

# A Spiritual Battle

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, folks, we good? Yep. Are we there? Acts 19, this is where we need to be today. Got to get the word open in front of us if we're going to see the impact of this passage we're making us this morning. So have Acts 19 open in front of us. There's a shout that comes from the back of our car at 10.45 every Sunday morning. And it comes at the precise moment that we're coming from Marchmont over here and we turn onto the links. The shout from the back of the car comes at the exact point where we hit the black ivy, if you know where that is over there. You want to hear the shout from the kids? Two words. Battle club!

Now does anybody know what I'm talking about? Put their hands up. A few of us. Okay, so what they're in their element about is that they look out the car window in the back and what they see happening on the links is the Historical Battle Reenactment Society doing their thing.

If you've never seen this on a Sunday morning, you certainly will see it now. Okay? So they're in their element because they look out and they see the Historical Battle Reenactment Club doing their thing. One of these little reminders in life, isn't it, that we live in Edinburgh and not in Glasgow. But there's a group of people there and they've got their linen tunics on.

They've chosen their sparring partner. They've got their helmet donned, sword pulled, shield is out. And battle's on. Battle's on. And here's why I love, and the Lord uses that every Sunday morning to remind me of two things in the Christian life. Here's number one. Number one is that we are caught up, all of us, not in a physical battle, but in a spiritual battle. The one that the Bible would tell us is raging in the unseen realms. That what we see is not all that there is going on in life.

Between the battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. We are in a spiritual battle. That's number one. And secondly, it gloriously reminds me of what it is to be a Christian.

[ 2 : 22 ] How often we need to repent of our small ideas of what it is to be Jesus's. And the miracle that it is that we're here on a Sunday morning. It reminds me that what happened to every single one of us.

When we became a Christian. That by very nature, we were caught up in and following the kingdom of darkness. We were following our own sinful desires. We were driven by our own ambitions. We were enslaved by our own passions. That was life without Jesus. But when the Holy Spirit took the message about the work of Jesus, his unjust, bloody death on the cross that paid for our sin in full. And the news of the resurrection that God raised Jesus from the dead, seated him in the position of power in the heavenly realms, and put our lives in him. When that message, when the Holy Spirit took it and applied it to our hearts, causing us to believe what was going on was the superior power of the light was penetrating and destroying the death hold that darkness had over every single one of us. Battles on. We've woken up a few times this week, haven't we?

And what have we seen? We found this over the last few weeks. Just woke up and you can't see five feet in front of you. Why? It's har. What do people say? It'll be gone by 10. Why? It's a lights up. Light shines in the har and the har's gone.

That's the image of this passage. That's what's going on in Ephesus. A city that's devastatingly drowning in the darkness. I think what Luke wants us to see is the superior power of the kingdom of light.

The king of light. As it dispels and does its thing over the darkness, right? So lonely planet guide to first century Ephesus, it's dominated by one place. The tour bus stops in one place. Edinburgh's got the castle. Paris has the Eiffel Tower. Pisa has its leaning tower. Ephesus has the temple of Artemis.

[ 4 : 38 ] She's the goddess of life and health and she's said to live in this huge pillared temple which dominates the city's skyline. This thing is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This is what Ephesus is all about. And it's not just how that the temple looks which draws people from all

over the place to come and see it. It's what the whole setup represents. So this temple represents making money. It represents dabbling in the occult. It represents the pursuit of pleasure. And this is what the people in Ephesus love. This is what the people in Ephesus chase. And if ever those things are under threat, this is what causes the people in Ephesus to come out swinging. So the chant that you can hear on the streets of Ephesus. We get it twice in our passage. Come with me. Verse 28 of chapter 19 and you get it again at verse 34. Hear the chant on the streets of Ephesus. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

