*Read also 2 Chronicles 33:2-7, 1 Chronicles 16:8-15*

Who says the Bible isn’t funny! That is one of the funniest stories in the Bible, and can’t you just hear that demon possessed man saying, “Jesus I know and Paul I know, *but who are you*?”

Paul was very well known in Ephesus, where this story takes place. Looking at the map, we see towns where Paul has traveled as an evangelist – Antioch, the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, just before going to Ephesus. This is his third and last missionary journey and he lived in Ephesus about three years, working there as a tentmaker. Paul had suffered elsewhere, so Ephesus was a little oasis for him, and Paul’s reputation grew as a man of God, a powerful disciple of Jesus Christ.

Ephesus had its reputation. Ephesus was known for one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the largest Greek temple of Artemis. So, one of the issues in that city was the presence of the occult and practice of magic.

Demon possessions and the presence of exorcists were common. People then were very savvy about the spiritual realm. Secularism was unknown. People who did not worship the God of Israel worshiped other gods, and often Israel was drawn into this idol worship, even though the Bible cautioned them strongly against it.

Earlier we read about Kings Manasseh, son of King Hezekiah, who led Israel into idol worship. He adopted the cultish practices of pagan nations. He constructed “gods” of those nations and set them up in the temple of the Lord. This was completely despicable to God, and it also led Manasseh into terrible self-deception, as he sacrificed his own sons in the practice of sorcery, divination, and witchcraft.

Many of these cults still operate today; in fact, paganism is the fastest growing religion in the 21st century.

But God said that His name is to be honored in His temple, and so God disciplined Manasseh by allowing him to be taken captive, bound, and exiled to Babylon. When that happened Manasseh had second thoughts; he humbled himself before God, and promised to remove all the idols. God heard his prayers and eventually restored him. Manasseh did as he had promised and removed all the idols from Israel. And the name of the Lord was made known in the temple once again.

When we come here to worship in this sanctuary, we make known the name of the Lord. We honor God as the Bible teaches. We talk about the wonderful works of God so that we can remember God is strong; God is present; God can help us; and God guides us in how to live. Paul proclaimed this same message to the Ephesians.

The man with the demon said, “I know Paul.” And, “I know Jesus.” He knew Paul because of his commitment to Jesus. And, Jesus’ reputation had spread because of His resurrection, which declared Him to be the Son of God.

You understand reputation. You are aware of the activities of famous people, such as Prince William of Wales and his new princess. The prince’s name alone carries respect and infers privilege. When a prince marries, his bride also enjoys the power and privilege of nobility. Likewise, Paul enjoyed the association with the power of the name of Jesus because Paul was closely associated with Jesus.

The demon was aware of both Paul’s and Jesus’ power.

Paul’s power was so strong that the do-rag he wore around his head when he worked healed people if it touched their skin. The power of the Holy Spirit in him was so great that evil spirits were expelled merely by coming in contact with his carpenter’s apron.

This Scripture said Paul’s ability to heal was extraordinary. It was unusual and remarkable. The miracles were not commonplace, and in fact, indicated a direct visitation from God.

Miracles are indeed not the norm and indicate an intense, personal connection with Jesus Christ.

However, when Jesus sent out the seventy, He gave them power to heal and cast out demons. So we must understand that the power of God is freely given to believers, and over the course of history there are records of individuals with extraordinary gifts of power.

But this Scripture teaches there are qualifications. If we think that miracles are casually given, we are sorely misinformed. The people who receive such gifts pray two to three hours a day. They are especially close to Jesus Christ. They do not make a show of the miracles in order to draw attention to themselves. The gift of healing is entirely sacred, and those who attempt to gain it casually, well, let’s just say, they will be clearly humiliated. I think the seven sons of Sceva would agree.

You might have noticed in this story that these exorcists were priests. Doesn’t that seem odd? I mean, they are *pastors* – leaders in the faith. Yet they are delving into magic. You might expect it from pagans but from the Jews? This indicates that Israel still struggled. They synthesized their beliefs with the occult, with magic.

That is common today. Particularly when people view God as really high and far removed, they will turn to folk magic, which seems more “at hand.” I have friends who believe that today, that God is going to do what God is going to do anyway.

And if you feel that way, you probably don’t think it matters much to pray. And, you might find yourself in this category of turning to magic.

Magic can be things like horoscopes, or lucky charms, or psychics or superstitions which people turn to deal with everyday troubles in life, people often turn to magic workers, or spells, or, other powers. Ephesus was a city that did exactly that. A great center of magical practices, Ephesus was famous for its “Ephesians’ Letters” which were “written charms, amulets and talismans.”

God was at work to free Ephesus from this grip of magic because it is absolutely meaningless and an insult to God.

Now, how did He do it? The book to the Ephesians gives us some clues. Paul teaches the Ephesians (and us) that God is not far removed or unable to handle life’s problems.

Have we seen in this congregation that God is near when we call to Him?

Paul says, Jesus is full of grace, and works his resurrection power in those who believe. This power is

* far above any power, rule, and dominion,
* above every name that is named,
* Jesus is so powerful that all things have been put under His feet,
* and are subject to Him as the head (1:19-22).

So when you pray to Jesus, believing in who He is, you are far better off than trusting that lucky charm or fortune teller or horoscope or wishing on a star or a bale of hay or a fortune cookie.

Paul told the Ephesians, “The power at work within you is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all you can ask or imagine” (3:20).

Do you understand the power in Jesus’ name? Or do you believe He is far away, removed from your everyday life, unavailable, and not listening? Paul said *He is so close you are His body* (5:30).

Now if that isn’t close enough for you, Paul says *you are the “bride/wife” of Christ.*

Now if that doesn’t make sense to you, Paul says your body is *“the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit*” (2:21). That is exclusive closeness.

Therefore we must not grieve the Holy Spirit with unholy living or unholy loyalties that include other spiritual strongholds.

All that intimacy results in you really knowing Jesus Christ, not just being *slightly acquainted*. Healing power is not magic; rather power comes when you know the Lord well.

If you are not intentional about it, you can go through your whole life and never really feel or experience that intimacy. It’s knowing the person behind the name that matters most.

Well, when the Ephesians saw Paul’s extraordinary power and then witnessed the exorcist wanna-be’s get beaten up by the demon-possessed man, they realized who had the true power. They turned away from all that stuff which was not consistent with the Christian faith. First they confessed that they did that stuff. Then they burned their books of magic – they didn’t sell them, even though they were worth thousands. They destroyed them.

They wanted their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ to be unmistaken.

Is your loyalty unmistaken? Realize He dwells within you so that you may know Him. Invest yourself in Him and you will find that “the power at work within you is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all you can ask or imagine” – in the name of Jesus.

AMEN