

# Powered by the Spirit

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 July 2013

Preacher: Colin Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] So Acts chapter 19 verses 1 to 20 lots of interesting and strange things going on in this little passage. What do you associate with the word power?

What is it that springs to mind when you hear the word power? Now as a man of a certain vintage when I think of power I think of Icelandic power lifters.

When I was growing up the world's strongest man was filled with Icelanders. You had the great John Paul Sigmerson or you had Magnus for Magnuson.

These were men who could pull a truck with their teeth. They could carry battles for no reason whatsoever but just to plunk them on some stage and just prove their strength to the world.

It was incredible television. It was amazing. They would be in these exotic locations like Los Angeles or Hawaii and they'd be doing all their stuff strutting around with their maxi-muscle-fueled bodies.

[ 1 : 04 ] And it was just awesome. It was a sight to behold. But I don't know what springs to your mind when you think of power. It might be the boss at work, the guy or girl who tells you what to do, what not to do, blah, blah, blah.

It could be you think of the queen and her power. It could be Dave or Alex and their power. It could be those guys in the G8 who kind of kick around the globe now and again in expensive hotels making decisions which affect the rest of the world.

I don't know what picture you have of power in your mind but have you ever associated power and the Christian? In your mind, when you think of those with power, have you ever thought of yourself as a believer having power?

Well, this rather obscure and difficult passage, yes, really difficult, is about God's power at work in ordinary people.

God's power is at work in this city called Ephesus and his power is being worked out through ordinary people. Yes, it's a unique account. It's not really going to happen like this on the Mount tonight as we leave church.

[ 2 : 26 ] But it's an account that reminds those of us who are Christians that God's power is at work in our lives. That God is working through us by his Holy Spirit to do his work here on earth.

As we look at this chapter, I want us to notice three things. First of all, in verses one to seven, God's power is at work in every believer.

God's power is at work in every believer. Then God's power enables the believer to witness. God's power enables the believer to witness. That's in verses eight to 10.

And then verses 11 to 20, we have God's power can overcome the fiercest opponent. I want us to be encouraged tonight.

I want us to take heart from the fact that God's power is at work in our lives and that God's power can give inner transformation to any who come to him in faith.

[ 3 : 27 ] Let us begin then, verses one to seven. God's power is at work in every believer. And as we begin our brief walk about with Paul in Ephesus, we will begin with Paul's first visit.

We notice this is his second visit. As I said before the reading, his first visit is found in chapter 18, verse 18. And in chapter 18, we had read that Paul's first trip to the city of Ephesus had led to this meeting with a guy called Apollos.

Apollos is a very bright guy. He's very smart. He's kind of glued up on a lot of things. But Apollos has only got half the story right.

Apollos has, yes, he's talked about the way he's emphasized John's, the Baptist's work, however, over the work of Jesus. So Apollos has kind of become stuck in the Old Testament theology.

He's got to John the Baptist, but he hasn't really got much further on than that. And in chapter 18, we have the account of how these two godly people, Aquila and Priscilla, make Apollos under their wing and help him understand the fullness of the Christian message.

[ 4 : 43 ] So we have Aquila and Priscilla who hear this man, Apollos, teaching to a point about failing to miss the mark and they gently encourage him and tell him about Jesus Christ.

And as Paul in verse one walks down the gang plank onto Ephesians soil, he is met by a group of disciples. Now, there was something different about these disciples.

There was something that just didn't quite seem to feel right about this group of disciples. Paul couldn't quite put his finger on it, so he begins to ask them a few questions.

And in verse two, we see him gently probing the mind of these disciples. We have him asking, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

That answers very straightforward, very honest, no. Never even heard of the Holy Spirit. What's the Holy Spirit? And this really throws Paul. He said, what? You call yourself a disciple, but you've never heard of the Holy Spirit.

[ 5 : 46 ] And so he begins to dig a little bit deeper into what they mean by disciples. And he then asks them, into what then were you baptized?

Into John's baptism, they replied. Now Paul is beginning to understand why things don't add up. They had clearly received some teaching, but had not been made fully aware of all that Christ had achieved.

They were apostles, disciples before Apollos was able to understand the fullness of the gospel. These early Ephesians only understood half the story.

They hadn't been taught that John pointed to Jesus, that John had declared in Matthew 3.11, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.

