

Today's reading's about:

- “getting our faith right”;
- it's about “raising up a new generation of leaders”;
- it's about the life-changing power of God; and
- it's about our response **to** this power....

It really seems quite broad in its scope, but it's all held together by verse 20, which says: ²⁰ **So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.**

- As new leaders were raised up, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.
- As the disciples were getting their faith right, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.
- As the power of God was demonstrated, and as new believers, were giving up everything to follow Jesus, the word of the Lord was increasing and prevailing mightily....

What was it prevailing over? Well, the Kingdom of Light was prevailing over the Kingdom of Darkness.

So,,,,, in Acts chapter 19, we move from Paul's 2nd missionary journey, to the beginning of his 3rd missionary journey. But we've got a bit of an overlap today, because at the end of Chapter 18 we have a bit of a catch-up on what's been happening in Ephesus between Paul's 2 visits.

Alright, so if you have a look at the map here, we've got Paul's 2nd missionary journey, and he's picked up Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, and as Paul heads home to Antioch, he drops Priscilla and Aquila off at Ephesus, and he continues on to Antioch. And then from his missionary base of Antioch, he begins his 3rd missionary journey, which we're not told about

in detail, but in this reading he arrives at Ephesus, and he stays there for at least 2 years. (That's a long time for Paul to remain in one place).

So, we're picking up the story, between when Paul drops Priscilla and Aquila off at Ephesus, and when Paul returns again on his 3rd trip. And we meet a bloke by the name of "Apollos". We're told that Apollos is a Jew, a native of Alexandria (which in later times, becomes quite a centre for Christianity). Alexandria, by the way, is in Egypt. It's a port on the Mediterranean. – you know where the Nile river breaks into a delta, well it's on the western edge of that delta.

And Apollos arrives in Ephesus and starts to preach in the Jewish synagogue... And the description that we're given (of Apollos), I actually find quite confusing.

- He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. (now remember, when the New Testament talks about "the Scriptures", it's talking about the Old Testament, because the New Testament hadn't been written.) – alright, so he was eloquent – he was a good speaker. And he knew the Old Testament scriptures very well.
- He'd also been instructed in the way of the Lord.
- And he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.
- And he did this because he was fervent in spirit.

Wow – you'd think they'd gotten the mother load – they've got the dream preacher...

- He was eloquent

- He knew his bible
- He'd been instructed about Jesus, and he taught accurately
- And he was fervent in spirit

You know, sometimes the most theologically correct sermons, are delivered with absolutely zero fervency ... Why? Because the preacher either doesn't really believe it, or he's not confident in the **power** of it... *Fervency comes from a confidence in the **truth** and **power** of what we proclaim.¹* You don't have to be a gifted orator, to have fervency... *Fervency comes from a confidence in the truth and power of what we proclaim....*

Don't ever get the performance of public speaking, confused with a fervency of spirit... *I never joined the school debating team, because I was no good at it. To be in a debating team, you have to be able to speak passionately and convincingly, about something you don't even believe... - that's not fervency – that's a performance – it's a skill you can learn... Fervency comes, when you're speaking about something you really believe... And if you really believe in the truth and the power of the gospel, the Holy Spirit will give you fervency.*

Anyway, so here we have Apollos – we've just been told all these great things about him, but there's something missing:

- He knew only the baptism of John (and we'll talk more about that shortly)
- And although we've already been told that he taught accurately about Jesus, we're then told that **when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him**

aside and explained to him the way of God **more accurately**

Alright, so he was preaching about Jesus, and he was full of fervency in his preaching... And he was **mostly** right in what he was saying, but he had a few things wrong... So, what did they do with him?

Well, I want you to note what they **didn't** do: They didn't ban him from preaching; They didn't put him on trial for heresy; And they didn't burn him at the stake...

He was a new preacher starting out, he had it **mostly** right, but some of the stuff that's important he had wrong, so they took him aside, and explained to him what he didn't quite have right... And he must've had a teachable spirit, because the church in Ephesus were then willing to send him on to Corinth with their stamp of approval...

The Lord is **always** raising up new leaders... The word of God increases – how does it increase? – Well, one of the ways it increases, is by The Lord raising up **new** leaders, who are willing to preach.... My, how we need more preachers today...

When we were living in Dalby, I was blessed that my minister (Ron Watson), was a man who encouraged me (and others) to preach. I hadn't been to bible college, but I had started studying some biblical subjects externally... I didn't have any university degree... I didn't have any preaching qualifications...

Probably the only thing I had going for me, was I was willing, and I believed – I loved Jesus.

And our church at Dalby only had one preaching place (Dalby)... But we were surrounded by a bunch of other little towns, who didn't have full time preachers. So our minister goes off to the Presbytery meeting, and he says to people "If you need any preachers, just let me know – we've got a few folk who are willing to travel"... And me and a few others end up preaching in places like Dalby; Tara; Jandowae; Chinchilla; Warra; Brigalow; Jondaryan; Oakey; Pittsworth; Millmerran; Roma; Cunnamulla; Wallumbilla.....

