



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 19:8–20

“The Saving Power of the Name of the Lord”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Daniel Dafoe in “The True Born Englishman,” wrote a little stanza that goes like this. “Wherever God erects a house of prayer, the Devil always builds a chapel there. And ‘twill be found upon examination, the latter has the largest congregation.” Someone also has written, it was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Devil is most devilish when respectable.” And George Bancroft, in the same kind of spirit, wrote, “Where Christ erected his church, the Devil in the same churchyard will have his chapel.”

Perhaps it would help to understand some of what we read about in just a moment if we understand some of the things that characterize early Christianity’s people, with whom they had to deal, and, also, things that were characteristic of the Roman age. In the early days of the founding of Rome, augury or foretelling the future by the examination of the entrails of slaughtered animals or by observing the flight of birds, was practiced. That form of exorcism was, of course, a particular kind and associated with a particular era. But it is a striking fact that the early church had to deal with a great deal of the exorcism of their day. The exorcists and the necromancers of the East were often influenced by Jewish individuals, probably, because since they were the recipients of the revelation of God it would be natural that they would have a better understanding of divine things. And, therefore, when they did go wrong, as often they did, they would be much more able to confuse and deceive others.

There are some interesting spells that were pronounced. One notable spell for driving out demons was this, “Hail, Spirit of Abraham, hail spirit of Isaac, hail spirit of Jacob, Jesus the Christ, the Holy One, the Spirit,” then there’s some meaningless terms, “Drive forth the demon from the man until the unclean demon of Satan shall flee before thee. I adjure thee, O demon, whoever thou art by the God Sabarbarbathioth, Sabarbarbathiouth, Sababarbathioneth, and Sabarbarbaphai.” I know I pronounced those correctly because I did it without losing my tongue in the midst of them. [Laughter] “Come forth, O demon,” it continues, “whoever thou art, and depart from so-and-so at once, at once, now! Come forth, O demon, for I shall chain thee with adamantine chains not to be loosed, and I shall give you over to black chaos in utter destruction.” In the Paris magical, the Paris number five hundred and seventy-four, this oath or adjuration was found. “I adjure thee, by Jesus, the God of the Hebrews.”

There are people today, of course, who claim to have some authority over the unclean spirits and claim to know a great deal about demons. Occasionally, in theological seminary you will see a student who gets interested in this kind of thing and begins to think that it is possible for him to cast out demons. Some years ago at Dallas Seminary here, one of the students gained quite a reputation among other students as being skilled in casting out demons. I don’t know about him, whether it was true or not. My own observation was it was not true. But, at any rate, this activity did not enable him to develop exceedingly good skills in exegesis. I listened to him interpret the Bible in exegesis classes and I’m afraid he did not impress any of us with his illumination by the good Spirit, the Holy Spirit, maybe he spent too much time with the evil ones. I don’t know.

I do know this, that one day, sometime later, he came to Believers Chapel, stood up in our meeting, and in the evening where the men have freedom to stand up and speak, and he spoke in tongues and then sat down. And one of his fellow students was there, who’d been in class with him and he stood up afterwards. And he said, “Gary, I would like to publicly rebuke you because you have not followed the teaching of Holy Scripture in what you have done. You have stood up in the meeting and you have spoken in tongues, and the Apostle Paul states very plainly and definitely and

clearly in 1 Corinthians 14, that one should not do that if there is no interpreter present. And there is no interpreter present.” And so it was an effective rebuke of a person who actually claiming to have some special gift proved in the exercise of it that he really did not have it.

Now, the Apostle had a great deal of contact with the exorcists. We’ve already seen some evidence of that previously. But in Acts chapter 19, verse 8 through verse 20, we have another instance of this. And in this particular incident, a great deal of stress is laid upon it by Luke. And so I ask you to turn with me to Acts chapter 19, verse 8 through verse 20. And, I think, as we read through this, we should bear in mind the fact that what we are reading about here is, in its modern form, still with us. And some of its modern forms may be found very frequently on channel 27 or channel 39 or channel, and then you can name the places, for you probably know them just as well as I. We do have this kind of thing today, slightly different forms, but then that’s characteristic of the age, isn’t it? To have the same old thing but in slightly different form, to make us think that it is new. Luke writes, concerning Paul’s visit now to Ephesus again.

