

The test of any ministry is what happens through the people to whom we minister. Luke tells us that as a result of Paul’s proclamation of the kingdom of God, **all** who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, both Jews and Greeks. That’s quite an accolade for a short time of teaching in the synagogue and two years of daily meetings in the lecture hall of the philosopher Tyrannus. Research reveals that Paul probably was given use of the hall when it was not being used by the philosopher, the hours of 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. These are the hours of rest when all work in the city stopped—five hours a day when most people would be free to leisurely stop and listen. These few hours each day for two years produced a movement that reached the entire province of Asia Minor!

We can be sure that Paul was disappointed when he was put out of the synagogue once again because of the hardness of the hearts of the Jews. But the closed door again led to an open door of opportunity. The hall of Tyrannus was a perfectly suited, natural place to reach the inquiring Greeks who would be interested in a new philosophy. But Paul gave them more than a new set of ideas. He preached Christ and the kingdom of God. Inherent in the proclamation of the kingdom was the Lord’s rule over all of life. The theme of the kingdom of God, coupled with the lordship of Christ, produces an authentic faith in those who respond. It makes them aware that they have an obligation to claim the city, the country and the world for the true King—Jesus.

The joy of these new converts must have been contagious. Wherever they went they told about what had happened to them. Paul could not have reached the whole province in two years even if he had walked the length and breadth of the area talking to everyone he met. Instead he preached daily, and those who were won to Christ multiplied his ministry. The people who became followers of Jesus did the rest. They could not stop talking about what had happened to them. **All** of Asia Minor heard about Christ through them. The successful communicator can judge his or her effectiveness not only in what happens **to** those who listen, but **through** them in reproducing their faith in others. There is no greater joy than seeing the message multiplied and passed on.

Nor is there any limit to what can happen when we base our entire ministry on the power of the name of Jesus. The “name” carries with it the authority, power, and will of the person designated. When we minister, preach, pray, and confront the forces of evil in the name of Jesus, we are assured that he will be present to release the same wonders we witness in the Gospels during his incarnate ministry.

**Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was marked by many miracles done through the name of Jesus.** The power at work through the Apostle was so great that the Ephesians actually believed that the handkerchiefs and aprons he wore working at a trade would have his power. Superstition? Perhaps. But the Lord came near to meet people’s needs because of Paul’s clear preaching of the power of Jesus’ name. Paul’s sweatbands and artisan apron were not powerful in themselves. It was because people had heard the Apostle’s message and witnessed the Lord’s miracles through him they believed an article from him would be efficacious. The evil spirits could not resist the name of Jesus and the simple faith of those who trusted, however primitive their method was. The point is that the Holy Spirit was moving mightily in Ephesus, confronting the entrenched evil of the city. Through the power of his name God does miracles.

This shows us how the Lord takes people where they are. At this time there was a belief in the spiritual power of articles fashioned in the image of a god or blessed in its shrine. There were called *grammata*. The Lord blessed the prayers of people who held articles of Paul's clothing because he knew of the Apostle's faithfulness to point away from himself to the source of his power in the name of Jesus Christ.

But the demonstration of that kind of power often attracts counterfeiters, phonies. Itinerant Jewish exorcists roamed the world at the time claiming to rid people of evil spirits. Sadly, the profession had become a source of revenue for the exorcists. Superstitious Ephesians attracted many of these would-be liberators of possessed people. When they saw the miracles of Paul's ministry, they tried to emulate his power by using the name of Jesus. The seven sons of a priest named Sceva sought to use Jesus' name without personal faith in him. They tried to exorcise evil spirits by saying, *"In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches..."* It was to that secondhand pretense of power that the evil spirit responded, *"Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?"* Evil cannot cast out evil. The evil spirit recognized the self-serving exploitation engaged in by the sons of Sceva. Only a person in whom Jesus lives has the power to use his name in prayer and healing.

Confronting evil without the only name which is greater than evil, is dangerous. What happened to the sons of Sceva is evidence of that. A possessed man with whom they had tried to use their counterfeited formula for exorcism turned on them and beat them badly. They fled naked and wounded.

The exposure of the difference between magic and miracles had a profound impact on the entire city. It caused a moral reform. A creative awe and wonder came upon those who had believed in Christ. They *"came and openly confessed what they had done"* (v. 18). That's truly fascinating. Those who had become Christians now confessed their false dependence on magic. They brought their magic books, horoscopes, cult manuals, and occult literature and burned them in a public display of their total dependence on the name of Jesus. The clear preaching of the name brings confession, repentance, and a radical change of lifestyle.

Paul's method in Ephesus was to introduce people to Christ knowing that once he took up residence in a new believer, this reform would begin in them and continue throughout their lifetime. We can depend on the Lord to augment our communication with an outward sign of its source of power. The changed lives of the people we've introduced to him will alert others to their own need. We will be given a hearing not because of our learning or eloquence, but because of what has happened to people around us.

Lifestyle speaks as loudly as our words. A congregation may have the intent to do evangelism, but it's the quality of unconditional love in a congregation, expressed in tangible ministry toward visible problems found in a community, that make a difference. There is nothing more powerful than a local church that preaches and teaches the power of Christ and is also involved in a ministry to the poor, the troubled, and the disadvantaged.

Ephesus had its own brand of belief in magic. We have ours today. The magic of money dominates many of us today. When people receive Christ's Spirit, he confronts this "false god" in our lives. In the context of his love we are able to grapple with the kind of biblical giving that we talked about last week in 1 Corinthians 16. Money was released for the work of ministry through the generosity and compassion of those congregations, giving authenticity to the total life of those congregations.

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie said that this once happened in the life of a man who watched their television ministry and was attracted to Hollywood Presbyterian Church. Ogilvie says that “Through attending the worship services, he committed his life to Christ and received his Spirit. Eventually his love of money as the meaning of his life was brought into sharp focus. He began to grow as a believer and he started tithing his immense income. Over time, his giving won him the privilege of sharing his faith with other people. Not only has his giving made possible a great advance in the work of the church, it has also confronted others with their need to admit their false loyalty to money as their source of security” (*The Communicator’s Commentary, Vol. 5, Acts* © 1983, p. 281).

I said it once and I’ll say it again: **Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was marked by many miracles done through the name of Jesus.**

Preaching, teaching and healing in the powerful name of Jesus Christ produces results. When people are changed they experience the adventure of life in the kingdom of God. When people are healed they can band together to claim the power of the name of Jesus that changes people, families, households, places of work, communities and even the world, with his healing power. Amen.