm not going to lie. Someone asked, were they properly dunked?

They were well and truly dunked. In fact, I think I either overestimated my own strength or underestimated my weakness. I think we may have dropped Jasper into the ocean first, and then we had to pick him back up afterwards.

So he got well and truly dunked. All the sin was removed. It was good. I want to invite the three of them up in a bit to do the scripture reading for us, actually. So I'll just give you a warning now. Acts chapter 19, if you want to do it.

[1:03] But before then, this week has been a fun week, right? You've been going to all these family gatherings. You've been celebrating with people who actually, I'm guessing, many who do not know Christ yet.

And Gabe, last week, shared how Christ really confronts some of these things within our Chinese culture. He gave us the three Fs. Does anyone remember what they were?

Does anyone remember? This proves to me that, as I always knew anyway, that people don't really remember what we teach. Oh, oh, there we go. Sunny. Family is one.

The Chinese culture just values family so much. And it's not necessarily a bad thing. But yet, actually, when it becomes an idol, when it becomes your God, when it becomes the only thing, that's when the problem is.

Brayden, you put your hand up. Are you going to give us another one? Brayden? Huh? Fortune. It's all about money.

[2:03] It's all about wanting more and more blessings onto us. And then the final F. Does anyone remember? It was actually fears. But actually, your one is probably, I think, the most important.

I think, actually, so fears is the one that he talked about. How we are actually all afraid of something. And I've joked many times before how the Chinese culture always uses fear as the thing to drive any kind of behavior.

I mean, it's part of the honor-shame culture that we're in as well. And what we're most afraid of, maybe, face. How we perceive to other people. Andy, you prayed earlier this morning.

And that was the thing that was in my heart. I said, wow, we are really afraid of how the people around us perceive us. How they actually look at us, especially our families. And many of us dread going to these family gatherings.

And we get asked those same questions. What do you do? Have you moved on to the next life stage yet? It's all about faith. It's all about fears. It's all about fortune. It's all about family.

[2:58] When Christianity comes into a culture, what it does is it confronts the idols of that culture. And it doesn't force that culture to conform to a perceived Western religion kind of stereotype.

We were with my family all the way in Yulong. No word of English spoken in our family gatherings. But they would often say, oh, it's really good that you guys do that. But we didn't grow up in the West.

And it's a white man's religion. It's a Western religion. But if you look around the world, and that's why I'm particularly encouraged every time I gather, is on a Sunday morning, around the world, every country, every culture, every race, there are people who are worshipping. You look at the book of Revelation, towards the end in Revelation 7, where every tribe and tongue and every language is worshipping. This is not just a Western religion that speaks English. This is way more than that. This transcends culture. But the problem is, sometimes when Christianity comes into our culture, we don't actually let it confront every part of the culture. [4:05] What we do instead is we hold on to some of the parts of the culture that we have found very comforting. Family, fortunes, face. And then we say, Christ, can you move in as well? But not fully.

Just only to the surface level, because I still need to keep these other ones. And yet Christianity has never just let us stay in that space.

In fact, Jesus, if we invite him into our hearts, he goes into every single room. He goes into every single part of our culture and goes, which of this is of me? Family is of me.

I was the OG. But which is actually not? What have you turned a good thing into, and now has turned into God itself? It's really what Christianity is doing.

And we're going to keep going back into the book of Acts now. And Acts chapter 19 is where we're going to go. But just to recap at the end, Acts 17 is where Gabe finished last week with us. When the gospel is preached, actually a few different responses happened.

[5:03] And this was back then. So this is greatly encouraging for me. So even in a room like this, I know there will be people who fall into these three separate categories. One is you believe. You're like, I'm agreeing. I'm nodding. I'm amening. And there's another group which is like, tell me more.

I'm not quite sure. Well, I kind of understand, but I kind of don't. But I would like to find out more.

And then there's the third group just mocks and just says, well, this is stupid. Why would you believe that? This doesn't make sense. But then to those, I would ask, well, what do you believe? Do you believe that billions of years ago, we came from nothing and we'll go back to nothing? And that's it. Or you believe in yourself? Or you believe in your career? Or you believe in your achievements? Or you believe in what you can attain in this life, in this world?

Is that what you believe? Is that how you get true contentment? And how's that working for you? And I'm not asking in a sarcastic, condescending, petty kind of way. I'm just genuinely asking, how is that working for you? As you look at society out there and you look at all the things people are pursuing out there, do we see people who are genuinely free?

People who declare and proclaim to be free, that they can do what they want. Do they actually feel free to you? When actually the things that we say we are in control of, so often, so often, so quickly, they turn around and end up controlling us.