They love her. They love her. So Paul goes into this city and we've traced it in the book of Acts. He goes into this city and preaches the gospel of the king of light to the people in this city who are caught up in the darkness and battles on. Battles on. And so whereas before all the people in this city were like dead fish, they were just going with the flow. Now all of a sudden what happens is the message of the gospel, the power of the gospel, the Holy Spirit takes it and penetrates people's hearts, causing them to see. All of a sudden what you get is salmon start appearing in the Ephesian river who listen, believe, repent and do what salmon do best. They start swimming upstream. And notice Luke tell us what did it. Two verses for us to see. And I know we're jumping around a little bit. We're covering a lot of ground this morning. Two verses for us to see. Verse 10 of chapter 19. What did it?

Luke says this went on for two years. That's a long time if you track it in the book of Acts. Two years so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia, right? So length and breadth there.

What did they hear? They heard the word of the Lord. And again verse 20 is the one on the screen. Luke says in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. So he wants us to be under no illusions. What was doing the work in Ephesus. So the Holy Spirit taking the message of the scriptures, penetrating people's souls, bringing a deep conviction of sin, exposing the darkness and the ugliness of the human heart and shining brightly on Christ and saying behold him.

And the darkness doesn't stand a chance. What this thing is doing is bringing radical and holistic change to people's lives in Ephesus. Battles on. And I love what they call these early believers.

[ 7 : 55 ] Love seeing it in preparation this week. Right? Check this out. Verse 19 of chapter 19. And again we get it at verse 23. Look what they called them. Come with me. Look what they called them.

About that time that arose a great disturbance about the way. That's what they called them. Not Christians. They called them the way. I love that. You know, let me get my geek on.

Luke uses this term the way five times in the book of Acts. Two of them are right here. I think that's telling us that there's something going on in Ephesus that's unmistakable.

The way. I presume that's an echo. These disciples are saying they're echoing the words of Jesus, right? Who said he is the way, the truth and the life. And I take it flowing from that. These way people are living a life in front of the watching world that declares loudly and unmissably that I'm not going the Ephesian way. I'm going Jesus' way.

And who got me thinking this week? And here's the challenge for us. Friends, would our friends say that of us? Or would they conclude, I think this is often the case in my life, that essentially I'm going the same way as them, albeit I'm dressed differently, I'm dressed in Christian clothes.

[ 9 : 26 ] In what ways would people see that we belong to a different way? You know, I had a friend Lisa at university. Before she came to university, thought Christianity was nonsense.

But she knew one girl at school, her best friend Katie. Katie was a Christian. The two of them went to university together. They share a flat. It's a three-bed flat. So my friend Fiona moves in. She's also a Christian.

And so whereas now Lisa knew one Christian, now she knows two Christians. And what happened is they brought their friends around to the flat. The circle kept on expanding. She kept meeting more and more Christians.

And she asked herself, all these people are going a different way to me. We're going a different way. Is there something in this? So she goes to a Christianity Explorer course with some of the people that she's met.

She repents. She believes. And welcome to the way. The battle's on. Do you see it? This is what did it.

[ 10 : 30 ] Flip it around. Luke wants us to see what it did. Summed up in that word, disturbed. I think. Do you see it? Disturbed.

So this is how the people of Ephesus are reacting to what's going on. Which shows you just the sheer volume of people who are becoming Christians here, doesn't it? What did it disturb? We'll rattle through these three areas really quickly.

Firstly, it disturbed the religious world. Okay, verse 1 of chapter 19. It disturbed the religious world, right? So Paul meets these disciples.

And yet he asks a few questions. And it becomes clear that they're not following Jesus. Do you see in the text? They are following John the Baptist. So presumably this is a message that they've picked up from Apollos during his time in Ephesus.

Verse 25 of chapter 18. This is what he was preaching before Priscilla and Aquila helped him fill in the gaps with his understanding.

[11:33] Right? What does it say? They explained to him the way of God more fully and about Jesus. Let me just say never underestimate the power of Priscilla and Aquila in your life.