“And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

May I interject this. You remember when Paul came, on his first missionary journey, he was prevented from entering into Asia by the Holy Spirit. But here we read that as a result of Paul’s ministry, “All that were in Asia heard the Word.” That leads me just to make this observation that when we think about the teaching of Holy Scripture, we need to remember that we are to obey the words of Holy Scripture, of course. But there is often a time for obedience and a time at which we are not to engage in certain activities that may be set out as activities of Christians. For example, all

Christians are to witness, but all Christians are not to witness at every occasion, upon every circumstance, in which they might have an opportunity to say something, as we will see later on, the Lord Jesus Christ specifically warns against that. And so there was a time for the ministry of the Word to come to Asia. Though Scripture says that the Word of God should go out universally, what the Spirit determines to be the time is of great importance.

So it's the Word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit that is important. It was not the Spirit's will that Paul enter into Asia even though that was within the compass of the great commission on his first missionary journey. But, now, on his third missionary journey it is the time for Paul to engage in ministry and others, and for all in Asia to hear the Word of the Lord. A very important principle, it means that we should not always say something. We should say something when the Holy Spirit guides us and directs us to say something. Verse 11:

“And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus saying, ‘We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.’”

In the Greek text, there is an article there. “By the Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” Now, Luke will give us an instance of what was happening.

“And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.”

Now, there is no record of Sceva, as high priest of the Jews. What this refers to is not that he was a high priest but that he probably belonged to the high priestly family, and that's what Luke means when he says, “A Jew and chief of the priests which did so.”

“And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?’ And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. [So this happened within a building.] And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.”

Now, it seems strange to read “showed their deeds,” showed their practices. This is word from which we get the English word practice, actually. Well, what it probably refers to, and there are instances of the use of this term in ancient literature, is the spells and incantations that they were using. And so they showed their incantations and spells.

“Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Now, that’s a large some of money because a drachma referred to here was the wage of a workman for one days work. Now, if we were talking about plumber’s wages, that’s a vast amount of money. If we’re talking about the rest of us, it’s still a lot of money. So we’re not surprised then to read in verse 20:

“So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege of the reading of the Word of God and we thank Thee for the message that is contained within the section that we have read. The saving power

of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the fact that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. And we pray, Lord, that through the preaching of the Word of God men may be saved. We ask, Lord, that through the preaching of this particular Word today not only individuals in this auditorium but, also, among those who listen to the broadcasts that follow, may there be a number that turn to Him, who is the Savior of human souls, the Lord Jesus Christ; who loved us and loosed us from our sins in His precious blood, who has offered an atonement as we have just sung, for sinners; and whose atoning ministry is sufficient for human salvation. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the blessings of life that come through Him and for the presence of the Holy Spirit who guides and directs the children of God. We ask, Lord, thy blessing upon the whole Church of Jesus Christ, bless its ministry, not only the ministry of Believers Chapel, but the ministry of the whole body of Christ. We pray for our country, for our president, and in these critical days, give wisdom and guidance and direction. And, Father, we give Thee thanks, also, for those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. We especially remember them. We pray Thy blessing on them. And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt give healing if it should please Thee. Give encouragement. Minister to not only those that are afflicted, but also to those who minister to them, and to the families and loved ones who minister to them. May we, O God, rejoice in the way in which Thou dost deal with those who are stricken, and others who have difficulties and trials. We commit them all to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon our meeting. May it honor and glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For His Name's sake, we pray. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is “The Saving Power of the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle is on his third missionary journey and he has returned to the city of Ephesus, sometimes called “The Treasure House of Asia,” a place where Paul stayed longer than he stayed in any other place. And there he stayed longer than he stayed in any other place in spite of the fact that

he had many adversaries there. As he writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 in verse 9, he says that there is “a great and effectual door” that has been opened unto me, but there are many adversaries.