There were plenty of opportunities. Did we have everything perfectly correct? Of course not. And I look back at some of my early sermons now (stuff that I thought was pretty good at the time), and I think "Oh my goodness, did I actually say that?" ... (they used to be a fair bit shorter, too, by the way...)

But my minister, would work with me. I remember, the very first sermon I ever gave, he actually got me to preach it to him, in His office, and he gave me feedback. Now, that wouldn't have been of any use to me at all, if I wasn't willing to hear it, and if I wasn't willing to correct what I had wrong. And I look back at some of my old sermons – at what he let go through – and I realise, he was pretty easy on me...

For the word of God to increase and prevail mightily, the Lord is raising up a new generation of preachers today. And guess what – we have to recognise them, and we need to be encouraging them. And for those of us who are preachers, we need to be teachable. We don't always get it right. And it's **important** for us to **get** our faith right, as we see in chapter 19.

So, Paul returns to Ephesus. Earlier, he **sailed** away from Ephesus, and now he's returned via the inland route. Apollos is gone – he's sailed over to Corinth. But it appears as if Apollos may have left something behind, and that is a misunderstanding about Baptism. Remember, Apollos only knew about the baptism of John. And when Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples, and he realised there was something missing. He realised there was something deficient in their faith,² 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."³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."

Now, there's a bit of a debate here amongst Bible scholars, over whether these 12 men disciples of Jesus, or whether they were disciples of John the Baptist... But I think the fact that **Luke** calls them "disciples", means they professed to being Christians.. And certainly with it being tied to Apollos, who knew and taught about Jesus, but only knew the baptism of John, is a pretty fair indicator that they **were** disciples of Jesus. But their faith – what they believed – was a bit off the mark.

And so Paul explained to them the difference. "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

Alright, so Jesus wasn't just the successor to John the Baptist – Jesus is the one who John was pointing to. John preached “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”. And that's what Jesus preached too (by the way), and Jesus' disciples baptised people, the same as John the Baptist did..

But from Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, the message regarding baptism had changed. In Acts 2, the message became: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. No longer is baptism just something about preparing for Jesus' coming, because Jesus had already come. And now He'd sent His Holy Spirit... – the Kingdom of Heaven isn't coming – the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived...

From the time of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had come into the hearts and lives of believers. John the Baptist himself, had foretold ^{Luke 3:16} “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

And that had happened. Jesus had come, and since Pentecost, Christians were being baptised in the Holy Spirit.

The word of God was increasing. The word of God was prevailing mightily, because when these men heard this, ⁵ ... they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy

Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

It was important for them to get their faith right. They were close, but they were missing something **vital**ly important... Baptism in the Name of Jesus, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. And I want to encourage you: “If you believe in Jesus, and you’ve **never** been baptised, then this is something you really should consider.”

Anyway, for 3 months after this, Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue. And some believed, but he also got a fair bit of opposition, so he withdrew from the synagogue, and continued his preaching in a hall. (a bit like us really)

And the Lord was doing extraordinary miracles through Paul.... But then something strange happened. The power that was being displayed in the name of Jesus, was obvious... Even items of clothing that Paul had touched, were carried to the sick, and they were made well.

It was so obvious that non-Christians could see the value of it, and wanted to get in on the act. And 7 sons of someone who claimed to be a Jewish high priest, were trying to drive out a demon by using the name of **Jesus whom Paul proclaims**.

Alright, so they didn’t even know Jesus – **they** weren’t Christians, but they were trying to drive out demons in the **name** of Jesus – they’d seen it work for Paul, and “Well, we’ll do that too.”

And the demon goes feral: “I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?”... And the man who was possessed by the evil spirit got the better of them, beat up the 7 men, **so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**

A few weeks ago, we talked about how demons flee at the name of Jesus... Well, what happened here? **They** used the name of Jesus, and it all went terribly wrong

And there’s an important lesson for us here: In any battle with evil, the name of Jesus is power alright, but only for those who are **in** Jesus. You see, it’s not actually the literal speaking of a name, that gives anyone power... - It’s confessing the Name of the One who is **in** you.

When we **belong** to Jesus – when we are filled with His Holy Spirit, and **then** we confess the name of Jesus, (this Name which we worship; this Name to whom we bow our knee),,, **then** demons will flee ... - not only because He is Lord, but because He is **our** Lord... Demons aren’t afraid of a name, and they’re not afraid of us – they’re afraid of the One who is **in** us. A life yielded to the Lord Jesus, is a life filled with the presence and **power** of Jesus....

But the Sons of Sceva **weren’t** believers – they were **not** disciples of Jesus, and Jesus was **not** in them. And so they copped a hiding...

