

**TEXT:** Acts 19:8-22

**TITLE:** Putting Sin Aside

**THEME:** Repentance is surrendering whatever stands between you and the Lord.

**TAKE HOME:** Identify one area of sin or compromise and take a bold step to put it aside this week.

**NEXT WEEK:** We're exploring Acts 19:23-41 where we'll be "Confronting Our Counterfeit Gods."

### **ACTS 19:8-22 (NLT)**

8 Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. 9 But some became stubborn, rejecting his message and publicly speaking against the Way. So Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he held daily discussions at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord.

11 God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. 12 When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.

13 A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. 15 But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

17 The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. 18 Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. 19 A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. 20 So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

21 Afterward Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" 22 He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus, ahead to Macedonia while he stayed awhile longer in the province of Asia.

## OPENING

**Seatbelt.** Have you ever parked your car and then sat in it for a while, finishing up a podcast episode before you get out? After the episode finishes, you open the door, swing your left leg out, begin shifting your weight to lean out the door and then **BAM!** Your seatbelt is still on.

Have you had this experience like I have?

Trying to get out of your car without removing your seatbelt is like trying to practice the way of Jesus without putting sin aside.

**Flat tires.** Or consider this illustration. I often see folks pedaling their cruisers to the beach with half inflated tires. It's really hard for me not to roll down my window and offer some unsolicited advice. Because their tires are only inflated to like 15psi, they are struggling mightily. The resistance those half-flat tires are creating is making it twice as difficult to ride. They don't know that riding a bike isn't supposed to be that difficult! If only they would inflate their tires to the appropriate level, they would see it's so much easier, smoother, safer and enjoyable to ride a bike!

Pedaling to the beach with half inflated tires is like trying to practice the way of Jesus without putting sin aside. The resistance holds you back and can kinda take the joy out of it.

## BOTTOM LINE

**Putting sin by the wayside is the way of Jesus.** In other words, following Jesus requires we let our sin fall by the wayside. We must put sin aside if we want to experience the presence and power and provision of Jesus.

You're here because you either want to walk with Jesus, or you're curious about what walking with Jesus looks like. I hope to persuade you, by looking at the experience of the believers in Ephesus recorded for us in Acts 19, that walking in the way of Jesus means putting sin aside.

## PRAY

## IN EPHESUS

We are in the city of Ephesus today – on the west coast of Turkey on the Aegean Sea.

Apollos, the influential gospel-teacher from northern Africa, had also been in Ephesus, but after he was coached in gospel-clarity by Italian tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos went over to Corinth in Greece and shared the gospel there.

Sometime after Apollos left Ephesus is when Paul arrived. We meet Paul in the synagogue there, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God and inviting people to practice the Way of Jesus.

**READ >>** Acts 19:8-22 (NLT)

## THE KINGDOM

Paul is arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God and inviting people to practice the Way of Jesus.

What is the kingdom of God Paul is so persuasively speaking about? Well, it's the same kingdom which was Jesus favorite subject. Jesus taught about the kingdom of God more than any other

subject. In fact, Jesus' very first sermon was simply an announcement about the kingdom.

Here is a portion of it in Mark 1:14-15,

Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

It's time. The time about which the prophets of Israel regularly spoke is upon us. It's kingdom-time.

Before we get into what the kingdom is, notice what kind of response Jesus invites us to make to the kingdom's nearness:

1. Repent of your sins, and
2. Believe the Good News.

In light of the kingdom's nearness, Jesus calls us to put aside our sin (that's what repent means) and to believe.

So then what is the kingdom and what does it mean that it has come near?

Think about an earthly kingdom ruled by a king, like Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, which means King Salman holds ultimate power. This is different from a constitutional monarchy like the UK. In the UK, King Charles III does not have ultimate power. But in Saudi Arabia, King Salman is the ruler. He is in charge. It is his kingdom.

King Salman's influence as king has boundaries which we know as the geo-political border of Saudi Arabia. King Salman's power and influence is absolute within those geo-political borders, but outside those borders his power is limited.

The kingdom of God also has a ruler – a King – who has ultimate power. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. King Jesus is the ruler of the kingdom of God, but unlike a geo-political entity like Saudi Arabia, the kingdom of God has no geographic or political borders.

Instead, the kingdom of God isn't in any particular place; the kingdom of God is located wherever the King exercises his influence as King.

So King Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God has drawn near is an announcement that his influence as King has drawn near.

Which of course it has because the King himself has come near!

When the King exercises influence, there is wholeness and flourishing. When King Jesus exercises influence in human hearts and communities, there is redemption in broken lives, there is reconciliation in broken relationships, there is restoration in broken creation.

Jesus announces the nearness of his redeeming, reconciling, and restoring kingdom in his first sermon and invites us to put our sin aside and believe this good news.

When Paul is persuasively arguing about the kingdom of God in Ephesus, he is helping people see that Jesus has come to establish his kingdom where wholeness and flourishing is normal.

## THE WAY

Just as Jesus is inviting us to put sin aside and believe the good news, so also Paul is inviting the Ephesians to respond to this good news by becoming practitioners of the Way of Jesus. The Way of Jesus is a way of life – a way to go.

Practicing the Way involves three simple things, which John Mark Comer helpfully outlines in his book by that title:

- Be with Jesus
- Become like Jesus
- Do what Jesus did

There were three different kinds of responses to Paul's invitation, which is really Jesus' invitation, to practice the Way of Jesus.

