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Talk About Jesus or Take Down Your Sign

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Series: The Church and the Home

Acts 19:1-10

My family, my family, how are we doing? I like it. Listen. I'm your dark-skinned cousin from Las Vegas. I'm happy to be here. The reason I say "My family" is because you will see my face in heaven. We will be together in eternity, so we might as well get to know each other.

I am so happy to be here. I have my beautiful family over there. They're beautiful. They come and support me. I praise God for them. My beautiful wife is over there. My "chocolate queen" I call her. We're just happy to be here. We just moved to Las Vegas, so when I got back to RDU, the airport, I did two things. I laid down and rubbed some grass, and then I went to Bojangles. Four-piece Supreme dinner. Man, that's what I'm talking about.

I'm happy to be here. I've been a fan of your church for a while. I am so thankful to be here. I will say this. I did not fly all this way to perform for you. I came here, by the grace of God, to preach his Word that he might be glorified. So do me a favor. Let's bow our heads and let's pray.

Father, I thank you for this time, the opportunity to preach your Word. Thank you for what you are doing here in Winston-Salem. Would you be so kind to speak to us, God, to ease our worries, and to encourage us to continue to move forward with your gospel message? This is our prayer, Lord. In Christ's name, amen.

So, my wife and I have two children. Our son Tripp just turned 8 years old last week. If you're a parent, you realize how fast your children grow up. I remember this dude was a baby walking around in diapers, using the restroom wherever he wanted to, but now he's 8 years old. He's growing up. As a kid, my son would love those kid puzzles. So, I would come home with those kid puzzles.

He would open the box and dump it all out on the floor, and he would begin to mess around with the puzzle. One day, I noticed he did something interesting. He would

open the box, dump out the pieces of the puzzle on the floor, and he would move one piece and look back at the box, move one piece and look back at the box, move one piece and look back at the box.

It was as if my son understood that when orchestrating or putting together a puzzle, and to anticipate what shall come before you, it's often wise to look back at the original picture. My son understood that if he was going to build a picture before him, he had to occasionally look back at the box. Today, what I'm trying to say is sometimes the way you move forward is by looking backward.

So, this is what we should spend our time in today. You've been in the book of Ephesians, working through this book, and God has been blessing you in amazing ways. Today it's as if the apostle Paul walks into our church. He has a box for you called the *Ephesian church*. You and I open this box and dump out all of the pieces on the floor.

But Paul says, "You should listen to Ricky Harris' son," because if you're going to put together and understand the book of Ephesians, if you're going to allow it to make sense to you, it would behoove you to look back at how it all started, at the original picture. Today we shall look back at the original picture of the Ephesian church and allow that picture to move us forward as we push through the book.

I think, as we look back at this time in Acts, chapter 19, there are a few things our time should encourage us to do. It should remind us of who God is through his Word, and it should push us as we move forward as a church. I only have three points for you. So, turn to Acts, chapter 19. As you turn to Acts 19, let me set the scene for you.

In Acts, chapter 18, we meet the apostle Paul. He's doing what he does best. He's opening his mouth to talk about Jesus. Who would have thought that Christians were supposed to open their mouth and talk about Jesus? The apostle Paul is now talking about Christ and so well that the people in Ephesus ask him to stay.

Paul says, "I must go ahead. I must preach the gospel. I must help plant and erect churches." Paul says, "But if God is so kind, I will come back to you if he allows." This is where we find the apostle Paul now. He's making his way back to the city of Ephesus, and he's crossing the city limits. This is where we pick him up. Look with me. Acts 19:1-10.

"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 even 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 the 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 the 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 twelve 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 [Christianity] before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

01 THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

As we look back at the original picture, the first thing we shall see about this church is it was started by the power of the gospel. In verse 1, Luke is the one who writes this account, and Luke mentions a name very quickly, the name Apollos. I want to spend a little time here.