And that incident caused everyone who heard about it, to develop a holy fear for God – this was no magic trick – this was something to do with the presence of God. And so the Name of Jesus was praised... And the Lord’s victory over

evil, should always develop in us, praise for Jesus, and a healthy and holy fear of God.

²⁰ ... the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

What did that look like in Ephesus???? A total and complete yielding to God in repentance.

V18.... many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who **had** practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

How seriously do **we** really take repentance? You know, as I read the Gospels, it's pretty obvious, that the one thing that always attracts the ire of Jesus, is hypocrisy – When we have an external **show** of righteousness, without a changed life.

How seriously do we really take repentance?

One little boy defined repentance as “Being sorry enough to stop”.

Well, sometimes we feel bad enough about our sin to say “Sorry”, but is that it? Is that really what Jesus wants of me? – just for me to be **sorry** about who I am or something that I've done???? Don't you think He wants to change me??? Does the Kingdom of God really prevail mightily when I just say “Sorry”, and have every intention of staying the same...

I believe, in many ways, we've become a generation who are starving to see the power of God... Am I right in that??? Are you starving to see the power of God? Are you longing to see the word of the Lord continuing to increase and prevailing mightily in your community??? (If not, I'm just going to stop preaching right now, and find another town to preach in)...

So we are – we are a generation who are starving to see the power of God... But the thing is, we fail to realise that the power of God begins with his work, right here, with changed hearts and lives. It begins with a people who don't just say "Sorry" – They say "Never again!"... Because when the word of God prevails mightily, He makes us sorry enough to Stop. But if you're anything like me, it's not that easy. Usually, to carry it through, means we need to take concrete, practical, and (often) costly steps, to **help** us to stop. And so repentance is God and us, working together.

And that's what happened in Ephesus. These new believers came and confessed – it was a **public** confession, of all of their wrongdoings. Some of them had been practicing magic – they'd been caught up in worship of demons, and they brought their books of spells and burnt them... – And that was no little thing. Their total value was 50 000 pieces of silver. A piece of silver was a day's wages, so the value of what they burned, was about \$10 000 000 in our money....

You realise, these things that they burnt, had been their **prized** possessions – they'd saved up for them, and longed for them, and finally they'd saved up enough to be able to buy them... And so these were cherished possessions... But more than that – they were part of their history – It was their identity –

part of who they were... These things that **used** to play such an enormous part in their life – these things that were their very identity – they threw them on the bonfire.... And the word of God prevailed mightily...

When you **first** become a Christian, usually there'll be a lot of big changes, that God makes in your life, real quick... But repentance isn't just a one-off event – it's an ongoing transformation. God doesn't let us just stay the same – He's continually changing us and refining us – the theological term is “sanctification” – And sanctification is the Lord changing us (daily), to become more and more like His Son...

And as part of this “sanctification”, one thing I can promise you, is The Lord is going to **continue** to reveal to you (as He does to me), things that we need to repent of. And I can promise you this because (I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but) you don't look anything like Jesus... Oh, you're probably a lot more like Jesus than when you first believed, but the Lord's not finished with you yet (and He's not finished with me), and so this side of glory, the Lord's going to continue to reveal to us, things we need to repent of. And it may cut to the very core of who we are...

You may even find there's things in your house, you need to burn.

As I wrote this message, I thought about what I need to get rid of. What do I have, that I should never use again? And I thought of a few DVD's I had in the cupboard. When I watched them, they were more crude than I was expecting, and I never want to watch them again. But they're too valuable to just throw away, so I thought “Maybe I should just

sell them on eBay”, but I didn’t, and so they’ve just sat there in the cupboard – unwatched. And as I wrote this sermon, I thought, “Right. Into the fire.”

What do **you** need to repent of? With God’s help, what actions do you need to change? What attitudes? What practices? ... What’s in **your** home that you need to take outside and burn?

- It may be some idol or religious trinket that somebody gave you from an overseas holiday.
- I remember my dad telling me about the time when he burned all of his Masonic Lodge paraphernalia.
- Some friends of mine, when they became Christians, they burned their satanic music.
- Maybe you need to burn your internet modem and your smart-phone
- Maybe every day, when you get your newspaper, you need to burn your horoscope

Or maybe it’s even deeper than that.

- Maybe it’s ingrained racism
- Maybe it’s your politics God wants to change
- Or maybe it’s your career
- Maybe it’s the tough guy – gruff exterior
- Or maybe it’s the proud, self-confident, self-righteous know-it-all

When the word of God prevails mightily, He’ll cut right to the heart – to the very core of our being – to the very identity of who we are... Because I cannot be changed to be like Him, and remain the same as I am...

²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Questions?

ⁱ Fernando Ajith, The NIV Application Commentary – Acts . Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 1998. (p.506-7)