



Central Peninsula Church

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What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

Our mission statement as a church is “to make and mature more followers of Christ.” For some time now we’ve been studying the book of Acts and this has really provided something of a foundation for that mission statement because Acts is all about how the early church went about making and maturing more followers of Christ—starting in Jerusalem and then spreading out as far as Rome.

Integral in this process has been the Apostle Paul. We observed Paul on his first missionary journey with Barnabas as they sailed from their home church in Antioch to the island of Cyprus and then onto the mainland of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) where they preached and planted churches in the southern region of Galatia.

Then we saw Paul and Silas on that second missionary journey traveling north through Syria and Cilicia and then on to Troas. There Paul had his vision of a Macedonian man calling him over. They sailed to Macedonia and planted churches in Philippi and Thessalonica, part of what we know of as Europe. Paul then came to Corinth and spent a year and a half teaching and establishing a vibrant fellowship of believers. Finally, they headed home, on the way stopping at Ephesus; the Ephesians wanted them to stay but Paul pressed on to Jerusalem, promising that if it was God’s will he would return.

And then last week we saw Paul begin his third missionary journey. Paul traveled through Galatia, strengthening the believers in those churches he had already planted, and then came back to Ephesus. No doubt Paul had had his eyes on Ephesus for some time. It was the queen city of the province of Asia. It enjoyed the power of Rome, the splendor of Greek culture, and it was at the high tide of religious influence. Ephesus was a breeding place of magical practices and was home to the temple of Diana, a structure that ran the length of a football field and was considered one the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Today and next week we’ll look at Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. It was a significant one. Paul would spend two years there, longer than any other place. In Ephesus Paul would establish a flourishing church. He would pen his letters to the Corinthians and take up a collection from Gentile churches to be brought as a love gift to the needy Jewish Christians of Judea. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that from Ephesus Luke tells us in

v.10 that “**all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.**” And as a result of Paul’s ministry there, Luke reported in v.20 that “**the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.**”

But what we’ll see this morning is that it didn’t start out that way. I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase, “what you don’t know can’t hurt you.” In some cases that might be true, but when it comes to matters of faith nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, what you don’t know CAN hurt you. When Paul came to Ephesus he encountered a variety of people who were being very hurt by what they didn’t know. Some of us today think we know some things about faith, but we really don’t know what we need to know and that could hurt us. Others of us know we don’t know, but we don’t really care that we don’t know because we don’t see how it’s hurting us, but it is. So today we’re going to see how dangerous that is and what it is we need to know and why.

I. The disciples of John didn’t know Jesus.

The first group that Paul encounters in Ephesus are described in vv.1-7. Luke says Paul came to Ephesus and “found some disciples there.” It sounds as if these are disciples of Jesus. I would imagine that on the surface that’s what they appeared to be. But as Paul spent time with them he began to sense that something was wrong; something was missing. Right away we’re reminded that you can look like a Christian and even act like a Christian but not really be the genuine article.

And so like a skilled doctor Paul began to probe, looking for a diagnosis. He asks them two questions. The first is in v.2 “**And he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’**” You see, it was Paul’s assumption that when a person truly believed in the Lord Jesus he would receive the Holy Spirit. That’s why in Rom. 8:9 Paul wrote, “**But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to him.**” So Paul wasn’t implying that somehow when they believed they might have missed out on the gift of the Spirit. He was in fact questioning the reality of their faith because from what he could tell the Spirit wasn’t present in their lives. You ask, “Well, how could he know that? Isn’t he being a bit judgmental here? What right does he or anyone else have to question someone else’s faith?” But it’s a fair question to ask because there ARE certain indications that the Spirit of God is actually present in a person’s life. Jesus himself said, “**He who believes in Me... ‘From his**

innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” John says in the next breath, **“But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive”** (Jn 7:38-39). Like a gushing river, the Spirit makes a tangible difference in our lives.

It's like a 17-year-old boy who falls in love for the first time. All of a sudden, you notice he's different. He dresses different. He actually puts on a clean pair of underwear. He smells different. “Why are you wearing my cologne?” He even acts different. There's a bounce in his step. He even vacuums out his car. In the same way, the presence of the Spirit makes us different and it's noticeable. That's why Paul could say, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control”** (Gal. 6:22-23).

So as Paul got to know this little band of about twelve men he began to see that something was missing. And he was right to question this because look at their answer, “No, we have not heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” That's a very revealing answer, isn't it? “We didn't even know there was such a thing!” I believe we have a bit of hyperbole here. No doubt they had read of the Spirit in the Old Testament. And as disciples of John they had heard of the Holy Spirit because John said that while he baptized with water the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit. What they're more likely saying then is that while they had heard of the Spirit they had no idea that he'd been poured out upon the disciples of Jesus.