[6:14] Because the moment we lose them, our lives, our worlds just come crashing down. And yet what we believe, what we hang our hats on, is that 2,000 years ago, someone came, the Son of God came. He died and then he rose again.

And there has been no evidence to refute that. And that fact changed everything. The fact that we're in 2026 is because we're counting since that man lived. There's got to be something to this. And I want to ask you whether you are in the mock camp or whether you're in the believe camp or whether you're in the just inquiring camp. To just be willing. To be willing to open your heart and go, well, what if there was something true about this?

What if there was something to this that is worth looking into? Now, do we have all the answers? Absolutely no. In fact, many of us who are following and believing now, we actually still have a lot of these questions.

And yet, I'll be honest with you, I'll be frank with you. The alternative is quite dire. The alternative is quite bleak. So I'd encourage you, if you're just on that fence and you're just wondering, or you're actually, you're quite defiant and you say, no, I don't believe this kind of stuff.

[7:14] Well, why don't you just give it a chance? And actually, test. And see. And my hope is that as you step into a place like this, filled with these people here who are hungry, that actually, you go, oh, there is something to this.

Christianity confronts the culture that we're in. Exposes the idols that we're often holding on to. And it shows us a better way. And we see that now as we move into Acts chapter 19.

And we're just going to invite them up. Janice, Moses, Jasper, would you mind coming up? Let me embarrass you for a little bit and have you do the scripture reading for us. Is that okay? Can we give them a round of applause? I can tell you the water was cold.

The water was cold. So I'm looking forward to the next one, which will be in the summer, where we will have some warm water to go into. All right. Acts chapter 19. What should we do? Why don't you do this? Yeah.

Yeah. Moses, you do this. Acts 19 verse 1 to 10. Janice, then you do 11 to 20. And then Jasper, you do 21 to 27. Is that good?

[8:14] Can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

There he found some disciples. And he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, no, we have not heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, into what then were you baptized?

They said, into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one who was to come after him. That is Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about 12 men in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took disciples with him.

[9:25] Reasoning daily, the hall of tyrannous, this continued for two years so that all residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul 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. Then some of the itinerants, 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.

Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered, then Jesus, then, Jesus, I know, and Paul, I recognize.

But who are you? 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.

[10:33] 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.

Also, many of those who were now believers came professing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burdened them in the sight of all.

And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Now, after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem saying, After I've been here, I must also see Rome.

And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Eurystice, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time, there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this business, we have our wealth.

[12:04] And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence.

She whom all Asia and the world worship. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Jasper, Moses, and Janice. Thank you very much.

Hopefully you were able to follow along. Acts chapter 19, if you've got your Bible, do follow along.

I'm going to be going through this at a fairly quick speed. But the premise is this. Jesus is Lord of all

or not at all.

Jesus is Lord of all or not at all. You see when Christianity goes into the city of Ephesus, which is actually a very important city back in the ancient world, just like Antioch, just like Rome, just like Alexandria, this was a place that actually was a hub for sea and land transportation.

[13:18] It was a capital business center. This was an important city. This was an important city. And then Paul goes into this city, and then he brings the gospel. And what's really interesting here is that he meets 12 guys.

He meets 12 guys, and this is the start of the church in Ephesus. So this is how it begins. And again, I can just imagine Paul walking into this city, overwhelmed, just like he was in Athens, just deeply provoked, distressed about the idols that were going on here.

And he meets 12 guys, and he has this fascinating interaction that actually theologians and scholars to this day are still debating what it truly means here. So he meets these 12 guys who say they've been baptized, but then they don't truly understand the gospel, which is interesting because I wonder whether actually if Paul walked into here and he would ask us, do you truly understand what the gospel is?

I wonder how many of us would truly be able to articulate to him and tell him what the gospel is.

They say something interesting here. And his question is, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, no, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

And then John says, well, until what then were you baptized? They said, into John's baptism. And then Paul explains to them, John's baptism was one of repentance. So basically what that is, is if you look back into the book of John, in chapter one, John the Baptist is calling people into repentance.

[14:35] He's saying, hey, turn away from your life of sin. What you're doing is damaging how you're living and it will end up in death. Turn around, repent is what the word repents means. Turn around and go the other way.

And so then these people would be baptized, basically filled with guilt and shame of what they'd done in their lives. And they're saying, okay, fine. I want to turn away from that. But what they didn't understand and what Paul was trying to get out here was, hey, do you know who the Holy Spirit is? Or do you even know who Jesus is? What they had gotten was this feeling of guilt and shame, baptized into repentance saying, I don't want to live that life anymore. But they didn't really know where to go.

