The High Honor of Jesus' Name

Acts 19:1-20 on September 19, 2021 Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

Please read Acts 19:1-20 before going further in this transcript.

I remember a time back in college when a bunch of us "young theologians" were wrestling with the idea of worshipping the NAME of Jesus. It seemed a little strange to us, to worship a NAME. Shouldn't we instead worship the PERSON of Jesus? Well, ultimately, I suppose the answer is "yes," we should worship Jesus Himself, not just the "NAME" of Jesus. And yet, the Bible often makes a big deal about particular names; that's because a name often represents a person's whole being, everything they've said and done. Or in some cases, will do... Matthew 1:21 says, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the NAME Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Jesus' name literally means "The Lord saves."¹ So, why name Him "Jesus?" because Jesus will save us from our sins! Back in Acts 10:43 the Apostle Peter proclaimed, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his NAME." When we hold the name of Jesus in high honor, we are honoring Jesus Himself. We worship Him for who He is, and for what He's done. Today's text urges us to consider "The High Honor of Jesus' Name." In fact, it calls us to embrace "The High Honor of Jesus' Name," in our personal lives, in our church, and in front of our watching neighbors.

Paul asks some questions in Acts 19:2-3, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"² They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied." Now you've gotta wonder, where have these guys been? What kind of disciple hasn't even heard of the Holy Spirit? After all, at this point in church history, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, was some 20 years earlier! ^{3 4 5} Nonetheless, they simply hadn't heard about this, so Paul asks a clarifying question, and then he realizes that these are disciples of John the Baptist, who hadn't been brought up to speed. ^{6 7} Paul

¹ See text note on Matthew 1:21, *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1590. ² Personally, I wonder why Paul even thought to ask them this question? Perhaps when he got back to Ephesus, one of the first things that Priscilla and Aquila brought him up to speed on, was Apollos – how Apollos had only known the baptism of John the Baptist. Apparently, there were a number of people who had not yet been brought up to speed on Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

 ³ See timeline on pp. 1844-1845 of *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.
 ⁴ "Like Apollos [in Acts 18:25], they had a limited understanding of the gospel." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1864 footnote on Acts 19:1.

⁵ Since the text is not explicit here, scholars suggest that it's possible that these disciples were either disciples of Jesus or disciples of John the Baptist. However, either way, they had an incomplete understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, and no clue that the Holy Spirit was now being poured out. See discussion in Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, top of p. 599.

 ⁶ This is kind of similar to Acts 18:25 where we learned that Apollos "knew only the baptism of John."
 ⁷ <u>Mark 1:2-8</u> says this about John the Baptist: "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

goes on in Acts 19:4, "...John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁸ One author notes: John's baptism was "preparatory and provisional, stressing human sinfulness and thus creating a sense of need for the gospel. John's baptism looked forward to Jesus, who by his death would make possible forgiveness of sins."⁹

Can you imagine going around for years and years, having honestly repented of your sins, but then not experiencing the forgiveness of Christ? Not yet having trusted in Christ and not yet having your life transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit? Being baptized in the name of Jesus is "qualitatively different from John's baptism of repentance; it symbolizes the regenerating work of the Spirit through the death and resurrection of Christ."¹⁰ You see, as great as John's message was, His NAME had no power to transform lives. Being baptized by John the Baptist was all well and good, but being baptized in the Name of Jesus, and being filled with His Holy Spirt, was on a whole other level. How glad these 12 men must have been, to finally hear the wonderful name of Jesus! How incredible it must have felt to be baptized not just for repentance, but for new life in Jesus' NAME! ^{11 12 13}

'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' " And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." So it probably wasn't quite that these disciples of John the Baptist had NEVER heard of the Holy Spirit, but rather that they had not heard that He had COME at Pentecost. This shouldn't totally surprise us though, since Ephesus was hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, and the New Testament hadn't been completed yet. ⁸ Interestingly, when Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius and his household, he begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in Acts 10:37-38, "You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1653 footnote on Mark 1:4).

