

ACTS

THE STORY CONTINUES

THE UNSEEN WORLD | ACTS 19:11-10

When we dive into the fantasy worlds of Tolkien, Lewis (and even Rowling), we find ourselves in worlds of mythical powers and magical possibilities. Worlds where forces of good wage war with forces of darkness. The forces of good, we are confident, will win out in the end, but not without an epic struggle and dark moments when all hope is lost.

When we close the books and lay them on our night stands our thoughts slowly find their way back to the ordinary. While we have good days and bad days, we seldom think in terms of an epic struggle between good and evil. While we read our Bibles and pray, we seldom think about the extraordinary power of God that is available to us in Christ, or the extraordinary power of the enemy who violently opposes us.

The Bible reminds us that the unseen world is every bit as real as the world of minivans and strip malls. While we seldom think in terms of good and evil, we are embroiled in a struggle between good and evil. There is a lot more to the ordinary than meets the eye.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Paul is simply recalling his time in Ephesus. While he was able to perform extraordinary miracles, the power of the enemy was at work as well.

THE POWER OF GOD (vv. 11-12)

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

1. Miracles, by definition are extraordinary. Why do you think Luke goes out of his way to emphasize that these miracles were unusual even by miraculous standards?
2. What makes these miracles “extraordinary?”
3. Who is ultimately responsible for these miracles? Why is this important for us to keep in mind?
4. What do these miracles demonstrate about the power of God?
5. What do they tell us about what God is doing in the world?
6. What do we stand to lose when we rule out the possibility of the miraculous altogether?
7. What do we stand to lose when we have an unhealthy fixation on the miraculous?

THE POWER OF THE ENEMY (vv. 13-16)

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

1. How does Paul describe the malevolent forces that were at work in Ephesus?
2. What were they able to do?
3. Why do you think these particular exorcists tried to appropriate the names of Jesus and Paul?
4. Why do you think these particular exorcists were unable to appropriate the power of Jesus?
5. What does this particular passage teach us about the power of the enemy?

6. Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and 1 Peter 5:8-9. According to these passages, how should we approach the enemy?
7. What do we stand to lose when we ignore the power of the enemy altogether?
8. What do we stand to lose when when we have an unhealthy fixation on the power of the enemy?

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL (vv. 17-20)

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.

²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

1. According to verse 17, what was the overall impact of the dramatic spiritual power on display in Ephesus?
2. When and how can the fear of the Lord be a healthy thing?
3. What do you think it means to hold the name of Jesus in high honor?
4. How should a healthy fear of God and honoring the name of the Lord show up in our lives?
5. What further steps did the people take?
6. What are some ways our response to God should mirror theirs?
7. What do you think Luke meant when he said, “The word of the Lord... grew in power?”
8. What happens when the word of the Lord is powerfully at work in our lives?
9. How can we insure that the word of the Lord is at work in our lives?