They knew they had to turn around from this, but they didn't know that they had to go this way. So instead of just turning around and then following Jesus, they turned around and then were kind of just stuck in this place there.

And so John goes, hey, do you know that you need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? Now, this is a rare occurrence here. Because now if you're here having been baptized, you actually don't need to doubt on the most part that you haven't been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

[15:34] Our life group was talking about this only a couple of weeks ago. There are two baptisms. One is of water and one is of spirit. And often they actually happen at the same time. So when you get, actually the moment you decide to follow Christ, that is proof in itself that the Holy Spirit is inside you.

So you don't have to worry. If you are a follower of Jesus, if you are a believer of Jesus, you don't have to worry. Wait, actually, do I have the Holy Spirit inside me? Have I been baptized by the Spirit? You don't have to worry about that because Paul actually explains more in 1 Corinthians 12. He says, actually, the fact that you can say Jesus is Lord, the fact that you can utter those three words proves that the Holy Spirit is inside you. The fact that you're aware of your sin, that you're aware of what righteousness is, John chapter 16, verse 8, is what is the Holy Spirit revealing that to you.

But what he's talking to these guys about, this very specific group about is, hey, I think you don't really understand the gift of grace. I don't think you really understand. You know that you have to turn away from this life, but actually you don't know who you're following.

You just know that you shouldn't be there. And so he says, actually, what you do need to do is follow. And he says this is verse four, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus.

[16:44] And then verse five, on hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. So what he's saying there is, okay, you understood the first part, but maybe you missed the part

where John says, hey, I can only baptize with water, but there's one coming after me who is going to baptize in the spirit and you have to follow him.

So he's saying, you must know about Jesus. You have to know about Jesus because actually not only do you need to repent of your sins, you then need to know where you get forgiveness from. It's not free.

It's free for you, but because someone paid a price. And so you need to understand that because if you don't understand that, you don't understand grace. You need to understand that actually you're forgiven. You're not dead anymore, but you're alive because someone died for you.

And now that person lives. It's this concept of grace. Sometimes I wonder, actually I'm worried when I walk into a church setting, I wonder how many of us here truly grasp the concept of grace, that the Holy Spirit lives inside us, that Jesus sacrificed his life for us, but now he lives inside us.

To understand that actually we don't deserve to be here. We are far worse than we imagined, but far more loved than we ever dare dream, is what Tim Keller says. And that's what Paul is trying to confront here.

[17:55] And the moment he talks to them about that, boom, they receive the Holy Spirit. And then they start speaking in tongues. Remember, this group has never heard of the Holy Spirit before. Now, it doesn't really matter which realm of Christianity you're from.

One that we all have to agree on is the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead. It is part of the Trinity. But I know, as we joke, there are some churches that don't.

They have the Holy Father, Holy Son, and then they have the Holy Bible, and they replaced the Holy Spirit. But the truth is, the Holy Spirit is so alive and well and active. This whole book is inspired by him.

All the events of Acts are done by him. But it gets controversial because what happens here and what we see here is that the moment he prays for them and when he laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

And this is the part that divides the church because they're like, wait, does the Holy Spirit still do that? Or was it only in this time? And actually, let me tell you one thing. This isn't the key theme.

[18:58] This isn't the main reason why Luke writes this here. The focus of the book of Luke and Acts is not to talk about tongues. And yet actually, just because we are who we are, we are humans, we sometimes chase after those extraordinary things.

Some people downplay them. Some people discourage them. Some people dismiss them. Some people try to duplicate them. But I want to say, that's not the topic of today's message, but the point is, we just hunger for God.

We just ask him to come. And actually, whatever experiences come our way, whatever he decides to give to us, he gives to us. We just have to approach with humility. We just have to approach with openness.

And so, what happens then is, they receive, and then he moves on, and then he starts teaching.

But again, some people don't like it. Maybe some of you don't like my teaching here. And so, some people don't like it, and so he has to move to another place to keep teaching.

And he ends up teaching there for two years, which is actually the longest place that he's been in.

And so you see, Ephesus is built on that foundation. And then, something really funny happens.

[20:04] As he's teaching, what happens is that he starts doing miracles. And you see here, verse 11, and God was, actually, let me just re-correct myself. Because I just said, Paul did miracles, but that's not the case.

That's not what scripture says. Scripture says, and God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. So the point where even his handkerchief was filled with power. Can you imagine the hype that was building around that time?

Well, actually, you may have been a part of the church circles, but definitely you will know someone who's ill, and who's unwell, and who's sick. And then you start hearing something. Hey, have you heard about that guy who's hanging out in the hall of Tyrannus?

