

“HOLDING THE NAME OF JESUS IN HIGH HONOR”
Ephesians 5:15-20, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Acts 19:11-22
May 31 & June 1, 2025

“Sherri Conley, of Oklahoma, told the *Daily Oklahoman* newspaper how she, her husband, and two sons had huddled in their hallway linen closet for protection from a deadly tornado. ‘We said a prayer that God would watch over us.’ After the storm passed, she discovered the closet was the only thing left standing from the family's home.”¹ God had indeed, protected them from the ravaging of the storm. God had answered their prayer miraculously.

God often supplies gracious miracles to those who trust in Him and turn to Him for their everyday needs. The Conley family experienced this huge miracle, and do you think it changed their lives? You bet it did. Their trust in the Lord Jesus would have grown exponentially that day. They would have become a great witness to the love of God to all those around them, as they shared this account of God’s saving grace. I hope it encouraged all the folks in the area, even those who saw it on their TVs or in their newspapers. And even us, today.

Well, that is what the Apostle Paul was doing on this third missionary journey. He was faithfully telling the Great Work of God to the people of Ephesus so that they could put their trust and faith in Jesus, too. Though “*some of them became obstinate (and) refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way,*” Paul continued to encourage the faithful followers of Jesus in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). And in so doing, “*all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord*” (19:10). Good News travels fast, so everyone became aware of the Name of Jesus.

Listen to all that God did after that. This is Acts 19:11-22. (READ Acts 19:11-22)

Paul’s faithfulness to the Lord Jesus enabled the Holy Spirit to work mightily in Paul. Because Paul lifted up the Name of Jesus Christ as the Supreme power and authority, illnesses

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 217)

and diseases were cured, and evil spirits were cast out of people. People were being set free from a variety of things, and the people of Ephesus started noticing. Great encouragement and hope was growing within the body of the disciples of Jesus, and even those who were not followers of Jesus saw the miracles that were being done.

With so much success happening within the body of Christ, those on the outside began to get a bit envious, and even though they did not believe in Jesus as their Savior, they tried to muscle in on the action, invoking “*the Name of Jesus whom Paul preaches*,” but not getting the results they expected. They wanted the attention and praise that Paul was getting without actually being a part of the fellowship of believers in Jesus. They wanted the power to do miracles without any commitment to Christ.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains it like this: “The use of magical names in incantations to exorcise evil spirits was common in the ancient world, and it seems to have been especially prominent in Ephesus. In addition, Jewish practitioners of magic were highly esteemed in antiquity, for they were believed to have command of particularly effective spells. The great reluctance of the Jews to pronounce the divine Name (of God) was known among the ancients and often misinterpreted according to magical principles. Moreover, those connected with the Jewish priesthood would have enjoyed great prestige in magical circles since they were the most likely ones to know the true pronunciation of the Ineffable Name (of God) and therefore most able to release its power.

“Some Jewish exorcists, on coming into contact with Paul and his preaching about Jesus, attempted to make magical use of this new name they had heard. Luke identifies them as ‘*seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest*’ (Acts 19:14). Perhaps they did belong to one of the high priestly families of Jerusalem...though undoubtedly the title ‘Jewish chief priest’ was a self-

designation manufactured to impress their clients and is reported by Luke without evaluation. Perhaps they even professed to accept Paul's message and to be committed to Jesus personally themselves... But if they thought of themselves as in some sense Jewish Christians, it was primarily for the benefits they could derive for their magical arts from the power of the Name of Jesus, and so they simply continued in their old ways with a new twist.