Ephesus was the city preeminently of Diana’s Temple, a great wonder of the ancient age, four hundred and twenty-five feet long, two hundred and twenty feet wide, sixty feet high; it truly was one of the wonders of the day of the apostle. It was also a great city of pagan superstition, because it was one of those refuge cities. It’s not surprising that there, therefore, gathered in Ephesus all kinds of crooks and criminals.

In one of Shakespeare’s plays, “The Comedy of Errors,” there is a Syracusian by the name of Antipholus, who speaks concerning Ephesus, and he says, “They say this town is full of cozenage as nimble jugglers that deceive the eye, dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, soul-killing witches that deform the body, disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, and many such-like liberties of sin.” So it was a city of unusual pagan superstition. It was the place where you could buy charms and amulets, and you could also buy Ephesian letters, which were little scraps of paper that had spells and other occult material on them which you could recite if you wanted to control the spirits in some way. It was the place where you could get rabbit’s feet and where you could buy all kinds of metals, whatever they may be called, those things were to be found in Ephesus. And the magical papyri make reference to this.

It was also a city of commerce; one of the great commercial cities of the ancient world. And when John writes the book of Revelation, as one expects, it is given to him by the Lord Jesus, but it is given in terms that would be understood by John as well as by others. And John was associated with that part of the land and spent his last days in exile on the isle of Patmos, off of Asia Minor. And, consequently, it’s not surprising that in the description of the overthrow of the greatest commercial city described in the Bible, in Revelation chapter 17, and specifically in chapter 18, the terms that are used to describe the overthrow of Babylon are terms that are taken from the commerce of the day of the Apostle John. And since Ephesus was nearby, and since it was one of the great commercial cities, it is not far fetched to think that some of the description is given of

Ephesus. And after describing all of the wealth of the city and all of the kinds of goods in which men were dealing, the last phrase of chapter 18 in verse 13, dealing with the commerce of the city of Ephesus, perhaps, is the expression, “And the souls of men.” For it was a city so filled with superstition that the souls of men and women were truly at stake, in the way they responded to life in the city of Ephesus.

We certainly find that confirmed as we look at this short passage of thirteen carefully written verses, by Luke, the historian of the early church. They tell us a great deal of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. But we can learn a whole lot more in other places. In chapter 20, Paul will speak to the Ephesians elders on his way back to the city of Jerusalem, and he will refer to things that were happening during the ministry, which are not set out by Luke in Acts chapter 19 in 1 Corinthians written from Ephesus, the apostle tells us things about Ephesus there. And then, of course, in Ephesians, the epistle written to the church at Ephesus, we have other things that are said about the Ephesian believers and others. One thing appears emphasized in all of these things; it is this, the saving power of the name of the Lord Jesus. So that’s what we’ll try to lay stress upon as we look at the section today.

Remember, Paul, on his second missionary journey, on his way back to the city of Jerusalem, to observe the Passover feast, took Aquilla and Priscilla, traveled across the Aegean, came to Ephesus, left them there. And then after engaging in further discussion in the synagogue, Paul left for the city of Jerusalem, giving them the promise that he would return. He went to Jerusalem. He, evidently, was there in time for the feast. Then, afterwards, he left, traveled again up on the land, came again to Ephesus, as he had promised them, and it seems as if he picks up exactly where he left off. Because, in the 8th verse, describing his ministry, Luke says, “He went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months.”

Now, this is not a three months long sermon. I don’t think they could take that. But what it refers to is the fact that Sabbath day, after Sabbath day, the apostle would go in. And when the time came for the ministry of the Word, the apostle would stand and he would discourse concerning the

teaching of Scripture in the light of the things that we’ve been seeing in this book, undoubtedly, he would take his readers through the history of Israel and point to the fulfillment of the great promises in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he picks up in the synagogue, discoursing boldly, for three months, “Disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Now, Paul had a great deal of results in the city of Ephesus; the existence of the church indicates that. The existence of elders in the church, and other things indicate that, probably, he was as effective in his ministry there, judged by the human standards, as he was anywhere else except, perhaps, Berea, where they were more noble than those in Thessalonica and studied the Scriptures as well as listened to the preaching of the Word of God.