He can heal people. Hey, you've had that eczema for a very long time. You should go. You should go touch him. And maybe not him, just touch a part of him.

Or maybe even just a cloth or a towel. Maybe that power will be the thing that heals you. Hey, what about that cancer? Why don't we, why don't we take them? Can you imagine the hype of that that was starting to build?

[21:06] People were starting to hear about the miracles that were happening, and they couldn't, they couldn't resist going to find out, can this person really heal? And it's of that time where there's another group of people who were in the similar kind of work, and they were there, thank you, Janice, for trying to read that, itinerant Jewish exorcists.

Let's just, because it's a mouthful, let's just call them the Ghostbusters. Okay? So these were a group of guys that would go around invoking all the names of all the different gods to try and heal people. And guess what?

It worked. Why? Because the world we live in is a supernatural world. There is a spirit realm that we cannot see. Whether you're a follower of Christ, a believer in God or not, you will, you'll have to acknowledge and admit there's something beyond what we can see here.

You have to, because there's oxygen in this room and you can't see it. And we all know there's oxygen in this room. But beyond that, there's also a spiritual realm. And of course, the enemy is a work, and the enemy is actually powerful.

So therefore, these Ghostbusters were actually invoking all the different names and actually causing healings to happen. And so what do they do? They hear about this Paul, and they hear about this name Jesus, and they say, well, why don't we add him to our catalog?

[22:14] Maybe Jesus is the most powerful Pokemon we can invoke. Let's go and catch him, and then let's use him, is what they're doing. If you think back in Acts 17, when Paul walks through Athens, he sees this shrine for an unknown God.

Why is that unknown God there? It's because they worshiped so many gods, but they were very worried that they would offend and miss out some gods. So they would just put one, there's all these gods, fertility, wealth, and prosperity, but there's one God called the God unknown God. Why? Just in case. Just in case, because what we do not want to do, we do not want to offend the God that we did not name. So let's just call it the unknown God. It's really ironic because they create these gods, they try to worship these gods, but what they're actually really trying to do is control these gods.

Can you imagine a God that you control that will bless you with fertility, prosperity, and all these things? What kind of God is that? And so what they're trying to do here is they hear about this Jesus. So they said, this name of Jesus sounds powerful.

So let's try it. So the sons of Sceva, seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this, but the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?

[23:27] I mean, that would have just been a terrifying encounter to have. And then, 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.

I don't know if you've ever been in a fight before, but if you enter into a fight and you come out naked, it didn't win well for you. It was, it was not a good experience.

And so it would have been a hilarious scene to these seven guys try to invoke and conjure up the name of Jesus, end up in a fist fight with one person and they all walk out of there naked.

Fascinatingly, and this became known to all the residents that these seven guys got into a fight and lost their underwear and they walked out.

Well, at least the imagery that I have, they were completely naked and wounded. And you would have thought people would be terrified and in some ways they were, but then response is actually quite a natural one.

And fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. It means worshipped and held in high regard and honoured. So because of that incident, people were like, did you see that?

[24:43] Did you see that those seven guys just get beat up? Those seven ghostbusters get beat up by that ghost? Maybe Jesus is the only one. But just a word about those seven guys.

I wonder whether you and I are sometimes those seven guys where we try and conjure up the name of Jesus and the power of Jesus so we can get the blessings from Jesus, but we don't actually know Jesus at all. Imagine if we, in our pursuits for the things of this world, and we keep going to God and asking for these things and actually God says, I don't actually know you.

How dangerous is that? Do we sometimes do that? What are these guys doing? What are these ghostbusters even trying to do? They're trying to make money. They're trying to gain a name for themselves. If you strip it down, isn't that what we're trying to do half the time?

Trying to invoke the name of Jesus without the relationship of Jesus. I'm reminded of the book of Mark. There's this scene in Mark chapter nine, the transfiguration. Jesus takes his three guys up into a mountain and they see this just incredible scene.

Elijah and Moses show up and Peter's like, let's stay here forever, but they can't. So they have to go back down the mountain. And when they go down the mountain, there is chaos. There is absolute chaos. Why?

[25 : 59] Because there's this boy with an evil spirit inside them. And the other disciples, the ones who were left behind and all the other followers of Jesus were trying to cast out this demon, but they couldn't do it. This boy kept getting seizures. And then Jesus stops them when he comes and of course he casts out.