He will baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire. They were stuck in the past. They were old testament believers. I don't know if you've heard the story of Lieutenant Onodo.

[ 6 : 50 ] Now Lieutenant Onodo was a Japanese guy who was based in the remote Filipino jungle. I think it's Filipino jungle, and he's busy doing his thing as a soldier does, but he doesn't tell the message that the war is actually over.

So he's roaming around protecting the Filipino jungle for over 30 years after the war has ended. And the locals are, you're crazy man, the war is over.

A new era has come. Peace has arrived, but he refused to believe them. So what needed to happen was the Japanese had to send in Onodo's lieutenant from 30 years ago and tell him to lay down his arms.

Only then did Onodo lay down his arms. He was stuck in the past. He was stuck in a different era, and so were these Ephesian believers. They were stuck in the era of John.

They had not been told the good news that peace had broken out and that Jesus was reigning. How does Paul react though? How does Paul react to people who just don't get it, who completely missed the point?

[ 7 : 57 ] Well does he give them a ride, does he take them off? He can't call yourself a disciple man. You're an Oumia disciple. No. He gently and basically tells them what happens next.

He helps them. He encourages them. He teaches them the fullness of the story. Paul says John pointed to Jesus.

This was greater than John. And when they began to realize that John pointed to Jesus, and when they began to understand who Jesus was, they came for baptism in the name of Jesus.

They were eager to now show that they were disciples of Jesus Christ, not of John the Baptist.

Now, there's a little phrase here that's easily overlooked.

One of those that we can read over and just think, eh, very nice. It's when you are baptized in the name of Jesus.

[ 9 : 01 ] What does this mean? Being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Well it means this. That you represent the person's character.

You represent Jesus's character when you are baptized into the name of Jesus. When you are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, you are now living as His representative here on earth. You have committed to live your life as His ambassador. That's quite a thought. How can we, me, be Jesus' ambassador here on earth?

Have you not seen my life, God? Have you not seen how messed up I am? Have you not seen how I completely fail you day after day after day? Have you not seen my weaknesses?

Are you really sure you want me to be your representative here on earth? And God says, yes, yes, I do know what you are like. Yes, I do know your weaknesses.

[10:01] Yes, I do know that you are full of faults. But I am strong. I will help you. I am going to guarantee to help you.

I am going to help you live as an ambassador for Jesus throughout your life. Look at verse 6. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. When we were baptized, when a Christian is baptized, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, there are some of you here probably asking, what on earth is the Holy Spirit? Good question. Well, it's what we call the third person of the Trinity.

We have God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. This is where theology gets complex. They make one God but are three persons.

[11:05] Each person has a unique role to fulfill within that one Godhead. And the Holy Spirit's unique role within the Godhead is to make known the presence of God in the world.

And he does this through Christ's ambassadors. He does that through us, the church. This means that when we come to faith in Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit to help us to live for Jesus so that through our day to day lives, we can make God more visible in the world that we live in.

As Christians, do we acknowledge that the power of God is at work within us? Do we remember that God has given us a helper who is constantly with us, who is with us in every situation we face in life?

This must fill us with confidence. We are not little islands floating about Edinburgh. We are those who are connected to God's power.

We are those who have the presence of God's power within us as disciples of Jesus. It can sometimes be hard to remember that God's power is present in our lives.

[12:35] But we must remember that the presence of God's power dwells within us and that it is never removed from us. When you have the Holy Spirit, you have it forever.

God's power is within us in each one of us of those who are Christians. Secondly, we see God's power enables believers to witness in verses 8 to 10.

God's power enables believers to witness. As we have seen, one of the special functions of the Holy Spirit is to enable the people of God to act as His ambassadors here on earth, to speak, think and act like Jesus' people.

When we approach these next couple of verses, we see God's powerful spirit working through Paul to speak for Jesus in Ephesus.

We see the spirit of God enabling Paul to speak about God. Paul as his habit, whenever he comes to a new city to plant a church, he always goes to the synagogue first, the seat of the religious life in these major cities.

[13:53] Now, he has been there for three months and he's seeking to reason. He's seeking to persuade the people that the Messiah they're looking for, the one they have been promised, is actually Jesus.