Now, Paul, Luke says, preached “The things concerning the kingdom of God.” This was one of the watchwords of early Christianity, one of the watchwords, really, of the Bible, and it’s still one of the watchwords of Christianity. One of the very useful ways in which to read the Bible is to read it with some key phrase in mind, keeping it in mind as you go through. I read through the whole of the Bible, looking for the expression “the kingdom of God” or “The kingdom,” because, I think, it’s one of the key phrases of the Word of God. It’s one of the watchwords of Scripture. It’s characteristic of movements to have watchwords. Islam has one: God is God and Mohammed is His Prophet. The French Revolution had one of the most famous ones: Liberty Equality and Fraternity. The Democratic idea has had a watchword: Government of the People, by the People, for the People. The Student voluntary missionary movement had as its watchword: The evangelization of the world in this generation.

Most new ideas, that have stirred the hearts of men, have been ideas that could be put in a few words. The Church of Christ, which has had great influence in our part of the country, has a little watchword. It’s not a bad one. It’s a pretty good one. It’s “When the Bible speaks, we speak. When the Bible is silent, we are silent.” That’s not a bad idea because I have lots of friends who, when the Bible speaks, they speak. And when the Bible is silent, they go on speaking and speaking.

And one has to learn to distinguish between the things that the Bible says and the things that people say the Bible says.

Now, we have a movement today that we are observing on our newspapers, the front pages, it's the movement of the Shiite Muslims. They have a watchword too: Death to America, Death to America. This is characteristic of a movement and theirs is that watchword. When we come to biblical things, one of the watchwords is “The kingdom of God.” What is meant by the term, The kingdom of God? Now, it's possible to have a false idea of a watchword, and still repeat it, all of the time. Sometimes that's true of “The kingdom of God.” There are people who talk about the kingdom, the kingdom of God, and what they mean is the church. They speak of things that have to do with the kingdom. If you ask them what they're talking about, well, it's things that have to do with the church, as if the church is the kingdom. Nowhere in Scripture is the church ever identified as the kingdom.

Now, the church, the true church of believers, is composed of individuals who have membership in the kingdom; but the church is not the kingdom. In fact, when we talk about the Kingdom, we sometimes lose one of the major stresses of it. It's the “Kingdom of God.” One gets the impression from much use of it that we are really talking about something that we are doing when we talk about the kingdom or even about the kingdom of God. Whereas, in Scripture, it's the kingdom of God. In other words, the thing that we must never fail to stress is the little prepositional phrase “of God.” The Kingdom of God.

Now, Jewish individuals as well as Christian individuals have often laid stress on the wrong thing. It is the kingdom of God, in the sense that he is responsible for its establishment. He is responsible for its coming to the face of this earth. Now, when we look at it from the standpoint of Paul's preaching, if you look through Paul's preaching and he says, Luke says, he preaches the kingdom, the kingdom of God. Paul later will mention specifically, he preached the kingdom. What is referred to, when you look at all of Paul's preaching, is the death, the burial, the resurrection, and the

coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the kingdom is grounded in the death and resurrection and second coming of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is one sense in which we can speak of the kingdom as being in existence now; in the sense that the Lord Jesus has shed his blood, has ratified the New Covenant, has ratified the Davidic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenantal promises, and now is at the right hand of the Father, as pledge of the completion of all that is found in the promises of the kingdom in the Word of God. In that sense, we can say the King is at the right hand of the Father, at the present time, and he awaits the consummation of the kingdom in its manifestation, its physical manifestation, on the face of this earth. It will be realized when our Lord comes at his second advent.

Now, we've had indication of that previously in the book of Acts. In chapter 14, in verse 22, we read: “Confirming.” Now, this is a reference to the apostle and those traveling with him, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith; and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

Now, it is evident from a careful perusal of those words that they have not yet entered. It would be no point in saying this if they had already entered. He is saying there are certain things that must transpire before you enter and among them are the tribulations, the experiences of Christians in which they suffer. Those are preparatory to entrance into the kingdom.