“When, however, they tried to use this more powerful name in their exorcisms, Sceva's sons found they were dealing with realities far beyond their ability to cope. The demon they were trying to exorcise turned violently on them, and they fled from the house naked and bleeding. The name of Jesus, like an unfamiliar weapon misused, exploded in their hands; and they were taught a lesson about the danger of using the Name of Jesus in their dabbling in the supernatural.”²

Paul had been teaching that Jesus is the Name above All other names, and that no other One was to be worshipped above Him. In fact, had the Jews really been true to their faith, they would not have been using magical arts at all, since God had said, “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 16:21-17:7). They should not have had anything to do with the pagan gods of the Ephesians, or Romans, or Greeks, or any other people groups. They were to be worshipping the One and Holy God of the Universe, the One who had lead them out of Egypt, and had delivered the Promised Land to their ancestors. Jesus had confronted these unlawful practices, too, challenging the Scribes and Pharisees to be loyal only to the Lord God.

So as the seven sons of Sceva tried to use the Name of Jesus to their own advantage, they got the beating of their lives from the one possessed by the demon. They experienced the fact that playing with the Name of Jesus was nothing to be done lightly. As they were just using

² (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1981] pg. 497)

Jesus' Name for their own advantage and for their own purposes, they found out quickly that His Name was to be kept holy.

But we find that same thing happening today, too. We have people who profess to be followers of Jesus, yet really have no commitment to Him. They also use the Name of Jesus flippantly and with no regard to His divine authority. It's sad how many people take the Name of Jesus in vain, and then expect God to do something when they are in trouble. You can't defame the Name of Jesus and then pray to God in the same Name and expect God to honor your prayers. You can't have it both ways. God demands that if we are followers of Jesus, we are to honor and respect Him as our Lord and Savior.

I know I get people upset with me when I catch them profaning the Name of Jesus. If they cry out "Jesus Christ!" I'll ask them if they are praying. If they say "No," then I'll kindly ask them to stop taking my Savior's name in vain. That usually makes them think twice about what they are saying. And it usually makes them forget what they were mad about in the first place - or they turn that anger back at me. Whatever!

But we have an enemy who delights in it when we show disrespect to Jesus. Satan hates us, and if we profane the name of Jesus, he smiles with great joy knowing we've just grieved God. The Name of Jesus is to be honored above ALL other names, and if we are really followers of Jesus, we need to be the first ones to honor God by holding the Name of His Son in reverence.

Well this lesson was quickly relayed to the rest of the people in Ephesus, as well as throughout Asia. The Name of Jesus was to be revered, not idly used, especially if we're not sincere in our faith. Who knows how many people today are suffering horribly because they have misused the Name of Jesus and the demons punish them because of it, because it has no power for them. Though they may pray for God to bless them, because they misuse the Name of

Jesus, and recklessly speak His Name, there is no power to bring about anything good. If we are to expect the power of Jesus' Name to bring about any kind of positive result, we have to hold the Name of Jesus in very high honor.

And that is part of the reason that Paul wrote the words to the Ephesian Christians that we heard today in chapter 5. *“Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:15-17, 20). Let the Name of Jesus Christ be lifted up, not drug through the gutter.

You see, we are to be the witnesses FOR Jesus Christ, honoring Him and praising Him for all the good things He has done for us. We are to be proclaiming the marvelous miracles that are taking place in our lives out of gratitude for the mercy and grace of God through Jesus Christ. If we profane the Name of Jesus, and we profess to be followers of Jesus, what kind of witness are we giving to those who do not know Jesus? If we want those around us to take Jesus seriously, then we have to model it for them so that they can see that we hold the Name of Jesus in great honor and respect. If we model the disrespect of Jesus' Name, we then proclaim it Ok for the world to do the same thing.

It is note-worthy, then, that Paul also prays for the Thessalonians (and us) *“that the Name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess. 1:12). If we demonstrate to the world that the Name of Jesus is vitally important to our lives, not only will we lift the value of Christianity, but we will encourage others to hold the Name of Jesus in high honor, too. It has to start with us. The Name of Jesus being glorified in us, and then we being glorified in Jesus as His worthy disciples. And

then the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us and enables us to do great things for Him to help others come to know about Him and receive Him as their own Savior and Lord.

But if we don't model a great respect and honor for the Name of Jesus Christ, then those around us will not be encouraged to do the same, and then we will not be lifted up as disciples for Jesus, and we will have no power to do the work God has called us to do.