Jesus was the one that they were waiting for, but that they couldn't yet see it. He tries to point to Jesus throughout the Old Testament, through their scriptures. He's desperately reasoning and hoping that they come and they see that Jesus is the one sent from God.

The message that Paul is preaching is all about the kingdom of God. It's all about God's kingdom here on earth. He is preaching about the kingly rule that God exerts over the world in which we live and how Jesus Christ is the promised King who has come to reign and to rule.

The Jews are waiting for a great King to come. They are expecting and anticipating a great King, a war hero as it were. But Paul is trying to persuade them, you've got it all wrong.

You've missed the mark. You are not going to get a military power. You are going to get a spiritual King. They had missed the signs of kingship.

[15:08] And three months into his preaching and things aren't going that great. You know, opposition is growing. The Jews are getting fed up with this claim that Jesus is the one sent from God.

Opposition is brewing and eventually they begin to speak evil of the way. The Jewish people, they are beginning to say that the way, the way is simply a phrase used to explain the way of salvation is in fact evil.

And so in the face of the opposition, what does Paul do? He changes strategy. He doesn't give up. He doesn't leave Ephesus behind. No, he changes tack.

He knows that he's got a message from God to deliver and that the Ephesians people must hear it. And so he moves from trying to reason and persuade the Jewish people and he now goes to the Greek community in Ephesus.

He and his disciples take up their cushions and go into the Hall of Tyrannus. Clearly Paul has had a little success because he has taken with him some disciples, but there's not been much success.

[16:15] And Paul goes to the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus. Now, to get the context, lecture halls in those days are what the O2 arena is to Londoners.

That's what the O2 hall is to us. These venues were the arenas of the philosophers of rock. They were the gods of society.

The great philosophers were the ones you would flock to to hear what they have to say. You didn't need Bono or Bruce. You wanted the philosophers and I can't think of any names off the top of my head at the minute to add impact.

So people would flock to these halls to hear these great wonderful philosophers spout forth on what they believed, what they thought of the world in which they lived. Now Paul begins to tell them about Jesus.

Paul begins to tell them about God's great grace. Paul begins to tell them about Jesus. Paul begins to tell them that Jesus is the way back to God. Paul begins to tell them that they can be saved from their sin.

[17:22] And we begin to notice fruit is beginning. We begin to note that new life is coming into Ephesus.

We begin to note that after two years Paul is hammering home at this message that Christ is the one. Christ is your King. Come under his rule.

The gospel was beginning to take hold of the people. They were beginning to respond to the message of Jesus. This even though they had previously clung to the God Artemis, that lump of rock.

They were now putting away the lump of rock and replacing it with the living God. In these few verses we find an evangelist who is absolutely determined to reach out to all people no matter in their ethnicity, no matter their disposition, their background, their beliefs.

Paul was reaching out into that city bringing the message of God and how was he able to do that? How was he able to persuade the people?

[18:30] How was he able to reason with the people? How was he able to share the gospel? It was because God's power was at work in his life.

You know what the temptation is for us to look at this passage and say, that was just Paul. He was amazing. I can't do that kind of thing.

We're tempted to think, yeah, this is a one-off. This will never happen here. I will never be used to bring about that kind of new life into a city like Edinburgh.

But we know that it was a unique event. We know that it was a unique situation, but we also know that that same God works in our lives today, in our city today.

And you know what? Paul didn't find this easy. Paul found this tough. Paul doesn't find preaching easy. Paul doesn't find going to Jews, going to Greeks easy and telling them about Jesus.

[19:34] No. He doesn't find this difficult. Remember in Ephesians 6:19, Paul prays that he would be given boldness.

He knows that in and of himself, he does not have the boldness. He does not have the capacity to reach out to this people. And so Paul goes to God.

He is not some kind of super evangelist that just breezes into a situation, preaches the gospel, thousands come, goes to the next city, know he works hard, he toils, and he is persecuted and he suffers, but he persists because he has God's work to do.

Undoubtedly, God had given Paul great intelligence and a gift for understanding the culture around him so that he is able to present Jesus to them in a way that they can connect with.

Paul used his gifts. He doesn't sit back and drink ice mochas and do nice little Bible studies with Christians. No. He is not sitting back just laddy daddy dying, thankful for the few disciples he has with him.