Apollos was Paul's ministry partner. They were sharing the gospel together. I love this picture because it reminds Two Cities Church that when it comes to sharing our faith, this is no one-man job. It's not left to the paid Christians. If we're going to evangelize our city, it will take all of us to open our mouths to talk about King Jesus.

So, out of the gate, what we see is Paul has a ministry partner named Apollos, and there's no ego here. There are no turf wars here. There's no "These are *my* people" and "These are *my* people." No, we're all on the same team, team Jesus. And they pushed forward the gospel.

Now, Apollos is in Corinth, but Paul has a new assignment in the city of Ephesus. As he's walking, he meets some men, some disciples, and he asks them a random question. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit?" Now wait a minute. Think about that. If you're new to a city... They don't know you, and that's what you lead with? "Hi, my name is Ricky. I love your church. By the way, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" Like, what?

Whatever it was, it raised a red flag in Paul. So much so that he asked this audacious question but, to be honest, he was right. The men say, "No, we have never heard that there is even a Holy Spirit." This is where our text becomes a mystery. There's something here we must solve. Can you not see Paul is a little bit confused?

The first thing that confuses us is the word *disciple*. When you and I hear the word *disciple*, we think of Christians, but the term *disciple* is not exclusively a Christian term. *Disciple* simply means to be a learner or a follower. I'll say it this way. You can be a disciple and not be Christian, but you must be Christian to be a disciple.

As disciples of Jesus, we should learn to live how he lived, we should talk the way he talked, and we should think the way he thought. So, Paul is like, "You call yourself disciples, but you have not heard of the Holy Spirit." That would have meant these men would not have known of Jesus Christ. They would not have known of his life, his death, and his resurrection.

In fact, this would have confused Paul, because for Paul, once you and I became Christians, we were instantly filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul understood that to become a Christian meant you were filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment of your belief. In fact, in Ephesians 1:13, Paul would say it this way: ***"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..."***

I'll keep going this way. David Williams, speaking of this text, would say it something like this: "Paul's criteria of what distinguished a Christian was significant, for it implies that the Holy Spirit is received at the point and moment of initial belief." Paul simply understood this: once you and I accepted Christ Jesus, we were filled with his Holy Spirit.

So, you see, Paul is now confused. "Okay. You call yourselves disciples. You know nothing of the Holy Spirit." Then he says, "So what were you baptized into?" They say, "John's baptism." Paul says, "Got it. You were baptized into John but not baptized into Jesus." Simply put, these men were not saved.

Now, to appreciate the text, you have to understand John the Baptist was a big deal. He was not bigger than Jesus, but he was a big deal. In fact, Christ would say of him, "There is no man born of woman greater than John the Baptist." God would say that he allowed John to be the forerunner to tell this people that Christ was coming.

John's ministry was a ministry of repentance. It simply meant that if you're going to accept Christ, the first step into that is to see that you are a sinner. Now, to explain what Paul is dealing with here... He's going, "Men, you've crossed the first step into salvation, but there's one more step."

I'll say it this way. I now live in the West, but I'm from the South. In the South we have a thing they call *front porches*. Who would have thought that folks like to talk outside to each other? Man! Great invention. Growing up, I loved my front porch. I

laughed on the front porch. I ate on the front porch. I spent a lot of time on the front porch.

There's one thing I never did on the front porch. I never lived there. Why? The front porch is simply an entrance to the house. Paul is saying, "Men, good job. You have made it to the front porch of salvation, but you have missed one initial step. We don't live in repentance; we live in the house of the gospel. You are called to repent and then also believe."

I'll say it this way. What Paul saved these men from was behavior modification. He saved these men from what we call *religion*. Now, I'm from here, so I'm going to say some things that only you and I will understand because we're Southern. Religion says, "It's all based on what I do for God that has allowed me to be saved. It's my Bible reading. It's my church attendance. It's my tithing. It's my serving. Somehow, because I do these things for God, I am right with him."