And then he says this, what does he say? He says, this kind can only be cast out by prayer. What does he mean? He says, this kind of, you can only exercise any kind of power on behalf of me if you actually know me, if you have a connection with me, if you're able to speak to me yourself. If you and I have a connection, that's when you have the power. You can't invoke my name and not know me at all. You can't invoke my name for selfish gain. My name is that powerful, but only in connection and in relationship with you.

I wonder whether when we go into our pursuits, you know, this all sounds quite extreme. It sounds like demons and it sounds like exorcists, but often we approach life in a very similar way. Jesus, can you give me that job?

Jesus, can you give me that girl? Jesus, can you give me what I want? And Jesus is like, but you don't actually want connection with me. Relationship with me is the most important thing.

[27 : 14] Even when the crazy things happen that we do for God, it happened with the disciples. They went out and they actually ended up casting out demons. They ended up doing all these miracles and they go back to Jesus and they're so excited.

They're so hyped up. They said, do you know what we did? We did this. We healed that person. And then Jesus says, don't rejoice because you could do those things. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven, in my heart, that you have a connection with me.

That's what he's trying to confront here. That is, in some ways, the irony that they tried to do this. It didn't work. They left the fight naked, but yet the name of Jesus was extolled.

And something, again, this story just keeps going. And verse 18, and also many of those who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those books, those who had practiced magic arts, brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

So the other people, not the seven sons, they look and they see, okay, there's something special about this Jesus. We should follow him and only him. No one else. So they come and they bring all their books and they burn all their books and they say, we're not going to follow these other gods.

[28 : 25] We're not going to try and invoke all these other names. We're only going to go with the name of Jesus. We have found the one, the only one. And they go and burn all their books. And it says here, they burn all their books and they counted the value of them and found it and came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

In modern day terms, that's 35,000 US dollars worth of books. Textbooks of the defense against the dark arts. They threw them all.

They burned them all. That's a lot of money. Of course, I don't know if you have a book like that at home on your shelf, but maybe you do have some books on self-help.

Maybe you do have different books that you have read, investment gurus to help you make money quick. Maybe there are other things that you are relying on.

Maybe there are Instagram accounts that you are following, thinking, okay, I will follow Jesus, but I also need this guy's help. I do believe that Jesus provides for me, but I better go and do this in order, otherwise I won't get what I need.

[29 : 32] And yet these people, the beginning of this church happened at a bonfire where they each came and took all the books that they'd relied on and they burned them.

And the value of them, 35,000 US dollars worth of books and magical things because they saw the power of Jesus.

Jesus is either Lord of all or not at all. Imagine that kind of community. Imagine if you and I all came here and had to sacrifice an incredible amount to be here.

Because if I'm honest with you, we didn't have to sacrifice that much to sit here. There is no danger that we're in other than the danger of falling asleep. There is no danger imminent here.

There are no authorities outside. This did not cost us anything unless you came from Kowloon and you had to pay for the harbor transport. Yeah, it's a real thing. It's a very real thing. But when there's no cost that we've paid, I wonder how much it's worth to us.

[30:45] When there's no cost that we've paid to follow Jesus, I wonder how much Jesus is actually worth to us. What's your magic that you've been relying on?

What's the thing that you've been holding on to? What's the thing where you say, Jesus, you can be Lord but only of these parts because I have to look after these parts? I don't think that's how this church was started.

Do we hold on to those things? And this happens the most during Chinese New Year, I think. It's exposed when we sit around the table with our friends and family and the question that I asked myself was, how am I going to do this?

How am I going to bring up my faith to my family members? How am I going to be different to them? Not just for different sake, but if I really believe what I truly believe, that actually this is the path that leads to life and this is the path that leads to death, how do I share with them that?

How do I tell them that? How did you do it? Do we pray for our families that they would overcome the idols of family, fortune, face, and fears?

[32:01] Do we pray for ourselves that we can be a light when we head into those spaces? Not to judge those spaces. Remember, the gospel is that we are also in that space but then God came to find us.

He came to save us. He came to preach peace to us. Do we recognize our need for a savior and do we recognize their need for a savior? Christianity continues to grow and continues to confront culture.

So after that happens, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Verse 21, now after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem and then afterwards he must go to Rome.

Why? Because every city he goes to, he sees the fingerprints of Rome. He sees that Rome is the place that you have to hit. This is why I think you are in Hong Kong. And this is why I am in Hong Kong.

Because when you reach a city, you can reach a culture. When Jesus says, go and make disciples of all nations, well how good and how beautiful is it that all the nations gather into the cities?

[32:59] And it's when you can move the city, that's when you can move the culture. And everything that we need to reach the city is in the city so long as we are open to it, so long as we are obedient to it.

