

Don't Trifle with the Spiritual Realm (Acts 19:11-20)

Prepared and preached by Pastor Steve Rhodes for and at Bethel Friends Church in Poland, OH on Sunday, October 30, 2022

The first Christian college I attended was Indiana Wesleyan University. One of the classes that I enrolled in was Old Testament Survey. I loved that class. Professor Colter was a great teacher. In one class he shared a story about spiritual warfare. I don't remember how it came up or how it related to our passage for the day, but I do remember the story.

Professor Colter was an Old Testament professor, but he was also a pastor in a local church. One morning he received a call. One of his members said, "Pastor, can you come over something happened with my son last night." Professor Colter left to her house, and he invited a retired pastor to come along with him. The retired pastor was a member of his church. They got to the house and spoke with a seventeen-year-old young man. Professor Colter asked the young man to explain what happened. The young man explained that the night before his mother was at work and he and some friends tried to raise a demonic spirit. Professor Colter asked what happened. The young man proceeded to explain that nothing happened at the time, but later he woke up and there was some type of demonic presence at the end of his bed. The demonic presence told him to rape his girlfriend, kill her and cut her up. Professor Colter then asked the young man, "What did you do?" The young man said at that time he pulled the covers over his head. So, now it is the next day and there they are. Professor Colter, and the retired pastor with him, talked with the young man longer and then said, "We want to pray over you." The young man said, "okay." Then professor Colter said, "You have to get on your knees." At that, the young man's voice changed deeper as he said, "Why do I have to get on my knees?" Professor Colter explained that it is submission to Christ, but we'll pray over you anyways. They started praying and when they mentioned Jesus, the young man fell on his knees. The following Sunday, after worship, the church elders prayed over him, and he accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. They then went to his house, and they found all kinds of stuff having to do with the occult in his room. They took all that stuff and had a huge bonfire in the young man's backyard. He had gotten involved in the occult when he was twelve years old.

Today, we look at a passage dealing with spiritual warfare. I have been preaching on difficult times. Today's message is not a topic that you submitted. Today's passage is about spiritual warfare. I am preaching this message on this date because of Halloween. I am sickened by the evil in our world, and I am more

sickened by the Christian embrace of the evil. Christians are entertained by things that we should not be involved in. When I was in high school my pastor was driving a missionary around the area. It was the season of Halloween. The missionary noticed all the decorations and he commented with something like the following, “In the country in which I serve, Christians would not be involved in this. When they are saved, they leave this stuff behind.” Now, a disclaimer. I did not grow up in a church-going family, but even in second grade I remember breathing a sigh of relief when Halloween was over. Still, I enjoyed the Disney Ichabod Crane in which Bing Crosby sang the song. Yet even that played tricks on my imagination. I do not think Christians should toy with Ouija boards, as I did as a child. I do not think we should watch Dracula movies, as I did as a child. I do not think Christians should watch horror movies. I do not think Christians should go to haunted houses. Now, the disclaimer, I think that there is nothing wrong with mystery. I think that there is nothing wrong with sci-fi. But we do not want to venture into the dark spiritual realm.

Paul is in Ephesus, and he encounters false religions. Now, let's look at this passage and see that spiritual warfare was real then and it is now as well.

My theme is: Don't Trifle with the Spiritual Realm

Let's read the passage:

Acts 19:11–20 (ESV)

### **The Sons of Sceva**

*<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.*

- I. First, let's look at what leads up to the spiritual warfare event.
  - a. Notice in verse 11 the passage talks about all that has been going on. Many people have been healed and Paul has done miraculous things.
  - b. Verse 12 tells us how far things have gotten. Now, they take handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul and if they touch other people they are healed. Also, the evil spirit would leave the person. So, this verse recognizes that this had to do with physical healing as well as demonic possession.
  - c. Before we move on, understand that this is not a type of witchcraft. There are two other occasions in the Scriptures where something like this occurred. One is with Peter in Acts 5:15 the people wanted his shadow to pass before them.
  - d. Another occurrence of something like this is in Luke 8:44 when a woman with an issue of blood came and touched the edge of Jesus' cloak to be healed.
  - e. All these incidences bring glory to God and not to man.
  - f. We'll see that as the narrative goes on.
  - g. By the way, one thought is that Luke must have really enjoyed writing this one. This is filled with humor in every way.
  - h. So, that is what is going on to lead up to this.
  - i. They are in Ephesus and Ephesus is full of witchcraft.
  - j. One writes: Ephesus was reputed as a center for magic. The famous statue of Artemis, the centerpiece of her temple, was noted for the mysterious terms engraved on the crown, girdle, and feet of the image. Referred to as the "Ephesian scripts," this magical gibberish was considered to have great power. It was not by accident that Paul's encounter with magic took place in Ephesus, nor is it a surprise that his converts there had been involved in such practices. Magic was part of Ephesian culture. Nor should one question the integrity of these Ephesian Christians who only now openly forsook such ways. Salvation involves a process of growth, of increasing sanctification. And after all, the Ephesian spells were not that remote from the horoscopes and board games that supposedly communicate telepathic messages with which many Christians dabble in our own day.
- II. Now, in the next few verses we have imposters.
  - a. Jewish people are faking and impersonating Paul.