The gospel says something completely different. The gospel says you could not get to God, so God came down to you. God left heaven, came down to earth, put on flesh, and hung on the cross because you and I had a bad day called *sin*. The gospel says there was nothing you and I could do to become his children, yet by his grace we are saved.

Listen. I want y'all to relax. I'm talking to you. I know what you struggle with. I'm from here. We've added to the gospel so much. Jesus plus my tithing. Jesus plus my attendance. Jesus plus what I don't wear. Jesus plus who I don't hang around. You are saved because God gave his Son for you.

The gospel is like my grandmama's collard greens. Leave it as is. Don't add to it. Don't touch it. Leave it as is. The gospel simply says Jesus loved you enough to die on the cross for your sins. He loved self-righteous, hypocritical, backstabbing, conniving people like me, and by the grace of God, we are now saved.

This is what happens to these men in verse 5. Only the power of the gospel could take broken, messed-up people and in a moment make them children of God. That's your story. You weren't always saved. Don't forget you didn't always sit as comfortably as you sit now. Don't forget. Don't let the gospel become simply something you just talk about occasionally. That's your life. That is your life.

I know you've heard the gospel a thousand times, but don't forget that unless Jesus Christ died for you, you have nothing. These men, in a blink of an eye, hear the gospel of Christ Jesus. They accept him all because the power of the gospel message. Paul would say it this way in Romans 1:16: ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation..."***

In fact, he would write about it in Ephesians, chapter 2. He would say it this way: ***"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."***

Let me tell you something you've probably become old to. Jesus lived, he died, and he rose just for you. Do not become cold for that simple message. These men hear the gospel. They're changed in a moment, and now we shall see how the power of the gospel now allows them to be introduced to the power of the Holy Spirit, which is our next point.

02 THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Verse 6 says, ***"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 twelve men in all."*** Now, this idea of Paul laying his hands on them finds its roots in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the fathers of the faith would oftentimes lay their hands on people to convey that they believed in the promises of God, that God will keep his promise. Well, now in the New Testament, God has kept his promise by sending the Holy Spirit. So, when Paul lays his hands on them, what he's doing is communicating that these men now belong to Jesus.

When he lays his hands on them, they're able to prophesy and speak in tongues. Now calm down. I know where I'm at. Calm down. Speaking in tongues simply means they were able to speak in different languages for one purpose: to preach the gospel. When it says "Prophesying," it simply means they were able to now read and teach the Bible.

So, these men, in a moment, who have never heard of the Holy Spirit, never heard of Jesus... Because they believed in him, in an instant they're now filled with him completely, and they're able to speak the gospel in different languages. Only the power of the Holy Spirit could do this.

Now, this is a picture of Acts, chapter 2. In Acts, chapter 2, the apostles are waiting on the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Once the Holy Spirit arrives and indwells them, they're able to do two things: speak in tongues for the purpose of different languages to share the gospel and to read and teach the Word of God.

Now, this would have blown those who were around them, because the apostles were considered simple country people. I'm country. They were considered simple people.

So, the fact that these simple people can now speak in different dialects and different languages would have blown their minds. Why? Because they are not supposed to do that. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit could they do these things.

Now listen. I have no idea why these folks in Acts experienced something that most of us have not. I don't know that. That's a great question for Pastor Kyle. I don't know that, but what I do know is this. Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit comes in various ways and at various times, but every time he comes in the book of Acts, he comes like *this*.

Because these men could speak in tongues and prophesy, read and teach the Word, it showed that they belonged to the church of Christ Jesus. So, simply, what's going on here is the Holy Spirit is telling everyone around them, "These men who did not know me now know me because they've put their faith in Christ Jesus."

Let me tell you what grieves my heart as I process through this text. Most of us have forgotten about the Holy Spirit. There's God the Father and God the Son and that's it. Most of us don't even know what the Holy Spirit's job is. So, I'm going to kind of give you something here.