⁹ The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1865 footnote on Acts 19:4.
¹⁰ The NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2260 footnote on Acts 19:5.
¹¹ Acts 19:5-6 goes on, "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." This causes us to think back to the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost in Acts 2 but also coming on Cornelius and the Gentiles in Acts 10. In Acts 11:15-18 Peter says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life." This is similar to the Samaritan's experience in Acts 8:14-17. The coming of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by speaking in tongues, was a formative way of demonstrating continuity in the Early Church as the gospel spread to all peoples and all places. Even to those who didn't historically get along. The Jews needed to see God's confirmation of these Samaritan believers.

Acts 19:8-10 then switches gears, "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned [meaning slandered or criticized] the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Back in Acts 18:20, at the very end of Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey, Paul had a very brief layover in Ephesus. Back then, the Jews had actually asked Paul to stay longer. Now however, after a few months of listening to Paul preach boldly and persuasively about Jesus, some of the Jews became obstinate. They started "trash talking" the Way, which was really trash talking Jesus and His followers, since the reason Christians were called "The Way," was that this is how Jesus referred to Himself back in John 14:6, "I am the WAY, the truth and the life." Now, in one sense, they may have actually done Paul a favor, by kicking him out and forcing him to move to the lecture hall. This likely allowed more room, in a more public place than the synagogue, for more different kinds of people (Jews and Greeks alike, both believers and nonbelievers). The fact is, this actually worked out pretty well for Paul's teaching ministry. After so many miles of traveling from place to place, Paul finally settles down for a couple of years and does some long-term, in-depth teaching.¹⁴ During his ministry, Paul did far more than travel all over the place making quick converts. He taught believers and helped them mature in their faith.

This begs the question: how much spiritual teaching do people really need? Once we accept the gospel, aren't we good to go? Well yes, we're ready for heaven, but God

¹² One of the key functions of speaking in tongues in these situations, was to tangibly demonstrate the continuity of the gospel's impact. In other words, at certain key points in the Early Church's history, God confirmed that He was at work, by manifesting the gift of speaking in tongues. But while this is descriptive of certain junctures, it is not by any means prescriptive for every occasion. We touched on this back on March 7, 2021, when I preached on "Cornelius" from Acts 10:1-48. https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/cornelius/ The evidence for their genuine faith in Jesus was unmistakable; unmistakable because Acts 10:46 records that the Gentiles were speaking in tongues. Some people refer to this as the "Gentile Pentecost," because it brings our thoughts back to the original Pentecost in Acts 2. In fact, one of the most practical ways that God used the gift of speaking in tongues in the Early Church, was to help the Jewish Christians see the change in these Gentile Christians. In other words, the speaking in tongues from back in Acts 2, helped prepare the Jewish Christians, to accept this extremely controversial reality, that the faith of Cornelius and these Gentiles was indeed legitimate. This is similar to what is happening now in Acts 19:5-6; it's a confirmation of continuity in what God is doing all over the world at this time in history among various people groups and situations.

¹³ "The book of Acts covers a period of transition, and there is no single model or pattern for the coming of the Spirit or its accompanying signs. The general pattern, however, is reception of the Spirit at the time of conversion." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2260 footnote on Acts 19:6.