Now, if you ask the question then, how is the kingdom entered? Well, the Lord Jesus has given us very, very plain information concerning that in his interview with Nicodemus, in which He said, in chapter 3, in verse 3, to this Pharisee, “Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And then in the 5th verse, “Verily, verily, Nicodemus, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” So when a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the king at the right hand of the Father, he becomes a son of the kingdom, and he is destined to enter the kingdom in the future in its glorious earthly manifestation. Now, if you'll look at all of the places in which Paul uses the term

“kingdom of God” some of them, you cannot tell whether he is talking about one aspect or another. But when he speaks plainly about the kingdom, it becomes evident that his primary sense is the sense of the future manifestation of what he has accomplished in the blood of the cross.

Now, Paul preached for three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But, like so many preachers, Paul discovered that after a period of time, there came to be an evidence of hardening on the part of some who were listening to the apostle preach. It’s hard for us in the Christian church to ever think that people could have listened to the Apostle Paul and actually have been hardened while they were listening to Paul. But, nevertheless, it’s true. Men were hardened when they listened to the Lord Jesus Christ. They become hardened when they listen to Paul. And, for the rest of us, we don’t take any comfort in that, but we at least can understand why it is that people can hear the gospel, hear the gospel, and finally reach the place where they cannot, it seems, respond. Jesus said, “Give not that which is holy to the dogs, cast not your pearls before swine, because they may turn and rend you.” So there comes a time when it is proper for us to stop preaching to some people and turn to others and turn to other forms of ministry. And Paul, evidently, thought that that was the appropriate time here. To think of it in one sense, it’s an amazing thing. Here are people in the presence of the immortal, if I may use a human term, the immortal apostle, and yet they were not responsive. Think how those spirits must feel down through the ages of eternity. “I was sitting in the synagogue in Ephesus, and I heard Paul preach the gospel, and I turned away from it. And I perceive now that he was preaching the Word of God.” I can understand why Scripture speaks about the lost, gnashing their teeth together, because it must be something to conjure up individuals who had a chance to hear Paul.

Bunyan in his noble work, speaks at the conclusion of the book, saying, “Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven.” It’s often been pointed out that as the Lord Jesus died between the two thieves, one turned in faith to him, the other went into a Christless eternity. Both from the side of the cross. Many men will go into an eternity of separation from God in the midst of the pure and plain preaching of apostles and prophets. And some will no doubt go

into an eternity of lostness, listening to common preachers like me as well. So Paul thought the time had come for change and so, he decided, evidently, to rent a little school building.

Now, one of the texts of the New Testament, probably not genuine but perhaps representative of tradition, says that Paul preached from the 5th hour unto the 10th hour daily in the school of Tyrannus. He separated the disciples, he disputed daily from the 5th hour unto the 10th hour in the school of one Tyrannus. Now, the 5th hour, as recorded by them would be 11 o'clock in the morning. The 10th hour would be 4 in the afternoon. So this is about five hours of preaching and teaching. And, remember, this is in the middle of the day. Now, if you've been to Ephesus in the summertime, you know that it is a warm place. In fact, it's very much like New Orleans or Charleston or Houston. And so the tendency of people then is to want to take a little siesta. Charlestonians eat their dinner at 1:30 in the afternoon, take a little siesta afterwards, and go back to work at 3:30 in the afternoon and work for a little while from 3:30 on. If you go to places now in Italy, you'll find similar kinds of hours. So the apostle preached in the time of the day in which men were ordinarily enjoying their siesta. In fact, it was said by one Roman writer that the proper time to tell a ghost story was during this period of time because most people were home and sleeping on their beds. And so that would be the time to tell a ghost story.