People who come into your path and they say, do you know what? I love you enough to say, I'm just not quite sure you're right on that. Because you see how that enhanced Apollos' ministry here. Right? Never underestimate if the Lord is laying out in your heart. You hear something about, no, no, no. Listen, I want to help you understand the way of God more clearly. That's Priscilla and Aquila.

But you see John's message. John the Baptist in the Bible is the guy who's getting people ready for Jesus. He's the guy, he's the forerunner who comes just before Jesus.

His message is effectively get your house in order. Right? Change your ways. Get your thoughts and your acts together.

[12:27] Because one is coming who is mightier than me. And you need to be ready for him. But essentially John's message, if that's all you've heard, not only are you still waiting for Jesus, but life for you becomes all about what?

Your effort and your morals. But these guys know nothing of the grace and forgiveness that comes through Jesus and the power of the indwelling spirit of God that truly transforms a person.

And so do you see when they hear that, they believe and they're baptized and they speak in tongues and they prophesy. And I take it signifying here their powerful inclusion into the people of God at this unique point in time as God declares genuine Christianity to have hit Ephesus as they hear and respond about the message of Jesus.

Which I take it means that we shouldn't necessarily expect to see this today when we become a Christian. But I take it that we should expect to see a demonstratable change in somebody's life when they become a Christian.

Now these things might look molehill to us. Right? I love the fruit of the Spirit just how every day it is. Growing in godliness, growing in patience, in forgiveness, in self-control of your tongue.

[13:47] All these things probably look molehill to us. But make no mistake, in the heavenly places, these things are mountain. Mountain. Because they declare that there's a new master at work in your life and his name is Jesus.

And it's one of the unique privileges, and I've been reflecting on this more and more as I've come up to this point. Administering here. One of the wonderful privileges is that you get to see the front, you get a front row seat to see the grace of God at work in people's lives behind the scenes that nobody else gets to see.

Right? Many of you remember Christy when she was here. Moved on. I remember for a season just meeting up with Christy and a guy called Ernest, and we just read the Bible together, read John's Gospel.

And every time we met her, I was almost begging her to come and read it. Okay, if I've got nothing on, I'll come and do it. Right? Every time we would do it, don't get it. But then I remember when we was on the Royal Mile, walking to register Chloe's birth.

And Christy phones me up and says, I get it. I get it. I never saw it before, but I get it. And all of a sudden, she starts begging me to read the Bible with her. I take it we should see a change in somebody's life where they encounter the risen Jesus.

[15:04] As I say, what appears more ill to us, we've got to understand is mountain, as far as the kingdom of God is concerned. Do you know that old hymn? I know not how the spirit moves, convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in him.

I take it this is exactly what's going on here. Disturb the religious world, guys. The battle's on. And it disturbed the occultic world.

So the occult is massive in Ephesus. Right? You probably got that as we read it through. Massive in Ephesus. Witchcraft, magic arts, sorcery. And just in case you think we're in a far-off land here, listen, we're living in a city where the nighttime ghost trade is huge business.

You know, we live on a main road where the buses go past all the time, pretty much every night it goes past the ghost bus tours. It goes past every night on its way to do its thing in the city centre, taking people around these places.

Now, guys, listen, this stuff might seem harmless, but I take it if we're discerning enough to see that somehow the power of darkness is wrapped up in all these things.

[16:15] And it's so often the case, is it not, that when people are at a low ebb in their lives, they turn to this stuff, which is heartbreaking. But do you see how it's got a hold of many people in Ephesus in this place? But contrast that verse 11.

God is doing, and what does Luke say, extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. And it's worth noting that word, extraordinary, because God's done a lot of miracles through Paul.

It's almost as if Luke is saying, these were almost heightened. Confirming to the world, I take it that Paul in his message, what he is saying is the real McCoy, it's the real deal.

