

✠ The power of **real**

- *Have you ever been looking forward to something- GREAT anticipation- then when it arrived, you discovered it was fake? Counterfeit? NOT what you had thought it would be?*
- *Reminds me of my own story of the most disappointing hamburger ever. 26 years ago, brand new to the valley, parents in town, had lunch at the old hub-cab brewery in the now non-existent Crossroads in Vail. Dad was buyin- get whatever you want. I was HUNGRY. My eyes landed on a hamburger I had never heard of before, but it sounded delicious. Here's what I envisioned- Big bug, big juicy hamburger patty, lettuce, tomato, layer of pepper-jack cheese, quacamole, bacon, all topped off by a layer of BLACK BEANS and salsa. UMM!*
- *I mean, what else would a BLACK BEAN hamburger be? To my horror, it was a tiny shriveled up layer of vegetables pretending to be a hamburger patty. The entire thing was a low-grade slightly crunchy salad pretending to be an actual hamburger. It was a COUNTERFEIT BURGER. I still get chills.*
- *In our post-modern generation, we are surrounded by things pretending to be something they aren't- or at least aren't fully. I remember when the term 'virtual reality' entered the lexicon- what could be more postmodern than this- FAKE REALITY.*
- *Unfortunately, fake reality has penetrated the church. There are many prevalent things in Christian culture that aren't the real thing- they are counterfeit knockoffs of the REAL THING.*
- *Tragic, because when it comes to first generation of believers, specifically the writers of NT- one of their GREAT PASSIONS was that people know the GOOD NEWS they proclaimed was GENUINE. It was real, live giving, and it was powerful.*
- *Listen to the language the Apostle John uses as he opens the first of this three letters....*

1 John 1:1-4 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.*

- *You can just FEEL John's emphasis. THIS IS REAL! THIS IS GENUINE! THIS IS THE LIFE OF GOD TO US! So don't settle for anything less than genuine.*
- *About 35 years before John wrote this, Paul was spending his afternoons teaching about the fullness of God's Grace in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, in Ephesus. Last week we saw the incredible story of how God used these three years to spread the Gospel across the entire region of ancient Asia.*
- *But as we will see today and next Sunday, Ephesus was profoundly impacted by the Gospel message as well. In addition to Paul's teaching, we see here- In acts 19, God working through Paul in another way for the purpose of AUTHENTICATING THE GOSPEL.*

✠ Authenticating the gospel

Acts 19:11-12 *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.*

- **Okay- We've discussed multiple passages such as this throughout Acts, but recap a few key points.**
- **First, this passage is DESCRIPTIVE- just as we talked last week when Paul laid his hands on the 12 men, resulting in the Spirit coming upon them and their speaking in tongues. This is description of how God, through Holy Spirit, worked in a unique way at this unique time with the purpose of AUTHENTICATING gospel message, specifically clear teaching of Jesus' very natural death and supernatural resurrection.**
- **Consequently this passage and others like it should not be taken as PRESCRIPTIVE for how God works through believers in all the church, for all time. GOD CAN AND DOES WORK THIS WAY, but we are not taught or promised He WILL work this way in response to ANYTHING WE would do.**
- **EVEN IN ACTS, in first generation of the church, SIGNS such as supernatural physical healing- are not a pattern. These actions by God are present in Acts, but they are not CONSISTENT.**
- **NOW, in response to this, we might think- WHY NOT?**
- **If God used supernatural actions- specifically that brought relief into the lives of people whose lives were profoundly difficult- as a means of validating and authenticating the identity and message of Jesus... THEN WHY WOULD HE NOT DO THE SAME TODAY? The logic goes... if Churches started experiencing supernatural healings done in the name of Jesus Christ, then everyone who witnessed this would become a believer... right?**
- **The answer of scripture is... no they wouldn't. A fascinating detail of Luke's history we often forget is that in virtually every instance of supernatural healings, there were direct witnesses to these events who not only refused to believe, but did everything they could to stop these works from happening.**
- **In Acts 4, Peter and John have been hauled before the Sanhedrin for the crime of healing the crippled man at the temple gates. Seeing the healed man standing right there, they said among themselves... WE CANNOT DENY these men have done a great miracle... WE HAVE GOT TO STOP THIS!**
- **But even more importantly, these supernatural actions by God were NOT the focus of the gospel message, not even here in Ephesus in the text we just read. Writing to the Corinthian church, during the very time these events were unfolding in Ephesus, Paul said this....**