- b. From readings it was common back then to have exorcists who went around trying to make a name and money for themselves. This case is no different. These people were fakes, they were imposters. They were not real.
- c. It is a big deal to fake who are you, right?
- d. My dad was a police officer before I was born. But he got to keep the uniform changing careers. My brother and I used to try to get him to put it on. My dad used to tell us that it was a big deal to impersonate a police officer and you cannot do that.
- e. Now, if it is a big deal to impersonate a police officer, what about impersonating one of Jesus' handpicked apostles? One would think that is a big deal.
- f. This honestly is a big deal.
- g. More than one set of men are doing this, but the Bible gives us one example.

III. In verses 14-16 we have the case study.

- a. Seven sons of Sceva: So, Sceva is their dad, and he is apparently a Jewish High Priest. There was a Jewish historian named Josephus and he listed all the High priest, and this guy is not one of them. But it could be that he is a pagan high priest. It could be that he was an illegitimate high priest, it could also be that he was from the high priest family. So, there are different options here.
- b. Think about this though, the High Priest is the only one to enter the Holy of Holies. Think about that with what happens. But to his credit he may not have known what his children were doing.
- c. With him being a high priest, the people might have thought there was a special type of power within him.
- d. So, his sons impersonate Paul and try to cast out demons in his name.
- e. The demons talk through the man they possessed. Then the man becomes supernaturally strong, and the demon says, "Jesus I know, Paul I am familiar with, you I don't know." The demon beats them all up and sends them on the street naked.
- f. Now, the translation might have missed something. The Bible says that the demon beat them all up which is all seven sons. However, that could also be translated "two." So, there could have been two or seven.
- g. They are then thrown out on the street naked. Which could mean with torn clothes.

- h. I remember being on a mission trip to a Native American Reservation when I heard about young adults who would get beat up because of what they got into. They were not beat up by friends but demons.
- IV. So, that is what is happening here.
- a. Now, people see this. The word spreads.
  - b. First in verse 17, the Bible says that Jews and Greeks see this. Then it says, “The name of the Lord was magnified.” That is what we are here for.
  - c. So, now many people are saved.
  - d. Verse 18 says of those who believed they now came out and confessed.
  - e. What this really means is that they got rid of their occult stuff.
  - f. See the next verse. They take them out on the street and burn them. They have a big bonfire getting rid of stuff.
  - g. Verse 20, the Word of God spreads.
- V. What do we do when we are saved or set free?
- a. Do you get rid of stuff? Do you put the past behind you?
  - b. Notice that spiritual warfare is real.
  - c. I shared the story in the beginning of the message. I have not experienced that, but I have been called to pray through houses and talk things through with people.
  - d. Ephesians 6:12: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*
  - e. You may ask about exorcism: I have talked with people who have taken part or led exorcisms. I believe they are real and what that means is to pray over someone to remove a demon.
  - f. In reality, we don't want people to get that far, do we? No, that young man I shared about, he was in the occult for five years. Don't mess with this, you are over your head.
  - g. ***This Present Darkness*** is a book that is fiction about spiritual warfare.
  - h. Now, who can exorcise a demon: I believe one must be pursuing God and not alone. There is no rite of exorcism. We must pray and seek God and grow spiritually and then you are ready to be used of God. Don't go in alone.
  - i. One writes:
  - j. Two lessons emerge from the story. For one, Christianity has nothing to do with magic. The name of Jesus is no magical incantation. The power of Jesus drives out the demonic, and his Spirit only works

through those who, like Paul, confess him and are committed to him. Second, the demon did confess the power of Jesus over him, “Jesus I know.” Compare Jas 2:19, “Even the demons believe and shudder.” The people of Ephesus recognized this and extolled the powerful name of Jesus as a result (v. 17). What was true for them is still true. In the name of Jesus is all the power needed to drive out the demonic forces in every age.

**Close:**

I remember talking with a professor in college. He was a missionary to Nepal and I asked him about spiritual warfare. He said in Nepal they have names for the demons.

What you need to know: As a Christ follower you have Jesus within you. You are possessed by God! Also, Jesus said we are not alone (Matthew 28:20). Lastly, put on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-12).

Pray