So Paul asks them a second question in v.3, **“Paul said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’** His first question linked the Spirit with belief while this question linked the Spirit with baptism. Remember in the New Testament water baptism is the initiatory rite of the church. It symbolizes true faith. There really was no conception in their mind of an unbaptized believer. So when someone came to faith they didn't say, “Well, let's wait awhile until we know this is for real and then we'll baptize this guy.” Or the new believer didn't say, “I've seen people do that baptism thing and I'm not doing that. That's weird. That's unsanitary! I'm saved. I don't have to do that.” No! As soon as someone came to faith they started looking for water! Faith and baptism were almost like one thing in their minds. So Paul says, “If you've never heard of the Spirit, you've never really believed in Jesus; into what then were you baptized?”

And they told him, **“Into John's baptism.”** Remember this was also the case with Apollos who we read about at the end of ch. 18. Paul must have thought, “Oh, okay. Now I'm getting the picture. I've heard about these guys. Priscilla and Aquila told me about Apollos, but I didn't know there was a whole bunch of them.” Look what Paul says in v.4, **“John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who**

was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” We don't know how much they knew about Jesus, but it seems that somehow they'd missed the fact that John's whole ministry was preparatory; he baptized people willing to repent. That was important but it wasn't the final destination. That was all about getting people ready for Jesus. That's why once Jesus showed up even John said, “You ought to be following him, not me. He's greater than me. He's the lamb of God who takes away your sins.”

That made total sense to these guys. Look at vv.5-7. **“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men.”** We've seen before in Acts how from time to time God gave visible signs to validate the spiritual reality of what was happening. We shouldn't take this as some kind of norm for today because right here in Acts there are so many similar occasions where tongues and prophecy are absent. This was a unique attestation for these particular people.

What we have here is a case where what these folks did NOT know really did hurt them. You might say they were “almost Christians.” For a short time they even had Paul fooled. But as he dug around a bit he discovered they were lacking the one thing that made all the difference: faith in Jesus and the experience of regeneration which only the Spirit of God can bring. That's what Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”

This is a reminder to us that in a crowd like this there will always be some almost Christians. It's not at all impossible for a person to come to a meeting like this, learn the songs, join a class, put a few bucks in the offering plate, and kind of just slide in with the crowd, yet still be lacking the marks of genuine faith which are born out of the presence of the Spirit of God in a person's life. Almost Christians, like the disciples of John, in many ways look like Christians. Their focus is on repentance, which means they're all about turning over a new leaf and trying hard to be good. And as important as it is to try to be good it's even more important to realize that we can never be good enough. We need more than just an example; we need a Savior. We can clean up our act but we can't clean up our heart. For that we need the Spirit of God to take up residence in our lives and ever so slowly but surely conform us and shape us and mold us into the image of Christ from the inside out. What you don't know CAN hurt you because almost Christians will just almost get to heaven, which is to say they won't get there at all.

II. People came to know Jesus when he was faithfully taught.

It was because of this kind of thing that Paul set

out in Ephesus to teach people what they needed to know about Jesus and his kingdom. He did this in much the same way he had in other cities. Verse 8 says, **“And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.”** You’ll notice that three months is longer than he lasted in most other synagogues. He must have felt he was making progress until, once again, the Jews began to make trouble. Verse 9 says, **“But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.”**

You can see here that Paul was not one to bang his head against a wall indefinitely, so he leaves the synagogue and rents out a lecture hall at the school of Tyrannus. Tyrannus was either the owner of the lecture hall or he was the main lecturer. It’s interesting that some of the ancient manuscripts add that Paul taught there between the hours of 11:00 am and 4:00 pm. If you know anything about the Middle East you know that those are the deadest hours of the day because of the heat. No one works during those hours. You work in the morning; you go have a meal; you sleep it off; and then you go back to work at about 4:00 pm. We know from what Paul says to the Ephesian elders in ch. 20 that he worked at his tentmaking trade in the morning and possibly went back to work in the early evening. But it’s in these hours of 11:00 am to 4:00 pm that Paul is teaching. It’s not a great time to draw a crowd. It’s like Paul has the 3:00 am time slot on channel 72 normally reserved for kooks and infomercials. “Not a real good church growth strategy, Paul.” But notice the results in v.10. **“This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”** People visit Ephesus, they hear Paul explain the gospel, they believe, and then they go back home and tell their friends. And this way, from this little lecture hall in Ephesus, from this little baldheaded Jew teaching at the deadest hours of the day, all Asia hears. You see, Paul believed that what those people did not know could hurt them. So he worked hard at this, very hard, for two years.

III. The seven sons of Sceva didn’t know Jesus.

During this time, God also performed amazing miracles through Paul. Look at vv.11-12. **“God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.”** The key word here is “extraordinary.” In other words, these were not every day miracles! Even among miracles these were unusual. They remind us, of course, of the woman who approached Jesus and thought to herself, “If I can only touch the hem of his cloak, I will be clean,” and she did and she was. Here God was working in much the same way. Notice Luke is careful

to say it was God who was doing this. It was not Paul’s power; it was God’s power acting through the hands of Paul.