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. **Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,** ²³ **but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,** ²⁴ **but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**

- **We- in the human condition- say to God.. "I'll believe if you do things according to what I think is right... according to what makes sense to me"... The gospel responds... THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S AUTHENTICITY AND GOODNESS is the CROSS.**

- **The great Christian songwriter Michael Card put it this way in his song “God’s Own Fool”**

When we in our foolishness thought we were wise, he became foolish to open our eyes... when we in our weakness believed we were strong, he became helpless to show we were wrong! And so I’ll follow God’s own fool, for only the foolish can tell... believe the unbelievable, come be a fool as well.

- **The great miracle of the Christian faith is not supernatural events that ultimately are only temporary- it is the power of the Cross and the Resurrection- foolishness to the world, but to those of us who believe, the wisdom and power of God. OKAY! MOVING ON.**
- **SAYING sometimes used by people starting out in new jobs... Basically means if you don’t know what you’re doing, just pretend and do your best until you actually figure it out. FAKE IT ‘TILL YOU MAKE IT.**
- **As our story continues, we see a group of people try and jump on Paul’s miracle train- and they had no idea what they were doing- but for them, the saying would be more....**

✠ Fake it till you break it... and what got broken was them.

Acts 19:13-16 *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.*

- **Few things here. FIRST, Ephesus, like Corinth, was a center for the worship of many of the Greek Gods, but most importantly Diana (Artemis), the Goddess of Fertility. The temple to Diana at Ephesus was four times larger than the Parthenon, and was considered a wonder of the ancient world. Ephesus was filled with other temples to pagan gods and goddesses.**
- **Point is that Ephesus was a very spiritually diverse, and spiritually DARK, place. When Luke records Paul casting out demons, this isn’t a dramatic metaphor for mental illness or other diseases. This is real demonic possession.**
- **As a result, it was not uncommon for priests or other religious figures to fashion themselves as someone who could cast out demons. SO, when this starts genuinely happening through Paul’s ministry, it gets people’s attention- in this case from some Jewish men who it seems were already trying to conduct these exorcisms. They thought... HEY! If Paul can do this using the name of Jesus, why can’t we as well?**
- **This reminds me of the plot of the original Indiana Jones movie- The Nazi’s are trying to find the lost Ark of the Covenant- thinking that if they find it, and if they pretend to be Jewish priests, they can commandeer the power of God for their own purposes. Doesn’t go so well for them.**
- **Honestly, we don’t fully know the motivation of the ‘Seven sons of Sceva’, but the sense is they were pretending to be followers of Christ, seeking to commandeer the power of Jesus for their own purposes. It doesn’t go well for them.**
- **SO, what can we learn from this? Remember, this is primarily a DESCRIPTION of a unique way God was working, and we need to be careful not to read something into this story that isn’t there. THAT SAID, there’s a principle here we should consider.**
- **There always have been, and there are now... People and institutions who will co-opt the Christian faith, or the name of Jesus, or snippets of scripture- for their own purposes, while ignoring the true message of the Gospel. Its FAKE Christianity, centered in the agenda of SELF, rather than surrendered to the character, transformation, and calling of Christ.**

- *This happens in politics ALL THE TIME, and as the church we should be on our guard against people who would seek to gain our support through lip service to the beauty and Goodness of God they don't genuinely follow.*
- *But even inside Christian culture, there are leaders and movements that retain a veneer of faith in Christ, will cloth themselves in a degree of truth, but whose message is still centered in themselves, their glory, and the attempt to use God for their own purposes.*
- *Sometimes this is blatant, sometimes subtle, but it's always a temptation. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church from Ephesus, right in the first generation of the church, this is one of the distortions he was warning against.*
- *But here's the reality....*

Reality! Counterfeit christianity doesn't just lack power, it is DANGEROUS

- *It's dangerous because it distorts the Glory and Truth of God.*
- *It's dangerous because it distracts people- including believers- from the GOODNESS, the POWER, the LOVE, and the LIFE GIVING RICHES of God through faith in Christ.*
- *IT IS DANGEROUS because it MAKES IT HARDER for the outsiders to hear the message and turn to God.*
- *As believers, as the church, if we succumb to this temptation, IT IS DANGEROUS because it puts us in a position of being opposed to the work and purposes of God! AND, if you look throughout Acts, that is a very unwise place to be.*
- *LOTS more we could talk about there, but lets move on... because just as we saw the result of counterfeit faith in Christ, Luke now describes the result of GENUINE FAITH IN CHRIST... the result...*