[ 20 : 48 ] No, he goes out and he proclaims Jesus persuasively. The challenge for us, all of us is to use the gifts God has given us so that people can see Jesus.

Our challenge is to use our gift. We all have gifts. No Christian is without a gift to open up the truth of the Bible to the society in which we live.

Our job as a Christian, our challenge as a Christian is to use our gift to explain to our neighbour that Jesus loves them, to explain to our family that Jesus died for them, to explain to our colleague that salvation comes through Christ alone.

That should drive us to pray for one another. That should spur us on to pray for one another because we know each one of us knows that speaking for Jesus is tremendously difficult.

It's frightening. It's scary. I don't like it. I've never liked doing it, but do it. I must pray for one another, pray for each other, pray that we would be faithful witnesses amongst our circle of friends, our families, our colleagues.

[ 22 : 22 ] As we leave this building tonight, each one of us steps into our own Tyrannus Hall. Each one of us steps into a new situation where we may be the lone voice speaking for Jesus.

We may be the lone Christian living for Jesus. We need encouragement. We need help. Let us encourage one another. Let us pray for one another.

Let us help one another as we seek to live Jesus' lives here in Edinburgh. Most of us, though, will not be like Paul, standing up and delivering great messages of Jesus to hundreds of people.

However, you have your own group. You have your own situation. You have your own context into which you must speak for Jesus.

But get yourself ready because God's Spirit will enable you to speak for Him into your situation. God's Spirit gives us the words that we need to help others see Jesus.

[ 23 : 31 ] Let's get ready to deliver the message of Jesus to our world. Let's begin by listening to the world around us.

Let's stop telling them what we think they think, but let's actually listen to what they are actually saying. Because it's only when we know what they're saying. It's only when we know their thoughts and their feelings, their fears and their suffering can we present the message of Jesus in an appropriate way, in a way that will connect more easily with them.

Often as Christians, we assume a great deal about the world. Let's listen to the world. What are their fears? What are their concerns? Read your newspaper. Read your local newspaper.

Listen and think. How does the message of Jesus relate to that situation? How does the message of Jesus relate to the situation where a prince is born?

How does the message of Jesus help someone who has just lost their job? How does the message of Jesus help someone who is struggling raising a child?

[ 24 : 36 ] Think through how you will present the message. That's what Paul did. He just didn't batter the Ephesians with words. He thought. He knew. He understood the people.

And that is what enabled him to speak so clearly and so persuasively. Because he was hard at work because God's spirit was hard at work in his life.

Because we go out in our own halls of tyrannous, remember that God's spirit goes with us. That God's spirit is right there with us. And he will enable us to speak the words that will reveal to our world the love of Christ.

So we have God's spirit dwells in every believer. We have God's spirit enables every believer to speak for Jesus. We have, in verses 11 to 20, God's power overcomes the fiercest opposition.

This is a strange section of the Bible, ladies and gentlemen. If you haven't read that already, this is one of the most confusing things I have read in the Bible.

[ 25 : 48 ] And to show you how confusing it is, we only need to look at verse 11. And there we note that little phrase, Extraordinary Medicals. Now Luke describes these doings as Extraordinary Medicals.

Now, medicals are Extraordinary in and of themselves. A medical is basically God breaking in and changing the natural way of things. Now when Luke describes a medical, which is an Extraordinary thing as Extraordinary, so we've got this Extraordinary, Extraordinary, we know that we're coming up against something which is pretty confusing.

Now what we are about to see are some amazing medicals in the city of Ephesus. And these extraordinary medicals all begin with some dirty clothes and some miraculous healings. Now what appears to have happened is that after a hard day's work by Paul doing his carpentry thing, his disciples took his work belt and went throughout the city healing people by touching them with this work belt and they were healed.

And they were able even to drive out demons by doing this. It's bizarre, it's strange, it doesn't seem to fit.

[ 27 : 16 ] And you are right to wonder what is God doing here? Why is it in the Bible that a group of disciples are taking over some dirty hankies and a work belt healing people with it?

Bit odd. But this is a unique situation in Ephesus. Now this is where it gets interesting.

What's God doing here while he's doing this? He's speaking into their pagan culture. Now at that time the pagans of Ephesus thought that clean white garments carried a lot of power.

And the pagans of that day believed that clean white garments could be used to carry out great works of power like exorcisms and healings.