And that's why Paul is saying, I must go to Rome. I must tackle, Christianity must confront the head of this beast. And so he said, that's exactly what he says there. But afterwards, in Ephesus, something else happens.

There's a guy called Demetrius, wealthy man, businessman, okay? Silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis. Now Artemis is the god of Ephesus, is the local god of Ephesus, and she had this incredible temple, four times the size of the Parthenon, bigger than a football field.

People would use it as a bank and store their riches in this temple. It was the centerpiece of the whole city of Ephesus. And so this guy makes his living, got rich by building little statues of Artemis, and saying, hey, we're going to sell these, and everyone put them in their houses, and he would make a lot of money for them.

Of course, when Paul comes, and even his handkerchief has more power than these seven Ghostbusters, suddenly people start buying those statues, and they start just following Jesus. And that gets Demetrius upset.

[34:10] He actually riles up a whole group. These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades, and he says, men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. We got rich by this. This is our livelihood.

I am a third generation silversmith because of this. We need this to survive. Yet Paul, yet Jesus, is ruining that, and you see in here that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul, one guy, God uses as the chosen instrument to spread throughout all of Asia, the good news of Jesus.

But in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people saying that God's made with hands are not God's. Just freeze there for a second, just that line, that God's made with hands are not God's.

Well, well, obviously. When we're talking about the Holy Spirit, when we're talking about God Almighty, and then when we're trying to reduce him to a little statue that we can make with our own hands, or with our own little minds, we can understand what's happening.

I think that's where we go wrong. So even when we're talking about things of the spiritual realm, like tongues, like prophecy, sometimes I just approach all of this with humility going, this is what I can see in the Bible.

[35 : 23] This is what I can see sometimes in experiences out there, but I don't fully know, and anyone who says they fully, truly know, I don't know if we should believe them. Because we're dealing with this God that is so much bigger than us.

And I've shared this example before, if you've been to my house, you will meet an incredibly vicious, intimidating canine called Walter. Okay? He's about this size.

He's a toy poodle. Never did I ever dream that I would grow up and own a toy poodle, but it is what it is. It is Hong Kong. Imagine when we left the house this morning, and Walter then tries to explain to some of his other canine friends as he's outside going for a poop, guys, I've got the humans down.

I know exactly what they do. I know exactly how they're feeling. I know their culture. I know the way they think. I know what universities are. Like, no, because he's a dog.

He doesn't understand. Like, if him and his dogmates sat together and said, hey, let's just share everything we know about humans, they would not be able to tell you much at all.

[36 : 36] Dogs do not understand humans. Why do we humans think we can make gods with our own hands? Impossible. And so that line, Demetrius, my boy Demetrius here, and I hope he reflects on this, is the irony in that sentence.

Do you hear about this, Paul? He said the gods that we made with our own hands aren't gods at all. And again, it sounds stupid, but then we look at our lives. We look at the things that we hold on to, the brand names that we pursue, the careers that we obsess over, and we wonder, should we be surprised at all when they don't really satisfy us, when they don't truly deliver us?

How often are we actually relying on gods that we make with our own hands? And anyway, Demetrius is trying to cause a riot, and he actually succeeds, and he's saying, hey, we're losing money from this.

This guy, we need to get rid of this guy, otherwise I've got a whole pile of statues in the warehouse that won't move, and I've got kids to pay for. And then he also takes on a bit of a higher noble ground, and he says, 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.

The temple of Artemis is considered one of the seven wonders of the world. He's saying, hey, if we don't get rid of this Paul, Artemis will lose her magnificence, to which I would say, well, why does Artemis need us to defend her magnificence?

[38 : 21] Is she that weak that she needs us to build statues for her to sell them so that she would be glorified? Now, people did travel from all over the world to Ephesus to worship Artemis, who was actually mixed in with a Roman god called Diana, which would grant fertility.

But again, so he's basically saying, hey, this is about me, but it's also about our great city and our great culture, which tells me something else. Religion. Here is practiced publicly and it is also never neutral.

You walk into our streets of Hong Kong and you will see that there is a religion that is not practiced privately. It is out there public. The worship of money is one of the biggest ones. And you can see it. You walk through any mall, any MTR, and you'll see the shrines that are up where it will show you what we worship. And it is never done in private and it's always in public and it is never neutral.

So when we walk through these places, when we walk through these cities, let's not think that this is a neutral ground. Let's remember that this is actually a battleground. That there are lives, there are souls at stake here.

[39 : 30] And there is only one God that is alive. Jesus is either Lord of all or not at all. And it just shows you how fickle and stupid humans are.