To make it simple, the Holy Spirit's job is to give us power to live out the Christian life. You cannot live out the Bible without the help of the Holy Spirit. You cannot fight your sin without the help of the Holy Spirit. You cannot forgive those who have wronged you without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Not just that, but in John 16, Christ gives us a brief snapshot of the Holy Spirit's role, his job. I want to take you all through the snapshot, just kind of remind you of how important it is that we appreciate the gift we have in the Holy Spirit. In fact, in John 16:8-11, Christ says, first of all, the Holy Spirit's job is to convict the world of sin. Meaning, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world proves that the world does not love God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the world is proof that the world does not know and love God. It convicts the world.

Secondly, it convicts the world of righteousness. Meaning, the Holy Spirit helps you and me believe that Christ is who he says he is. Christ says, "When I leave, I will leave you a helper." Lastly, it says the Holy Spirit's job is to convict the world of judgment. Meaning (I love this part), the Holy Spirit's presence in the world is proof that Satan is defeated.

Some of y'all right now are struggling. You feel defeated. You feel as if God has forgotten you, that he has left you behind. The Holy Spirit's job is to remind you that because you have Jesus, everything will be all right. The Holy Spirit's job is to remind

you that things will not always be this way. The Holy Spirit's job is to remind you that Satan is defeated and Christ reigns on the world.

Now I want to talk about what the Holy Spirit continues to do for you. First of all, he *guides* you. He uses the Bible to teach you how to love God and live out what he has called us to do. He guides you. Secondly, he *encourages* you. Through the Scriptures, he paints a silhouette of who Christ is that gives us the energy and the peace and the hope to keep going. Lastly, he *assists* you.

I can only say it this way. Romans 8:36-37. The apostle Paul walks into the valley of life. Paul says the times in life when life hits you so hard you can't find the words to pray... Have you ever had a pain that ran so deep that if forgetfulness were a pill, you would take the whole bottle? Some of you right now have that ache. I know you look good tonight, but when you go back home, you know what I'm talking about.

When you close that door, you're by yourself. You have that ache, that cry. You just can't seem to get the words out. The Holy Spirit, being the divine translator, takes that tear, takes that ache, grabs it, and walks it to King Jesus. He assists you when you can't find the words to tell God, "I need help." That's his job. Do you now see why it's important for you and me to be thankful for the gift of the Holy Spirit?

So, now the question is...*If the Holy Spirit empowers me to live out the Christian life, how do I keep experiencing his power?* Faith. Faith is simply this: believing that God is who he says he is and can do what he said he can do. Faith. I think maybe the reason many of us are not experiencing peace, joy, and strength is because, in our daily lives, we have stopped believing God is who he says he is and can do exactly what he said he can do.

I'm not talking about salvation here. I know you're saved. But every single day you're faced with a challenge, and the test is, "Can I trust God to get me through?" If you want to experience the power of the Holy Spirit to help you live out the Christian life, keep believing in who he says he is.

In fact, this unbelief plagued this church. In Revelation 2:5, Christ said to the Ephesian church, "Great job, man. Love the building. Great worship. Great backslash. Oh! Love the kids' ministry. You're doing a great job. But I have one issue with you: you've lost your first love." Have you lost your first love? Have you lost your love for Jesus?

I'm not talking about you talking about what he did for you. I'm talking about have you lost your love to say, "God, when I did not know anything about theology, what I did know is that you love me and I love you." Have you forgotten your first love?

There is no quicker way for the Holy Spirit to withhold his power than for you and me to stop believing that God is who he says he is.

These men are now infused with the Holy Spirit, and guess what: they can't stop talking about Jesus. These men have heard the gospel, believed the gospel, and now they have been infused with the power of the Holy Spirit for one purpose: to talk about him wherever they go in front of whoever they may come. So, these men hear the power of the gospel. They're empowered by the Holy Spirit to do one last thing: to proclaim the gospel.