## THREE RESPONSES

**1. Stubbornly refuse to believe.** Some of the people in Ephesus stubbornly refused to believe. Verse 8 talks about these folks becoming hard-hearted and so rejected the gospel. Some went even further and maligned those who practiced the Way.

Think about that. If Paul were simply promoting some truth-claims, why would some people become hard-hearted about that and even trash-talk Paul and those who believed those claims? Why isn't it simply that they have a different opinion about things, or a different view? Why can't they just agree to disagree?

The reason the gospel runs up against so much resistance is because the gospel is not **only** a set of truth-claims. It is not **only** a claim about what the facts are – although the gospel does make truth claims. The gospel doesn't ask people to agree with its claims. If that were the case, some would simply disagree and we could move on.

The challenge is that the gospel demands a response from us. The King demands allegiance. As C. S. Lewis famously observed, no one ever heard the gospel and responded with mild approval. Either Jesus is a liar and you should hate him or he is a lunatic and you should pity him, or he is the Lord and you should worship him.

Because Jesus demands so much from us, the reason people choose not to believe is not because they can't make sense of the gospel or because they can't believe in the resurrection but rather because if they were to believe, they would have to pledge allegiance to the King – they would have to put Jesus in the driver's seat – they would have to rearrange their lives around Jesus at the center.

So some became hard-hearted and stubbornly refused to believe.

**2. Tried to Co-opt Jesus for their agenda.** Other people tried to co-opt Jesus for their own agenda. This is what the group of Jewish itinerant exorcists did. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" They weren't calling on the name of Jesus in faith; they were name-dropping Jesus in their magical spells thinking this would help them manipulate people better.

Unfortunately name-dropping Jesus happens too often today – maybe not to exorcize evil spirits,

but certainly to promote agendas that Jesus doesn't promote. The most ubiquitous example today is when Jesus is used as a political mascot, as we see in Christian nationalism . Christian nationalism is the merger of Christian identity with national identity so that it's difficult to tell the difference between what it means to be an American Patriot and what it means to be a Christian person. A patriot and a Christian are both good things to be, but when they are conflated – when an American flag is draped over a cross – we attempt to make Jesus into a mascot for a certain political and cultural ideology.

An obnoxious example of this was during the Jan 6 Capitol riot where Jesus-banners were flown by those involved in violent political action. These folks tried to co-opt the name of Jesus to lend divine approval to their political agenda.

But Jesus will not be co-opted by anyone's agenda. He won't be co-opted by your agenda, or your progressive cousin's agenda or your conservative uncle's agenda.

**3. Put sin aside.** The third response to Paul's invitation to practice the way of Jesus is to put sin aside.

Putting sin aside, or leaving sin by the wayside involves:

1. Identifying our sin
2. Confessing our sin
3. Repenting of our sin

We read about those who put their sin aside in verse 18-19,

*"Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A large number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars [in today's money]."*

Those who became disciples of Jesus publicly confessed their sin. It's important that confession isn't merely a private thing. Many of you were shaped by the Roman Catholic Church, as I was. Sometimes in the Protestant world, we look down our noses at the confessional where a parishioner would confess his or her sins to a priest. While it's

true you don't need to confess your sins to a priest, you do need to confess them to somebody.

Not only did these new believers confess their sin, they thoroughly turned away from, or repented of, their sin. They burned the books! At great personal cost to them!

As Jesus had said (Mt 16):

*"What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"*

**Putting sin by the wayside is the way of Jesus.**

And practicing the way of Jesus honors Jesus' name. This is what happened in Ephesus and it's what happens in Orange County when women and men choose to practice the way by putting sin by the wayside.

I heard John Ortberg recently refer to the sin we put aside this way. He said, **sometimes the mess becomes the message.** Your mess, when it is put aside, becomes a message of the power of the gospel to heal and to make whole.

Every Friday night at our Celebrate Recovery ministry, women and men are bearing witness to this reality. Messes are being transformed into messages of hope.

Many of you think if others actually knew how much of a mess you are, it would bring shame to Jesus' name. You think that you are doing Jesus's reputation a favor by masking your pain or pretending everything is ok. That's because you don't believe it's possible for our mess to become a message of hope for others and actually bring honor to Jesus' name.

But Jesus said,

*"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Lk 5:31-32).*

Practicing the way of Jesus involves putting sin by the wayside. This is the way of Jesus. And this is possible only because **Jesus puts our sin away.** The only reason we have the option of putting our sin aside is because Jesus has broken the power of sin through his sacrificial death on the cross.

There is power in the name of Jesus. When we call on Jesus to forgive our sin, to set us free from the power of sin, we are not co-opting Jesus' name for our agenda.

***Taking your sin away is Jesus' agenda!***

We're going to close today naming this reality:

*In the name of Jesus there is power  
In the name of Jesus there is healing  
In the name of Jesus there is life  
The name of Jesus breaks every stronghold  
The name of Jesus shines through the shadows  
He burns like a fire, torching our sin, purifying  
our hearts*

I hope that as you trust Jesus to put your sin aside, what you'll experience is a kind of lightness. Your shoulders no longer burdened with the weight of guilt and shame.

To put it another way, I think you'll feel like you're riding to the beach with tires that are fully inflated. It's going to be easier to pedal.

May it be so in your life and in our community, for the glory of Jesus' name. Amen.