And these sons of Sceva, I take it, who Luke wants us to see are just spiritual charlatans who want to use the name of Jesus rather than bow at the name of Jesus. They are shown to be utter pretenders.

The people of Ephesus begin to see powerfully that God's power is so much greater than the powers of the occult. And verse 17, you see, and this is really important to see, great fear fell upon them all.

[17:21] And the name of Jesus is being extolled. The Greek word there is just being magnified. It's being lifted high. It's almost like the Batman signal in the sky. There's a new king in town.

People want to mark and make that decisive break from the former ways of living. Again, Luke's written all this, so we would read it years later and see what's going on. Do you see they confess what they've done?

Verse 18, The Spirit of God prompting people deeply to get the skeletons out of the closet. And notice this is people who already what?

Believe. You know, I wonder too often, friends, that we settle for a wood louse Christian experience. A wood louse Christian life.

Okay, our orbit might be in the light, but we way prefer often the secrecy of the darkness. And I think this is where we need to tap into the spiritual battle, which will rage in our hearts.

[18:19] The whispers of the accuser, the lies and schemes of the devil whispering to us that that's precisely where you'll find freedom and pleasure. Did God really say that's not where you'll find it?

Do you see nothing's really changed since Genesis 3? Instead, what do we find? We find ourselves in a miry bog of shame and guilt, and all of a sudden the accusation changes.

What a mess. Who are you to come before the Lord? You really think he'll forgive you? Friends, what is this challenging us to do?

I take it as challenging us to be people who take seriously and love the fact that life is to be found in the light. You know, it doesn't mean that we'll be consequence-free, right?

Just we've got to be real about that. But it does mean that we can begin to know the freedom, the forgiveness that's found by stepping into the light and knowing the life of Jesus.

[19:18] And we've got to make this community a safe place for people to do that. Because who does it glorify? It glorifies him. You know, I heard somebody say recently that maturity in the Christian life is not coming to a point where you realize you need Jesus less.

Maturity in the Christian life is realizing that you need Jesus more. These guys burn their occultic books. Verse 19.

I love we get this detail. 50,000 pieces of silver. Commentators put that as \$6 million. Get your head around that one. Tells us there's some serious cash kicking around Ephesus. But more so it's saying that people have found a greater treasure in Jesus.

People publicly saying that that stuff is worthless. It doesn't have a hold on on me anymore.

Because the risen Jesus does. Do you see the battle's on? The battle's on.

It disturbed the occultic world. And it has disturbed the commercial world. Because as time ticks on in Ephesus, as more and more people become followers of the way, as this thing starts mushrooming, people start swimming against the flow of the Ephesian river.

[ 20 : 23 ] Verse 23. What happens? It all kicks off. Because what's Paul saying? And this is what kicks it off. Verse 26. Reported by Demetrius.

We'll come back to him in a moment. Clearly because he was affected by this stuff. What's Paul saying? He's saying how can something made with human hands be a god? Fair point. If something can be so easily destroyed, if something can rise and fall with the ever-changing seasons of life, if something can be here one minute and gone the next, would you not agree?

That makes for a pretty lousy god. And you can see people stop and think about what he's saying. And they begin to see his point.

You can see that's devastating news for the trade in the city. Demetrius, verse 24. He's livid. Because this is causing people to stop buying, I presume the little figurines of Artemis that he flogs. I love it. I must have brought one back recently from Ephesus. If you saw it on Twitter, it was amazing. Little Artemis is what's going on. You see, Demetrius is a Jerry Maguire kind of guy. What's he interested in? He's only interested in the money.

[ 21 : 29 ] And you get it if you look carefully at what he says. He said, verse 27, There is a danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited.

It's so often you hear people's idols in the way that you talk, because that should be the other way around. Right? He should be concerned about the good name of Artemis. But was he concerned about his good name? He should be concerned about his trade as an effect being discredited. But was he concerned about Artemis? He thinks she'll be discredited. Do you see how it's the other way around? He reveals his idol. Verse 29. They drag a few of the men who they know are with Paul, Gaius, and Aristarchus.