03 THE POWER OF PROCLAMATION

Now, to appreciate this point, you have to kind of go back in the halls of history to understand the city of Ephesus. At this time, it was the fourth largest city in the world. It was a port city. It was a gateway to all of Asia. If you wanted to get to Asia, you would go through Ephesus because it was the gateway to all roads. It was a big deal. Everyone wanted to go. It was a big deal to go to Ephesus.

But that's the tourist side of Ephesus. There was also a dark side. It was a place of dark magic, mysticism, and idolatry, much like Las Vegas. Hear me. Most Christians would not want to go to that place. My wife and I did not plan on going to Las Vegas. That was not in the cards, but what I've realized in being a Christian now for almost a decade or so is that my life is not my own.

Your life is not your own. When you became a Christian, you signed a blank check that you would go wherever God has sent you. You have no idea how many nights I've walked down a desert road. Your life is not your own. You're called to be a follower of Jesus and go wherever he says go and do whatever he says do.

So, Paul says, "I'm going there." He says in verse 8, "Take me to where the Jews hang out, the synagogue." I love this. This was Paul's MO. He would come to a new city. He would always go to where the Jews hung out because he always would share the gospel with the house of Israel first.

Paul would come into a service much like this one. He would worship in a service like this one, and then Paul would begin to open his mouth to talk about Jesus. Now listen. I love this because Paul teaches us something about how we should share our faith. There are three things about Paul's evangelism.

First of all, it was bold. Paul did not allow fear to stop him from sharing the gospel. Hear me. I'm a people pleaser. Okay? It's hard for me at times to share my faith because I want to be liked, but God reminds me "Ricky, there are some things more

important than you being liked, and the gospel is one of them," because if people don't hear the gospel, they will be separated from him for eternity.

Hear me. Take yourself out of the center of your Christianity. It is not about you. It is about Jesus. Paul was bold. Then Paul was, as they say... He reasoned with them. I love this. It meant he allowed them to ask questions. I love this, because one of the hardest things about sharing our faith... We don't want to share it because we don't have all of the answers. That makes us fearful to share our faith. That's okay.

But sometimes we don't have the answers because we don't read our Bible. Sometimes we don't have the answers because it's a choice of not reading our Bible. It's not so much that we read the Bible but the Bible reads us, and that's why we don't like to read the Bible.

Lastly, he was persuasive. He used everything he could to preach the gospel. I love this. The Jews had an issue with him. Verse 9 says some became stubborn. It meant their hearts had become hardened. This happened over time. Let me tell you something. Folks will not always hug you because you talk about Jesus. Folks will not always give you a high-five because you talk about Jesus.

Let that rest in your heart. Folks will not always want to hear about Christ, but we cannot crawl in a corner and stop. We have to continue to share our faith. Paul says, "Okay. If I can't do it here in the synagogue, I'll just go over here to the hall of Tyrannus." This hall was perfect because it was a place where Jew and Greek could come together to all hear the gospel message.

This is what blows my mind. Paul was persistent. He believed in proclamation. He believed in sharing his faith. Let me give you some hard facts about Paul. Paul was a tentmaker. What that means is he worked in the morning, and then he would leave work in the morning and go to the hall of Tyrannus and preach for five hours. He would preach 5 hours a day, 6 days a week, for 52 weeks a year, 2 years straight, which equates to 3,120 hours of sharing his faith.

So, those of you who say, "I'm tired of sharing my faith..." No, you're not. You haven't done *this*. Paul believed in proclaiming the gospel message. In fact, this blows my mind. To even make it more simple, it meant he would have preached, if you want to use it this way, 24 hours straight for 130 days. This man believed in the power of the gospel. So much so he preached 24 hours straight, 130 days, equivalent to 3,120 hours of sharing his faith.