What God's saying to the Ephesians through this incident, your worldview, your religion can't accomplish anything of significance. But look at my power.

[ 28 : 25 ] I can use the filthiest, dirtiest rags to bring about amazing things. I can accomplish great things with dirty pieces of material.

God is giving the pagan Ephesians here a clear and highly visible sign of his power. He is giving the Ephesians a reason to stop and think.

God is preparing the Ephesians to receive his message of hope and acceptance through Christ. Some things are going on, but more is to follow. Just when you think things couldn't get weirder,

they do, obviously. And the city has become struck by the power of Jesus.

Wow, the power of Jesus, this is something pretty amazing. And so there are a group of people who go off trying to throw out demons, trying to exercise demons in the name of Jesus.

[ 29 : 37 ] However disaster strikes, it soon becomes clear that these men had no idea of the powers that they were dealing with.

And as they try to drive out the demons, the demons begin to detect a fraud and begin to have a conversation with these so-called priests.

And the demons say to these men who are trying to drive them out, Jesus, I know, Paul, I recognise, but who are you?

And with that, the demon jumps on these seven scuns of Sceva and so destroys them that the priests run out of the building naked and wounded.

You know you have been well and truly beaten in a fight when you leave the scene naked and wounded. They are completely destroyed by these. These sons of Sceva, they wanted the power of Jesus but not the truth of Jesus.

[ 30 : 38 ] They wanted Jesus to bring them riches. They weren't interested in his authority over the lives. They wanted to carry out these exorcisms, these healings because they wanted cash repayment.

They weren't concerned about the fact that God and through Jesus reigned on earth. However, what we see next in verse 17 is how God can use this circumstance, how God can use this event to bring about his glory.

And according to verse 17, when this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. People are completely amazed by this incident.

So full of all are they for the power of God that they fall on their knees and worship the living God.

And as we read through the rest of this chapter, we then notice that this is no quick flash in the pan conversion.

This went deep into their lives and they called out on the name of Jesus. Look at them lining up in verse 18 and 19.

[ 31 : 55 ] They were taking those things which were most precious to them, their library, their books, their means of money making and they are throwing them on the pyre.

Hundreds and hundreds of books are going on to this fire, never to be used again, never to be read by anyone ever again. This was real change. These men of magic were taking the God of Jesus seriously.

God's power had overthrown their worldview and radically altered their lives and they displayed this change in a very visible and striking manner. And they willingly give up their spells for the priceless gospel of Jesus Christ.

Incredible. People who you would not expect to come to Jesus come to Jesus. Have we given up? Have we forgotten that the power of God can come into any life and bring about inner transformation? Are we still remembering that our friends can become Christians?

[ 33 : 06 ] Are we still remembering that our family can become Christians? That our colleagues can become Christians? This event was incredible.

It was unique. But it's that same power that brought new life to these men of magic, can bring new life to your friends and family.

Don't forget the power of God. Don't forget what he can do through you and through me. The Holy Spirit has a work here in Ephesus and as it works it is accompanied by unique events and signs. They are demonstrations of God's power. Let us gain assurance that that power which was at work in Ephesus is the same power we have access to in Edinburgh.

God's power can reveal to men and women, boys and girls, that the belief systems that they hold on to so tightly can be overcome when they see Christ in all of us wondering glory.

[ 34 : 19 ] That Holy Spirit, that power is at work in you and me. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Books of this story belong to the uniqueness of the occasion and Ephesus. But the power to change lives and to see public repentance and to witness those turning away from an old way of life and endeavouring to follow the way that leads to eternal life are for our encouragement for today and tomorrow.

As Christians in Edinburgh, we have the power of God within us. As Christians in Edinburgh, we are unable to speak that gospel because the Holy Spirit is with us.

As Christians in Edinburgh, we can believe that God can overthrow the fiercest of enemies. Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father we come this evening thankful that your power is with us. We come thankful that your Holy Spirit is with us. Lord, let us take great confidence in what you can do.

[ 35 : 32 ] Let us take great confidence in the fact that you will use us to be your witnesses. Thank you that your Spirit enables us to be your ambassadors.

That enables us to show to the world Jesus Christ in all His glory. And we pray, Father, that we would be in step with the Spirit.

That we would listen to His direction and thus live Christ fulfilling lives. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.