They take bravely, just nailing their colours to the mast here. They drag them to the assembly. And here's the thing to note about this crowd who gets swept up in this, verse 32. It's a massive crowd. They come together. Most of them didn't even know why they had come together. In other words, if you'd sent out a roaming news reporter onto the streets of Ephesus to ask the people of this mob, listen, can you tell us just why are you here?

[ 22 : 37 ] Couldn't have told you. None of them could have told you. So easy, isn't it, just to get swept up in the shouts of a mob.

You know, friends, when was the last time that you stopped and thought about if you really believe everything that crowds say? Do you really believe the things that everyone else is saying?

You know, I honestly, the amount of times I've heard that phrase, follow your heart, just falls off our tongues and our culture, doesn't it? And if ever that's lovingly questioned, that somebody could lovingly follow their heart, pursue their dreams, if ever that's questioned lovingly, it's riot time. Twitter pile-ons, Facebook posts. But listen, have you ever stopped to ask yourself whether, as human beings, the fact that we're so instinctively led by our hearts, have you ever stopped to ask yourself if that's the wisest thing?

That actually the Bible would point us to a God who loves us and knows us and who created us in his image? You know how often we build something, don't we? Build something at a key, get something at a key, build it, and we throw away the instruction manual.

[ 23 : 48 ] I'm doing this my way. What folly. I love that the God of the Bible has revealed himself. And all of a sudden we begin to see how easy it is to be in this crowd who are shouting, who are coming together, and yet they cannot articulate why they're doing the things that they're doing.

And they believe the things that they believe. And it's important to see that the town clerk thinks that this is baseless. I think Luke's underscoring the fact that Paul and his, these disciples weren't causing trouble.

They weren't doing anything. It wasn't them that was doing the breach of the peace. Actually, it was the other way around. She's nothing in it. But you see what's happening as the word of God impacts this city.

By the sheer grace of God. And you've got to understand that and underscore that. By the sheer grace of God. People who were once strangled by the darkness are now being set free by Jesus, the loving and the reigning king of light.

Because the battle's on. The battle's on. Now listen, just as we move towards a close this morning, and this is me putting on the fashion your seatbelt sign, okay?

[ 25 : 04 ] Maybe all that stuff freaks you out. Living my life in this world, honestly, I struggle to get through the toil of each day. How on earth am I going to stand in this spiritual battle?

Here's what I want you to know. And this has been so important for me to see as I think about heading off for a little season. Okay, a wonderful staff team here, a wonderful team of elders. But this is what I want you to see. And I want us to see. Eight years later, probably from prison in Rome, Paul writes back to this church in Ephesus. And it's an encouragement to go back and read Ephesians, Ephesians in your own time, in light of what we studied today.

And you'll see the language of power coming up all the time, what God has done. Paul writes back to these believers in Ephesus, who he envisages, I imagine, have those exact questions that we maybe have in our minds.

People, as they sit together, they gather, I don't know, in the Lord's day, they look at one another, and they think we're nothing impressive. There's a handful of us, but outside of here, Artemis is doing her thing.

[ 26 : 07 ] People are doing their own thing. How are we going to stand? She's got a massive temple. She's got tons of followers. We're not wanted in this city. How are we going to stand?

Ephesians chapter one, friends, what is Paul's first play? Who you are in Jesus. Who he is. And because of who he is and what he's done, who you are.

What does he say? That God the Father knew about you, and he chose you from eternity past. That Jesus, the Son, died for you at a point in time on the cross to redeem you from their sins.

That Jesus, the Son, rose again, meaning that you are justified in his sight. He's paid for your sins, past, present, and future. And the Spirit, he lives in you.

And he is a guarantee of your future. Why does he write that up top? What is his point? His point is that if you feel weak in your faith, look to a strong Christ.