✠ The result of what only God can do

Acts 19:17-20 *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.*

- **FIRST... when GOD changes peoples lives...**

- **God will be GLORIFIED**

Acts 19:17 *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.*

- *Genuine faith in Christ- and genuine expression and practice of our faith in Christ- will always do two things. It will LOVE PEOPLE, and it will bring honor, respect, and Glory to God. It will point people to the nature and goodness of God, NOT to us. Another way to say this is it will MAKE GOD BEAUTIFUL in the eyes of people.*
- *The next thing we see here.. When- through His church, through the lives of disciples-- God is doing what only God can do...*

- **We (believers) will have the courage to CONFESS**

Acts 19:18 *Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.*

- *This isn't to say we all will walk around with T-shirts saying "I'm a Christian", or wear religious jewelry... NOR that we are constantly telling people that we are Christian.*

- **IT DOES MEAN** that we are not afraid to live out the nature and character of Christ- to express the fruit of His spirit to everyone we encounter...
- **IT DOES MEAN** we aren't afraid- that we will desire- to gather with other believers, to grow in our faith as the Body of Christ- to be a part of God's church
- **IT DOES MEAN** that as people see the **GOODNESS, Character, Love, and Integrity of God in HOW WE LIVE**, we won't be afraid to tell them where this comes from- who we are- and the reason for the hope we have...
- **What follows is going to become very important in next weeks scripture... but when we are surrendered to God and we open ourselves to the Spirits work...**

- We will put off the OLD so we may put on the New

- **In other words, OUR LIVES WILL BE CHANGED. In how we THINK, How we FEEL, and how we ACT- in our mind, will, and emotions, we will experience transformation.... And this increasing change will lead us to LET GO OF the patterns of life- the behaviors – the ways of thinking- that are NO LONGER who we are!**
- **In Hebrews 12 the writer exclaims “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith”**
- **Luke tells us that in Ephesus....**

Acts 19:19 *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.*

- **This was huge! This was an act of great sacrifice! But even more, it was these new believers proclaiming.... WE ARE NO LONGER WHO WE USED TO BE! We have been given a NEW LIFE, a NEW IDENTITY...we are NEW CREATIONS, and we will no longer live the way we used to live.**
- **About 5 years later, Paul would write a letter to this very community of believers- what we know as the book of EPHESIANS, and he said...**

Ephesians 4:22-24 ²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;* ²³ *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;* ²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- **This is a marker of the genuine work of God- and it is a source of HOPE... that we experience God bringing change and transformation into who we are and how we live.**
- **The last observation here... when God is doing what only God can do... when Jesus followers are experiencing and expressing the REAL THING...**

- The Gospel will grow in both PRESENCE and INFLUENCE

Acts 19:20 *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

- *The word of the Lord- the good news of the cross, the resurrection, and the Grace of God... it grew in its presence- it spread to more people... and it also grew in its POWER- in the influence, the maturity, and the transformation it brought into people's lives.*
- *The Growing influence of the Gospel would soon be seen as a threat to those who profited from the spiritual darkness present in Ephesus. We will see this next week.*
- *Want to end with something we can't miss. When we look at this entire story, it wasn't the supernatural healings and exorcisms that led to what happened in Ephesus. This was part of it, but a small part.*
- *The great evidence that led to the Word of the Lord spreading widely and growing in power was the CHANGED LIVES of these new believers. It was the miracle of Jesus Christ taking people who were spiritually dead, giving them NEW LIFE, a new identity... FREEING THEM from the bondage of sin, shame, and a life centered only on self.... And ONE DAY AT A TIME, transforming the very nature of HOW THEY LIVED.*
- *In 1968, the great Marvin Gaye, with Tammi Terrell, released their second album entitled "You're all I need". The hit off that album was "AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING".*
- *Friends, in this world- even in the world of Christian culture- there are so many things that offer HOPE, that offer LIFE... that just can't deliver. They can't deliver because they aren't genuine.*
- *IN God's Word... IN CHRIST...we have been given THE REAL THING. THIS is the message, the goodness that our world needs to hear and see. MAY WE SETTLE for nothing less*