¹⁴ In fact, Paul's extended time in Ephesus, over 2 years, is his longest stretch in any one place during his Missionary Journeys so far. Corinth comes in 2nd place at around 18 months.

has more for us in the meantime. One historical record suggests that Paul probably taught for about 5 hours/day, from around 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.¹⁵¹⁶ So, if we do some rough math: at 5 hours/day, 5 days/week, for 2 years (or about 100 weeks), that's about 2,500 hours of instruction. That's roughly equivalent to going to a 1-hour Sunday church service 2,500 times, or going to church for about 50 years! And Paul fit all of this into just 2 years! The fact is, the Early Church sets a challenging example for us, to devote more of our time, to learning from God's Word.¹⁷ Brother or Sister in Christ, in order to grow as Christ-followers, we need WAY more than just one, weekly, 30-minute sermon. This is an excellent reason to join a Life Group. Life Groups provide an opportunity, for every adult in our church, to take an additional hour or so, each and every week, to dive more deeply into God's Word together. It's also a good reason to consider a Bible Study or one of the Spiritual Formation classes that Pastor Eric and Pastor Douglas will be offering on Sunday mornings. By the way, there is also a LOT of good stuff going on for our kids' spiritual formation. In addition to the new full hour of Kids Church during our 10:45 service, we're also going to have some options between services. Not to mention our Wednesday Night ministries to kids and youth. We had almost 200 people gathered in our building last Wednesday! Gathering to grow in their faith, worship, and study God's Word.

Hebrews 5:11-14 gives us a bit of a "kick in the pants," "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." If our Christian training and spiritual formation has stalled out, or if it hasn't progressed any further than a basic understanding of salvation, it's like pulling our kids out of school after they complete the 1st grade. "Well Pastor Jerry, I think a 1st grade education is really all kids need these days." You know, I've NEVER had anyone say that to me, but I have noticed that

¹⁵ See discussion in *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1865 footnote on Acts 19:9.

¹⁶ The thought here is that the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus probably had its own students and teaching programs meeting in the cooler morning hours. BUT, once the afternoon sun began to make things too hot, classes were over. However, a little heat didn't deter Paul from using it as an opportune place to teach about Jesus. Actually, there was probably a significant advantage to teaching at this time of day: day laborers would be taking their lunch break and avoiding outdoor work, during this hottest period of the day. So, in addition to the space being available, it likely made it convenient for people to stop by during their afternoon break. Christians and non-Christians alike, had an incredible opportunity to learn about Jesus!

¹⁷ We also saw this back in Acts 11:25-26, "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people...." And even further back, at its genesis, the Early Church: "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

sometimes we adults seem to approach our own, personal, spiritual formation this way. Brother or Sister in Christ, let's not be satisfied with the spiritual equivalent, of an elementary school education.

Acts 19:11-12 switches gears once again, "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 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." So not only was Paul leading daily discussions about the Lord, but God also enabled him to have a powerful healing ministry. Verse 11 makes it abundantly CLEAR, "GOD DID extraordinary miracles...." God's activity, God's will, and His power, are what accomplish these miracles, "not the use of magical incantations or objects." ¹⁸ ¹⁹ So let's be clear here that these were not "magic handkerchiefs" or "magic aprons." These were common, everyday items that Paul would have worn in his leathermaking trade. ²⁰ ²¹ ²² Let's not get caught up in supposed "holy hankies" or distracted by any kind of supposed "magical garments."²³ The key focus here, was genuine connection to Jesus Christ, to the truth of His message and to the power of His name.

This "magical" kind of thinking, is the very kind of thing that got the 7 Sons of Sceva²⁴ in some trouble. Acts 19:13 says, "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,

¹⁸ The NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2260 footnote on Acts 19:11-12.
¹⁹ These miracles were INDEED extraordinary, and this may cause us to wonder why God isn't doing these God's of things here in Bemidji in our day and age? There are several reasons we could list, but the one that's most pertinent to today's text, is the particular setting in which Paul was preaching. Ephesus was a geographical center for all kinds of fantabulous magical practices and evil powers (See F. F. Bruce, The Book of Acts: Rev., NICNT, Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, p. 369). We'll actually get into this a little more next week when we learn about the temple of the goddess Artemis. For now, suffice it to say that among these exorcists and magicians operating in Ephesus, God chose to operate in extraordinary ways through Paul. In other words, because of this particular local context and time in history, "the gospel proved its power" (F. F. Bruce, The Book of Acts: Rev., NICNT, Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, p. 369). So it shouldn't necessarily surprise us that God doesn't choose to demonstrate His power in our particular context here in Bemidji.