Do you know what blows my mind? Verse 10 says all of Asia heard the gospel. Did you hear what I just said? Not just the city. All of Asia heard the gospel because this man did not stop preaching it. This is what we are called to be: men and women who

cannot shut their mouth up about Jesus. These men believed the gospel and were infused by the power of the Holy Spirit to do one thing: to open their mouth and talk about Jesus.

A newlywed couple was heading toward their honeymoon one night. As the husband was driving, he didn't see a car coming around the bend, so two cars crashed. Now the car is on top. The husband comes to and looks at his newlywed bride, and she's bleeding out. He says to himself, "If I don't get her some help, she's going to die." To his surprise, he looks up the hill and sees a sign that says, "Office of Dr. Bill Jones." How fortunate for this tragedy to happen right down the road from a doctor's office.

So, he grabs his bride, and he stumbles up the hill. He gets to the door and knocks on the door. An old man answers and says, "Yes? How can I help you?" He says, "Sir, my wife is going to die. Save her." He says, "Son, I'm sorry. I stopped practicing medicine 20 years ago. I can't help you." He says, "Sir, you have two options. Either save her or take down your sign."

I come to tell you that your sign outside says that those who are broken and those who are lonely and those who are grieving... There's a place for them to come here. Two Cities Church, you have two options: either open your mouth and talk about Jesus or take down your sign.

I walked around the city this morning. The brokenness of the city... People are hurting. They're lost, and we have the power of the gospel message. How selfish of us, just because we got a seat on the bus, to now drive by them and say, "I wish you luck." You have two options. Open your mouth and talk about Jesus or take down your sign.

I'm not trying to be rude. I'm trying to encourage you, because you do not know when God will say, "Give me back my breath." The breath you breathe he blew in your body, but one day he will take it back. When that day comes, it is too late. The gospel is good news, but only if you get it in time. You have two options. Share your faith about Jesus or take down your sign.

I hope you hear my heart. I'm not trying to be rude. I'm not trying to be mean. I flew all the way from Las Vegas just to encourage and remind you of what we are called to be. You have the power of the gospel at your fingertips. Can you imagine if someone was too busy to share the gospel with you? You wouldn't sit where you're sitting now. Can you imagine if someone was too afraid to share the gospel with you? You wouldn't sit where you're sitting now.

Only by the grace of God are we called Christians. The audacity of us, just because we got a seat on the boat, to drive past those and say, "I wish you luck." Hear me. I'm talking about myself. I'm in the same boat with you. I make excuses. I'm always busy.

I'm always too afraid. God says, "Son, it's not about you." You have two options. Share your faith or take down your sign.

What do we learn from Acts 19:1-10? How can these verses push us through the book of Ephesians? Well, it shows us three things. The early start of the Ephesian church... They taught the Bible, they made disciples, and they sent people out to teach the Bible and make disciples. That is how this church began. They taught the Bible, they made disciples, and they sent those out to teach the Bible and make disciples.

That is what we are called to do. The church started out with power from the beginning, the power of the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do one thing: talk about Jesus. Sometimes the way you move forward is by looking back. If you want to move forward through this book and understand and appreciate it, look back at how it began. If you want to move forward in your Christian faith, don't you ever forget to look back at the cross.

I hope you leave here not just with some good notes. Notes don't save people. I hope your heart is full, that you find yourself going, "How can I not talk about Jesus?" When I think of the goodness of Jesus and all he has done for me, my soul cries out, "Hallelujah!" Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that what was shared was from your heart. I pray that I did not do anything to get in the way of what you are doing. I am so thankful for this church. I am so thankful for the volunteers and the staff and the lead pastor, Pastor Kyle. I'm so thankful for Pastor David and Pastor Caleb. I'm so thankful for what you're doing here in Winston-Salem. But I have one ask of you, Father, before I take off on a plane. Would you allow this church to live up to its sign? This is our prayer, Father. In Christ's name, amen.