Looking at what happened in Ephesus, the whole community "*was seized with fear, and the Name of Jesus was held in high honor*" because He has power to do great things (Acts 19:17). This impacted not only the Jews and Greeks, but also those within the life of the Christian Church. Luke tells us, "*Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 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*" (Acts 19:19).

Holding the Name of Jesus in high honor caused the whole church and the whole community to reevaluate their practices. It brought change in the lives of many, even in their religious practices. Those who had been practicing witchcraft brought their books of incantations and spells and burned them right there in the middle of town. Those books and scrolls were worth the value of 50,000 drachmae. The drachma was the value of one day's wage for the common worker. So the owners of those scrolls and books were willing to sacrifice a great expense just to rededicate their lives back to Jesus Christ. They realized that what they had did not compare with what Jesus enabled them to do. It was a cleansing of the church from all unwholesome practices, and it set them back on course in following the Lord Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

What a witness to the whole region! The Christian Church blossomed because the people

decided that they would hold the Name of Jesus in high honor, and decided to let nothing else come in between them and the Lord God Almighty.

My question to you today is this, “What if we were to do the very thing that the Ephesians did? What if we were to confess and get rid of all of the unwholesome things in our lives? What if we were to confess those things that we are doing against the Name of Jesus and come before the Lord in repentance and humility, lifting high the Name of Jesus above all other things? What might the Lord do here in this place? How might He begin to use us to take His great Name into the world in both words and actions?”

You see, that is the value of this text for us today. Luke tells us “*in this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power*” (19:20). If we are to make a difference here in Sheboygan, then we need to get down to the basics of faith. Who is it that we truly worship? What other things are getting in the way of our living for Jesus? What might we be doing that offends the Lord such that He keeps His hand of blessing from us? What might we have to repent of in order to realign our hearts to the making of disciples for Jesus Christ?

The church is not just a place to gather each week to see folks you haven’t seen in the last seven days. The church is not just a place where fellowship happens. We can do that at the local bar or social club. The church is the place where we come together to worship the Lord God Almighty and to give thanks to all that He has done for us through Jesus Christ. The church is a place where we gather as disciples of Jesus Christ to be challenged to grow in our faith, and to help others attain their own growth in Jesus. The church is to be the organization within the community that provides new life, everlasting hope, and redirection for those who have lost their way, so that they might live for Jesus, too. The church is where we gather to pray for those who are hurting, lift up those who have become troubled, and to praise God for what He has done in

answer to our prayers. The church is where we unite together as a part of the body of Jesus Christ to be encouraged to live our lives as witnesses for Jesus Christ. It's not for us to use the Name of Jesus for our own personal gain or our own glorification. The church is for holding the Name of Jesus in high honor so that we might declare to the whole community the difference that Jesus makes as we follow His teachings and obey the commands of God.

We Are The Church, but unless we get our priorities right, and keep the Name of Jesus held in high honor, and be the living witnesses for Him, we will have no power, we will have no blessing, we will have no influence, and we will see no change in our own communities. We must be different than the rest of the world so that the rest of the world might see the value of having Christ Jesus as Lord of our lives.

We are on the right track to finding God's direction for us here. But we have so far to go to become like the Ephesian Church in order that the "*word of the Lord spreads widely and grows in power*" here (Acts 19:20).

Today, as we come before the Lord to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf to free us from sin, if there is anything that is getting in between you and the Lord Jesus, come confess it to the Lord and let it go. God desires that you be His faithful servant, a witness to the whole world what Jesus has done in your life - be it saving you from a tornado, or saving you from an addiction, or saving you from the misuse of His Name, or the saving you of unforgiveness, or the saving you of whatever it might be in your life. Give it to Jesus and be free of it so that you might find His freedom and His blessing. Let's pray.

Father, here we are today, bowing before You with all of the stuff of our lives hanging out. Give us the courage to repent, to turn from our dishonoring ways, and draw close to You once again. Thank You for Jesus' love and forgiveness. We pray this in His great and powerful Name. Amen.