Verse 28, and when they heard this, they were enraged and were crying out, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. They shouted this for two hours. And they were confused.

And again, this feels extreme and if we were in that spot, it would have felt pretty intense. But if you look around, think about your family gatherings, think about my family gathering, think about the city that we're in, the culture that we're in.

Aren't we really just as confused? Aren't we really just as fearful? Aren't we really just as selfish? And so Demetrius tries to rile up the crowd, basically trying to drive Paul out.

Now, later, and we won't focus too much on this, there's a town clerk called Alexander who actually comes and calms down the whole setting and says, well, this isn't the way that you do this. If you want to get rid of him, then do it through the proper way is basically what he's saying.

[40 : 34] And so actually, the crowd calms down, and then they leave. But I think it leaves us with the same question. Is Jesus the Lord of all of our lives, or is he only Lord of parts?

Because if he's the Lord of parts, then he's actually not at all. That's the difference. the challenge that we have today is can we fight actively against these other little gods, these books that we rely on, this trade that we rely on?

I want to finish by sharing with you, we just painted a picture of the beginning of Ephesus, the church of Ephesus, the gathering at Ephesus. Paul writes them a lot, and he loves this church. Actually, in Ephesians, if you just go to Ephesians now, we'll just flick through a little bit, just do a mini Bible study, because actually, it will suddenly, you'll basically color in this church for us. Ephesians, the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 15. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 15. So, Paul visits Ephesus, this is what we see in Acts chapter 19, and now he writes to the church in Ephesus from prison.

[41 : 56] And this is many years later, and this is what he says. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love toward all the saints. Later, and that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

He's saying, I've heard of your faith, I've heard of your love, I remember, I personally remember when you burned all those books, I personally remember when you received the gift of the Holy Spirit and you encountered and experienced his love.

The only way we even experience his love, as Romans 5, 5 points out to us, is because God pours out his love onto us through his Holy Spirit. So Paul's saying, can you see now as we've read the events of Acts chapter 19, you read what he's saying here and suddenly it adds more context, it adds more color.

Guys, I remember your faith and I remember your love. I remember you know how to discern against the spirits. You know how to discern what is right and wrong because you saw those seven guys run out but naked and you saw the power of Jesus and I remember that and I do not cease to give thanks for that and the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

[43 : 22] I remember the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe. I remember when you saw and you witnessed the power of Jesus firsthand. I remember when you were willing to sacrifice 35,000 US dollars worth of self-help books for this Jesus and now you have riches of his glorious inheritance.

I remember all that. Stay strong is what he's saying. And that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

Verse 21 far above all rule and authority in power and dominion. Jesus is Lord of all or not at all. You guys chose Jesus in the beginning.

Unfortunately, the town of Ephesus, this great town, actually ends up gone. Who's been to Ephesus by the way? There we go. What is Ephesus?

What does it look like, Flo? Flo? No. Agnes? Ruins. A pile of rocks with a temple that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world is now a pile of rocks.

[44 : 36] Do you know why? Do you remember why? Did your tall guy tell you why? Does anyone remember? The town of Ephesus was so powerful because it was by a river.

It was by the mouth of a river and so that's where all the sea and all the imports and exports would come in. But eventually something happened which was interesting which was called silt. Anyone remember anything from geography lessons?

No, neither do I. Let me read it to you. Silt is basically a substance that is like rock and mineral particles all together but smaller than sand.

What happened over time was silt started building up in the river bed at the mouth of Ephesus. And what happened then was the water started to get drained out. What happened after that is that the boats could not go in.

So it no longer was the sea hub. And so then business started to drain. It started to stop. And slowly but surely that great town, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, is now a pile of rocks.

[45:46] So Paul writes to the Ephesians but there's someone even more special who writes to the church in Ephesus and that is in the book of Revelation. This is where we'll finish so feel free to go there.

I won't have you go anywhere else. Revelation chapter 2. Jesus himself writes a letter to this church. It's the first church that he writes to and he says this. And again, once you've understood Acts 19 and you know the story, these words just mean so much more.

He writes to the church in Ephesus and he says, I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance and how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not.

Remember, reference, sons of Sceva and are not and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary.

You've done well. You know the truth. You've been going to Bible studies. Your head is filled with Bible knowledge. You have endured patiently and yet it's not enough.

[46:48] Why? But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. That same love when the Holy Spirit poured out on you and you felt the love of God.

That same love of Jesus that caused you to burn all those books. That same love is now God. remember therefore from where you have fallen.