As you might expect, word got around. Look what happens next in v. 13. **“But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’”** Remember that Ephesus was a hotbed of magic and witchcraft and superstition. It was famous in the ancient world for what were called “the Ephesian letters” which were collections of charms and incantations to ward off evil spirits. In some places Satan prefers to go underground, disguising his work beneath a veil of respectability. But, in other places, as here in Ephesus, he prefers a frontal attack. So it’s no surprise that there were some so-called Jewish exorcists who thought, “Hey, this name of Jesus seems to be working well. Let’s use it. They saw it as a new spell they could use to ward off and cast out evil spirits. These guys aren’t idiots. They know a good thing when they see it. If I’m a carpenter and see a new tool that will improve my work I’m going to get one and use it. And they are trying to do good things. Evil spirits are evil. We’re all for getting rid of those buggers. So why not? If it works, let’s use the name of Jesus.

Here we have an example of a group of people who I would hardly call “almost Christians.” They’re hardly even “almost, almost Christians.” And yet, they’re people who see that the name of the Lord Jesus is a really powerful name that can do some really good things for others, not to mention improve their own resumé and cash flow. So they try to add in or mix in the Lord Jesus with all the other stuff they believe. He’s like one more ingredient to the tossed salad that is their belief system. “Carrots, you like carrots? You say they’re good for you? Great. Let’s toss them in.” “Jesus, you like Jesus? You say he’s good at getting rid of evil spirits? Great. Let’s toss him in.” There are a lot of people like that today. They love the idea of Jesus: “Jesus was cool. He cruised around and helped people. He said some radical stuff about love and justice. He bucked the status quo and he got killed for it. I want to be like that. The world needs that kind of thing. Of course I like Buddha, too. I like to listen to Deepak Chopra or PBS. Buddha had some cool things to say that really helped people. And I like that guy the Dalai Lama. Have you listened to him? He’s a smart guy. He makes a lot of sense. Don’t forget to toss him in the bowl.” And on and on it goes.

But it doesn’t work. It doesn’t work for Jesus and it doesn’t work for the evil spirits and it doesn’t work for the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. Look at vv.14-16. **“Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and**

overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” You have to read this with a sense of humor. The seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva are going to give this Jesus thing a shot. We don’t know if he was a real priest or not; it might have just been what he put on the sign in front of his shop. The demon says, “Listen, I know all about Jesus. I have to respect his authority over me. And I also know his servant Paul, who I also have to respect because he’s tied into Jesus. But who are you?” Then he beats the living daylights of them. He tears their clothes off and the seven sons become the seven streakers! People in downtown Ephesus see them run by with a look of terror on their faces and they say, “Did you see that? What happened to Sceva’s boys? Were they naked? Did I see that right? Goodness gracious, someone get them some clothes!”

And what’s amazing is that God uses this to ignite a little revival in Ephesus, especially among the magicians. Look at vv.17-20. **“This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”**

Here we have a group of people who aren’t just adding the name of Jesus to their arsenal but they’re renouncing everything else and embracing Jesus alone as their Lord and Savior. And they’re willing to do that in a way that cuts deeply into a very tender spot—their pocketbook. 50,000 pieces of silver is 50,000 drachma and one drachma was a day’s wage, so you figure it out in today’s numbers. How much do you make a day? Multiply that by 50,000 and you have a lot of money.

You see, what you don’t know CAN hurt you. And if you don’t know yet that you can’t just mix in a little Jesus with everything else, sooner or later that will catch up to you. For some of you it’s time to dump everything in your life that competes with Jesus. It’s time for a bonfire. It’s time to burn it. A lot of you men are battling internet pornography. It’s time to get rid of it. Some of you are out of control in your spending and your credit cards are killing you. It’s time to burn it. Some of you are killing way too much time in front of the TV. Get rid of it. Some of you are enmeshed in an ungodly and impure relationship. Dump it. Some of you are throwing in a little self-help with Jesus. It’s time to burn it.

CONCLUSION

Let me bring this to a close. I want to take you to a verse in 2 Cor. 13:5 where Paul says, **“Test yourselves to see if you’re in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test?”**

We’ve seen in this story that what we don’t know CAN hurt us. We have seen that if we think it’s enough to be “almost Christians” we’ll just almost get to heaven. It’s not enough to repent and try to turn over a new leaf. We need more than John; we need Jesus as our Savior. And it’s not enough to mix in a little Jesus with our own beliefs. Jesus will have no rivals. He demands our exclusive allegiance. And if we don’t give it to him we will be overpowered by evil.

So let each one of us take some time to examine ourselves. Do I see in myself the marks of true spiritual life on me? Repentance, faith in Jesus, baptism, the fruit of the Spirit. Are they there, or am I just playing a game? I want to be careful here because I know some of you have very sensitive consciences and one of the ways the enemy works is to accuse us and condemn us. The question is not “Am I sinless?” but rather “Do I see the marks of genuine conversion in my life?” On that basis, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.”