Now, this is rather amazing because remember Paul later will say, when he preaches to the Ephesian elders that he worked with his hands and supported himself while he was there. So he carried on his leather-working ministry in the morning, beginning early in the morning, worked until 11 o'clock and then began his preaching and teaching and did that for five hours. And then when he finished, he went on back to his working ministry. That was of course, something for the apostle to do this and it was really something for those who worked, and then to go in to listen to a preacher and teacher for five hours, now isn't it? Some of you are looking at me like, what am I supposed to do? I know it's something, of course. You have a hard time listening to me for forty minutes. How would you like to, I know, but you say, “But Paul would be different.” [Laughter] No! It wouldn't be

different at all, as we shall see. Not long later in the book of Acts, people can fall asleep while Paul is preaching, too. That’s very comforting to some of us common preachers.

But he preached for five hours in the school of Tyrannus. Now, I say, that he rented this property. That’s probably true. We don’t really know, of course, how he managed to do it. Maybe Tyrannus had become a Christian. What a name for a schoolmaster? Tyrannus. That’s the Latin word for tyrant. I wonder if his parents gave him the name or whether his pupils gave him the name. It was like Horace, who spoke about his teacher by the name of Orbillius, and he called him Plagosis; that’s a Latin expression that means thrasher. So like most teaching in those days was done by a simple pedagogical device and method. We cannot use it today, but it wouldn’t be a bad way to learn. Their method was this; in this repetition, punctuated with corporal punishment. You tended to learn or else. And, consequently, they were good teachers. And I’m sure thrasher was a good teacher and probably Tyrannus, also. I don’t know how he got his name, but that’s a good name for a schoolteacher. And I’ve had one or two that, I think, could go by that name, also, in my past.

Now, as a result of this, separating the disciples, bringing them in and instructing them, they continued by the space of two years, “so that all they that dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus.” And so those that were listening to Paul evidently went out, proclaiming the things that they were hearing and the result was marvelous things in the province of Asia.

Now, Luke goes on to speak about a most interesting incident here that happened in the midst of a superstitious people. Sometimes with superstitious people, God gives a kind of superstitious appeal. You can find some instances of that in the Old Testament. And here, in the midst of a superstitious people, God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul. Paul alludes to this, by the way, in several places in his writing. He was a man who was an apostle and he said the signs of an apostle. Those mighty miracles that were done in the history of the early church were the product of the apostolic ministry. They were means of confirming the ministry that the apostles were giving, and confirming the revelation of God that would come through them. That’s why down through the centuries the miracles have ceased. And the modern resurgence of claims concerning

miracles, in my view, mind you; there are some men who would certainly disagree—but in my view, they’re false. And I do not think that they are transpiring. Men today do not have the gift of miracles as is set out in the New Testament.

Now, we must not say that God does not perform miracles. He may perform a miracle at any time. But we’re talking about individuals with the gift of miracle working; that’s something different from saying that God does not perform miracles. I do believe God performs miracles. But, so far as miraculous workers are concerned, so far as I can tell, there are none of them today.

Now, God did some mighty miracles through Paul. They were not violations of natural law, but activity of law in a higher realm. Just as he did mighty miracles through the Lord and through Peter. One of these is a rather strange thing. We read here that “From Paul’s body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them.” Strange things were happening. We may have had the Church of the Perspiration Band growing up, or something like that. But at any rate, there were miraculous things. Today we are told, on the basis of this, since we don’t have the privilege of having pieces of garments. Some do offer that, some offer little handkerchiefs if you send them money. Put your hand on the radio and you will receive a certain kind of healing. That is largely nonsense. But there are always gullible people who will believe that and, unfortunately, many of them are evangelicals.

Now, Luke says that there were a number of vagabond Jews, who were exorcists. That’s not unusual. We know from history that there were many Jewish people among the exorcists. And, I think, it’s understandable, because they did have a greater history behind them, having the revelation of God, as we know of it in the Old Testament. They would have a knowledge of spiritual things that would surpass the pagans and the heathen. And so it’s not surprising that some of them, false to their own faith, would decide that this was a nice way to make money. Just as today, there are many people who are in the Christian ministry to make money in order to get along in the world, to have the right kind of home, the right kind of automobile, to have the nice, the right size bank account, and all of the things that go along with it.