 ²⁰ The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1865 footnote on Acts 19:12.
 ²¹ And he certainly wasn't selling them as some kind of religious gimmick or flaunting them in some self-promotional way.

²² Back in Acts 5:15 the Apostle Peter's healing ministry was so powerful that people laid their sick along the streets hoping that even just his shadow might fall on them. Even further back, during Jesus' earthly ministry, people were longing just to touch the edge of His cloak (See Matthew 14:36). None of these materials had magic qualities. The real key was that they were a means of contact with Jesus or one of His apostles (The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1833 footnote on Acts 5:15).

²³ Magic tries to manipulate... miracles are God's sovereign acts. Citing Witherington, Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 602.

²⁴ "SEE vuh" (Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names (p. 141). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers).

I command you to come out." The 7 Sons of Sceva were syncretists, meaning they mixed together various religious ideas.²⁵ This was actually very common in the 1st century, and frankly, it's still very common in our own day. As people, we often like to pick and choose from various religious ideas and teachings, and then mix them together, rather than committing to just one. These Jews who went around driving out evil spirits, decided to try throwing a little bit of Jesus into their Judaistic understanding, of how to drive out demons. "Abracadabra became Abraca-Jesus." After all, it seemed to work well for the Apostle Paul.²⁶ However, when we come to genuine faith in Jesus, we shouldn't just mix him into the lives we're already living. Rather, He becomes the Lord of our lives, Lord of all that we do and say. The 7 sons of Sceva did not place their full faith and confidence in the name of Jesus Christ, they just want to "tap into his power."²⁷ How many people today do a similar thing: we want the power and blessing of Jesus' name, but not the commitment, not the full devotion that our Lord requires. So we "dip our toe" into Christianity, just a little bit. One Study Bible notes: Even "the demon recognizes that these are not Jesus' authentic representatives and so they have no real power. Spiritual power does not reside in magical objects or spells but in Jesus himself. He is not a spiritual power we can manipulate, but the sovereign Lord whom we should worship and serve." ²⁸ ²⁹ And so, these 7 sons learn a painful lesson, and receive quite a beating.

Acts 19:17 records the result of all this: "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." The result of all of this is reverent fear for the name of Jesus, and a greater awareness of the genuine power that that NAME represents.³⁰ Here's something worth noting: it wasn't just the nonbelievers who needed to be reminded of "The High Honor of Jesus' Name," it was also the church, that needed to be reminded.³¹ In fact, in verse 18, when it mentions, "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done," it's not referring to people who had already been believers for some time now. (We know this based on the verb form in the original

 ²⁵ See *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2260 footnote on Acts 19:13-14.
 ²⁶ The name of Jesus is indeed exceedingly powerful, which is why it is most certainly NOT something to be trifled with! Contrast this story in Acts 19 with Luke 8:26-39.

²⁷ Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 603.

²⁸ The NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2260 footnote on Acts 19:15.
²⁹ Let's not fail to notice here: evil spirits are indeed powerful. So powerful in fact, that this evil spirit empowered 1 man to give a severe beatdown to these 7 sons. This vivid illustration teaches all of us a valuable lesson: It's a dangerous decision when we choose to toy around with something as powerful as the mighty name of Jesus. "this name, invoked by Paul and his colleagues with such beneficial effects, was [clearly] no name to be trifled with." F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: Rev.*, NICNT, Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, p. 369.

³⁰ Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 604.

³¹ This may remind some of us of the sudden judgment that fell on Ananias and Saphira back in Acts 5:11, "Great fear seized <u>the whole church</u> AND all who heard about these events." Read Acts 5:1-16 for the full story.