[ 27 : 16 ] He has you. This is his church. You are his people. All of a sudden you begin to realize, don't you, and this is ad hoc, I'm going for it, how Jesus, who are the people that he, when he's trying to teach the disciples what faith is, who are the people that he wheels on the scene?

It's not Hercules. Who is it? It's little children. As if they say, what, I mean, I find this with Eve. She wakes up in the morning, she screams, and what is she screaming for?

What's her only play? That I need you. That I need you. That's what he's saying. Jesus has you. He has you.

Your life looks unspectacular. Your gathering looks unimpressive. But let me tell you, this is the power of God at work in the world. The church is the greatest show on earth.

And because of that, the call is to display his lordship in every single area of your lives as the darkness continues to be penetrated by the light. Guys, the battle's on.

[ 28 : 21 ] The battle is on. And here's where I want to finish, and I hope this hits with us. We're on holiday down in Cornwall a few years ago. And we go to New Frontiers Church in a little place called Truro.

And one of the pastors there is giving the notices for the week. And it's amazing as a visitor just the things you pick up on. And he says in the notices, he says, guys, listen, Tesco Cafe Breakfast Club is on this week.

End of notice. Sitting there thinking, you've got to give me more than that, mate. Come on. I mean, do these guys love a Tesco meal deal? What is going on? And I asked a few questions after the service.

Do you know what this was? This was a little group of people in the church, new believers, established Christians, who had promised to do this for a season of their life, to meet up and to help one another in their battle with pornography.

People who, by the grace of Jesus, had been saved from it, and so I don't want... I don't want anything to do with it.

[ 29 : 31 ] I don't want anything to do with it. It's not true that in our world that we are moving to a place where we're almost normalising it. Honestly, I think about the statistics that come out, but when kids are going to be introduced to it, it's almost like we're being encouraged that there's nothing wrong with casually and visually using people for our own appetites.

And so here are this little group of people in Truro, in backwater Cornwall, who meet up in Tesco Cafe, and they share struggles. They put software on their phones and their computers.

They're determined to help one another with this. But primarily what they're committed to doing is sharing the gospel with one another. That this is who we are in Jesus.

He is the King of light. And we want to do battle against this evil in our hearts. Friends, maybe this is exactly where this is hitting you this morning.

When we're talking about things, just coming into the light and living your life. Maybe that's something you need to act on today. Because this little group in Truro, what are they doing? They're reminding themselves of who Jesus is.

[ 30 : 39 ] Remember what we said, Christian maturity is not realizing you need Jesus less. It's realizing you need Jesus more. And so here they are. What are they doing? What are they engaging in?

The spiritual battle. The spiritual battle. Guys, because the battle is on. It's on. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast.

When the tempter would prevail, he will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path. For my love is often cold.

He must hold me fast. He must hold me fast. He will hold me fast. For my saviour loves me so. He will hold me fast.

And that's the message of Ephesus is the gospel does battle in Ephesus. The king of light is on his throne and no one is going to stop him and this God's achieving his purposes in the world.

[ 31 : 43 ] So guys, let's pray and then we're going to stand and sing that song together to close. Okay? And so Father, this morning we're just so grateful for Jesus and the grace that we have encountered in him.

And I pray for us all this morning, Father, that you would give us a greater dependency on him, the king of light. May this little outpost of the kingdom of light as we meet here at Brunfield and his churches all over this city and all over this nation meet together as little outposts of the kingdom of light.

Would you help us to shine brightly for Jesus in this city? Father, I pray that your spirit would continue to work amongst us right now, challenging us, prompting us, encouraging us.

Oh Father, would the lies of the devil as we thought about the spiritual battle this morning, would the Holy Spirit bring just a fresh awareness of the truth of the gospel. Father, we just praise you for your great love for us in sending your son and we pray you'll be with us for the rest of this day.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.