Luke says, they were exorcists. And when they heard of the things that Paul was doing, and evidently, they were a bit down on their own luck, they said, “We better start using that little spell and incantation that that fellow Paul is using, because he’s getting results with the name Jesus.” And so they decided that they would put their own *Ephesia grammata* or Ephesian letters, in their pocket or in their file, and they would go around using the name of Jesus. And so they said, “We will just call over these people who have evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying ‘We adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’”

That’s a very interesting thing because it illustrates for us the fact that if a man repeats something that someone else has used with authority and fruit, it doesn’t necessarily mean that he will be fruitful in the things that he sets out. You can see all of this in Christianity, incidentally. You see young preachers want to imitate older preachers, who’ve been fruitful. But they always imitate the outward things, the things that don’t really matter.

When Mr. Truitt was preaching with such fruit here in the city of Dallas, he used to always come in the pulpit, and he would grasp the pulpit. I heard him in one of his last messages that he gave here in Dallas. He would grasp the pulpit like this, and put one foot forward, and preach this way. Well, all over Southern Baptistdom, young preachers would come and they would come in the pulpit, and they would take the pulpit like this and they would put one foot forward. But they didn’t sound like George Truitt. And so it’s characteristic of us to imitate the things that don’t really matter, the things that appeal to people, the outward things, that is, the things we think appeal to people. But, the inward vitality of the personal relationship to the Lord, which a man like Truitt had, that’s not something that you can imitate. That comes from an experience with the Lord God which Mr. Truitt had and other effective preachers have had.

So here were the exorcists, and they were shouting out the name, the Lord Jesus. But they didn’t have the experience of the Lord that the apostle had. And so Luke describes a humorous little incident. He says they went into a little place. Now, I don’t know what it was. Back when I was preaching on this some years ago, we were living in the days of people who were dressed in bell-

bottomed pants with flowered shirts and long chains hanging down from their necks, hair down to their shoulders, tangled, matted and dirty, with a bandanna wound around it, long sideburns, handlebar moustache, obviously, in mortal danger of strangling to death the next time a person used food. They were driveling out such nonsense as “I’m against the establishment.” Ah, you know. We live in the days of the Yuppies. Things are different. Now young people are wearing Brooks Brother’s shirts, button down collars, white, preferably. They care about their hair, They have it styled. They go to the stylist shop. They wear Gucci. They drive Mercedes. They don’t walk around on the street barefooted. And so they go down to their little happy hour place called “Yuppie’s Suppie.” [Laughter] And there they go in and they sit around the table and they think about moving up and getting on in the world. Interested in car, money, position, power, influence, the Word of God? Yeah, we’ve heard of that too. They, also, are engaged in ministering to the outer man, the body, and everybody’s concerned about that. Well, I can just imagine one of these exorcists among the Jews going into “Yuppie’s Suppie” and seeing over in the corner a person dressed in the latest thing, hair beautifully styled, and recognizing that here’s a guy that really is indwelt by a spirit, goes over to him and says, “I adjure thee in the name of the Lord Jesus. Come out!” And the spirit which controlled the individual gave a response which they weren’t anticipating. This spirit says, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? I can whip you.” And with that, the person jumps up out of his chair, and he grabs the individual and begins to tear away his clothes and, finally, the poor fellow escapes in his underwear.

Well, I’m not surprised that the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed in Ephesus, when things like that were happening. So Luke tells us a story. Those were vigorous days, you know. It would have been nice to have lived in those days. It would have been exciting, and it was surely exciting. And, as a result of this, and what was happening, it obviously brought the sense of reality to the people. Here come the Christians. Here come the people who sit in Believers Chapel, believe it or not. Or in Northwest Bible or in First Baptist Church or in Highland Park Presbyterian. Here they come. And what do they do? Why, they confess their sins. They believed, mind you, but they

confessed and they showed their deeds. What did they bring up? Well, they brought up the little spells and incantations that they were using. Now, they were using them, and others didn't know about it probably. They kept it rather quiet. It was known in the family. And so they had their little spells and incantations, too.