Greek³²). One author explains it this way: "These were Christians who had delved in the magical arts before their conversion who now came and openly confessed their former deeds... On their part, this was more than a confession of former ways. It was a commitment to forsake such practices altogether."³³ In other words, those who were already believers, were greatly impacted when they heard about the 7 Sons of Sceva misusing Jesus' name.³⁴

This is a good reminder for every one of us as believers, that as we mature in our Christian faith, we may discover things that need to be rooted out of our lives; things that are hindering us from full devotion.³⁵ So when they burned these scrolls in verse 19, it was done as a public testimony of their deepening faith and as a renunciation of their former magical practices.³⁶ Oftentimes, part of our witness as believers, is to publicly denounce our former associations with false teachings or with evil behaviors.³⁷ ^{38 39 40} One author explains it this way: "Ephesus was reputed as a center for magic... It was not by accident that Paul's encounter with magic took place in Ephesus, nor is it a surprise that his converts there had been involved in such practices. Magic was part of Ephesian culture. Nor should one question the integrity of these Ephesian Christians who only now openly forsook such ways. Salvation involves a process of growth, of increasing sanctification. And after all, the Ephesian spells were not that remote from the horoscopes and [supernatural] games...with which many Christians dabble in our own day." ^{41 42} (*That's worth thinking about*.)

³² Polhill notes, "Those concerned in verse 18 were evidently already confessing Christians, as the perfect tense πεπιστευκότων would indicate. That the "evil deeds" (πράξεις) were magical arts is indicated both by the context (cf. verse 19) and by the fact that πράξεις was a technical term for magic spells. Likewise, in verse 19, περίεργα was a technical term for magic arts/sorcery. See A. Deissmann, Bible Studies (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 323, n. 5." (Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 405). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers).

³³ Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 405). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³⁴ This "shows their growing maturity in the faith. They did not appreciate this when they initially responded to Jesus, but now they see it. So they did not give up the practice first and then become Christians. Rather, in their maturing walk with God, they came to renounce the practice." Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, pp. 604-605.

³⁵ As fully devoted followers of Jesus, we shouldn't be hedging our bets by keeping access to other options or other powers.

³⁶ Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 605.

³⁷ Zacchaeus is a good example of this in Luke 19:8.

³⁸ "Such documents, bearing alleged magical formulas, and secret information, have been unearthed. Ephesus was a center for magical incantations." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1865 footnote on Acts 19:19.

³⁹ See also Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:9-24 and the sorcerer Bar-Jesus in Acts 13:6-12

⁴⁰ The value of these scrolls was anywhere from the tens of thousands to possibly even several million dollars. A drachma = about one day's pay (*The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, NIV text note on Acts 19:19 on p. 1865). So, 50,000 drachmas would have been the equivalent of 50,000 days of pay. So even if you made \$40 a day, that would be 2 million dollars! ⁴¹ Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 405). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁴² Of their own free will, these people decided to make a dramatic, public declaration of turning FROM the world's way of pursuing power, TO trusting FULLY in the powerful name of Jesus.

Acts 19:20 concludes, "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." When verse 20 says, "In this way," it's referring back to verse 17: "this way" of reverent fear, "this way" of holding the name of Jesus in high honor. This is just as true for us today. If we truly want to see the word of the Lord spread and grow in power, then it begins with a deepening reverence in the hearts/minds of believers. It begins by US honoring Jesus' authority over our entire lives:

Honoring Jesus with hearts that love what He loves.

Honoring Jesus with minds that learn/obey what His Word teaches.

Honoring Jesus by stewarding our money for His purposes.

Honoring Jesus by living out relationships according to His will and design. Holding the name of Jesus in High Honor, means honoring Him with anything and everything we do. That includes taking stock of any kind of "evil practices" in our lives, or anything that might be like some sort of a "magical scroll," so to speak. We honor Jesus' NAME by openly confessing our sin and by getting rid of any sinful items that we possess. We do this out of reverence for the High Honor of Jesus' Name!