Remember those times. Remember those times when there was a riot and yet you still stood firm. You still decided that Jesus is the only way. Repent and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand. I will close your church down. If you don't go back to that first heart, if you don't go back to why this started in the first place, then there's no point for you to exist, is what he's saying.

And of course, sadly, the church of Ephesus is no more. The city of Ephesus is no more. But the lessons that we can learn here are the same.

[48:00] If we go back and trace back to Acts 19 and see the works that they did at first, see that the heart that they had at first, the first love that they had at first, and we continue every day to take our books, take our self-help books, take the things that we rely on, take our little statues, and take them to the fire to burn, and remember the love that we had at first, and lift up the name of Jesus, and only the name of Jesus, and only then will he allow us to remain.

I wonder whether there is, if you've been a believer for a long, long time, I wonder whether there is silt in our own hearts, layers of sediment that have built over time because of things that we've let into our lives, idols that we've let into our lives, little statues that we rely on, books and IG accounts that we follow.

Do we recognize that our hearts are compromised? Do we recognize that our hearts are not pure? And it's in that moment I want you to stop, because you might go, well, then how must I do better? What must I do? Should I go and attend another Bible study? That's not what he's saying. He says, go back to your first love. Go back to that moment where the Holy Spirit filled you and you were overwhelmed.

You were given the strength to comprehend the magnitude of the love that I have for you. When I dwelled in your hearts through your faith, when you were willingly giving up all the things of this world to follow me, go back to that moment.

[49:38] Understand again what grace is. Be filled again by my Holy Spirit. Trust me, I'm the only one who will provide for you. If you try and fight this world, if you try and fight and invoke my name without connection with me, you will lose all your clothes.

But if you trust me, I will give you everything that you ever needed. Why? Because I gave my life for you, is what Jesus says. you can have your first love for me because I first loved you.

I came to find you when you were dead, when you were lost, when you were blind. I came to give my life for you. Would you trust me and allow my Holy Spirit to live inside you now?

So you would live in a different way. So you would allow me to confront the idols in your heart, but not to destroy you, but to complete you. Because you and I both know those little statues don't work.

That is what he's saying to us. That is what he was saying to the church in Ephesus. That is what he's saying to the church in Hong Kong. Do we truly believe in the name of Jesus?

[50:58] You have a choice. You can mock, you can ask more, or you can believe that he is the name above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

Let us walk out of here as people who bear his name, who glorify his name, who are just hungry and thirsty for him and his kingdom to come in this world, to confront every part of this world that isn't of him.

Not just because he's a domineering tyrant, but because he is gracious and compassionate, and where his spirit is, there is freedom. And don't we just all want freedom for the people around us, for the city that we live in?

Let's spend a moment now just to respond as I invite Kelly and the team to come up. Maybe if you join me just and just to bow our heads and close our eyes and ask for the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Jesus, we recognize that you are either Lord of all or not at all. And today here as a family, as a church, we recognize your authority, your power, your dominion, but even more so your grace, your compassion.

[52:37] And so we repent. But we don't just stay there.

By your spirit, we also believe. and by your power we follow. Would you continue to confront the idols of our hearts?

Thank you that you often do it in such gentleness and humility. often those things that we hold on to are just so destructive to us.

Those things that we do in secret, those things that we think in secret are so destructive to us. But I know, but we know the gentleness of the Father comes and approaches and seeks to take those things away.

Forgive us, Lord. Lord. Lord. Lord. Lord.

[54:30] Lord. And so we come to you with our fears of failure, with our anxieties for the future, with our judgment against others, with our pursuit of pleasure.

and we ask that by the name and the power of Jesus, we will be set free.

We remember. We repent. And we go back to our first love. for those of you who are here at pre-service prayer, we work through the Lord's prayer.

And just personally, I've been meditating on that first line, our Father, hallowed be your name.

Already, we're on our feet, we're on our knees when we pray that prayer.

We're praying that the Father's name would be hallowed. We're praying that Jesus' name would be hallowed in our lives. And so, and just remind it that we're beginning a season of Lent as well. And it's a season of re-consecrating ourselves to the Lord in fresh and new ways, praying that we would do that as a church and as a community as we go from here with fresh reverence for his name to live more, live lives that reflect him.

[56:09] So let's pray, church, as we close. God, we revere your name and we thank you that you walk with us step by step in this life that you've created us in your image, that you are restoring us to your image.

And we pray that in this season, in this new year, and in our lead up to Easter, that you would, that Christ would dwell in our hearts richly and that for each person here that you would guide us as to what it means to look more like our Savior day by day to be renewed into his image until we enter your glory again.

Thank you that we can do that together. Would your name be hallowed in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.