You know, it illustrates a very important thing. It illustrates this fact; that Christians may walk according to a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. That's a very interesting point. These were believers, mind you but, yet, they had their little spells too. Now, you know, there are some of my friends who tell me, and they're good friends of mine, I don't know whether I should say this or not but I'm going to say it. They're Calvinists, but they're human. They tell me it's impossible for a Christian to be a carnal believer. I don't believe that for a moment. I've known too many Christians. It's possible for a Christian to be a carnal believer.

Now, I want to say something else very plainly, so it's not misunderstood. It's not possible for a Christian to remain a carnal believer because God has a system of discipline, and he sets it out. For this cause, difficulties in the Church at Corinth, for this cause some were weak, some are sickly, and some have fallen asleep in physical death. So we cannot remain carnal. But, we can be believers and be carnal. Not be walking according to the Word of God. And I just sense in the light of the low spiritual condition of many of us, I include myself, in the light of our low spiritual condition, it's possible that we have what may be compared with the spells and incantations of those Ephesians. Our things are a little different. We are members of a different kind of society. Our influences are worldly and fleshly as well. And, also, spiritual as well in that we put things before the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And it would be good for us to have a good time of confession by the side of our beds and ask God to bring transformation into our lives. Many of us are far too interested in material things. We are far too interested in attaining a status materially in our society. We are far more interested in power and success than we ought to be. And some of us might find that power and success come when we put the Lord God first. You might find how easy it is for God to arrange things, to be exactly what you would hope to be, but in an entirely different way. So they came

forward. And then many others also, who used magic, brought their books together and burned them all before men. And they counted the price of them, and it was fifty thousand pieces of silver. An amazing display of trust in the material and spiritistic side of things. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.

Now, I'd like to close with just a few comments, because our time is up. Just point out, very simply; we have a beautiful example in Paul of the man of God, sacrificing, laboring, loving, as we shall see later when we hear his message to the Ephesian elders, being loved, a tent maker, an apologist for the Christian faith, a teacher, a pastor, one man, absolutely at the disposal of the Lord, and under his spell. O, how important and how fruitful it is to be under the spell of the Lord God rather than under the spell of the world.

And then, we have an example to avoid. Ephesus, a city that began well, with the ministry of the Apostle Paul, forty years later, Jesus writes to Ephesus, the same church founded by Paul in his preaching and says, “You have left your first love.” I remind you, those of you who have been faithful, in Believers Chapel, Believers Chapel is twenty-three years old. Twenty-three years ago, almost exactly, today, about June the 22nd, as I remember we started, in nineteen sixty-two, twenty-three years, only seventeen more years until the forty years are finished. Will our Lord say to us, “You have left your first love.” Will he say the same kind of thing?

And then, one last thing, it's obvious that Luke is laying stress upon the fact that there is only one name, through which men may be saved. The law may restrain actions, ethics may proclaim principles that it has no power to realize. Education casts out the demon of ignorance. And, often, makes other spirits more dangerous. Medicine heals the body, leaves the soul sick. Psychiatry exposes the causes of guilt based psychosomatic illness, but cannot grant forgiveness. Only Christ's evangelist can point men to resources beyond himself to the name, the name of the Lord Jesus; to all other names such as psychiatry, medicine, whatever, the demons shout, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” I bring to you the name of the Lord Jesus. There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. Don't leave this auditorium without the

“The Saving Power of the Name of the Lord” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

assurance of a relationship to the name above all other names, the name of Christ, who offered the atoning sacrifice about which we sang in the first hymn and who has made it possible for sinners to be saved. May God help you to come to him in faith, to believe, and receive forgiveness of sins in grace.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the marvelous way in which Luke has recorded for us the history of the early church. O God, we pray that we as the church of the twentieth century may experience the blessing of God in the most realistic of ways, and in Believers Chapel, O God, work mightily in our midst, to the glorification of the name that is above every name.

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.