

Acts 19:8-20

Back to the Beginning

The Summit Church

MPT: *The Holy Spirit causes gospel-awakening by moving through God's ppl.*

MPS: *The way to fall in love again is to remember back to the beginning.*

Introduction

My name is Curtis...

There are few things I love more than getting to deliver God's word to you...but, if I'm honest, it's still nerve-wracking sometimes. Not because of speaking in front of people – that doesn't bother me one bit – but because I know I'm *not Pastor J.D.*...so immediately I'm fighting an uphill battle with all of you...

- ...I was telling this to J.D. the other day, and in an effort to be encouraging he said: *"Man, you're going to be fine. Don't try to be **charming**, or **witty**, or sound **smart**...just be yourself."*
- I'm just kidding. I love my Pastor...I'm beyond thankful for him and indebted to him in ways I'll never be able to repay.

Actually, starting next week Pastor J.D. is going to start a short series about **atheism** and **faith** that we're calling *"Unknown God."* We'll be exploring some of the **hardest questions** presented to the Christian faith. This will be a great opportunity for you to bring some of your friends who are curious about Christianity or just have questions...so be sure to pick up some inviter cards and meet back here next week for that.

A series about atheism on Easter...seriously, this is just one of the reason I love this church. I love The Summit Church. I love the people, the message, the mission, the leadership, the worship...everything about it. ***How many of y'all love this church?***

You know, I can't help but compare our church to the church we've been studying the last few weeks: the church at Ephesus; a church that the Holy Spirit was **exploding** in and doing some **incredible** things. Here's how the Summit reminds me of the church at Ephesus:

- They've got phenomenal **leadership**: Paul, Timothy, John
 - They've got BIBLE AUTHORS teaching. Unfair.
 - I love our leadership, but this would be like the Summit having J.D., Platt, and Piper all **teaching** on rotation.
- The **Holy Spirit is moving**, healing, and doing miracles.
- People are getting saved and then being **sent out** to tell more people about Jesus.
- And they're **planting** other churches.
 - Seriously, what more could you want from a church?
 - Doesn't this sound like the Summit *just a bit*? At this point it almost feels like gloating, but I'm really just bragging on the work God has done *in* and *through* us.

What's interesting is that Ephesus is the only church in the bible where we see the beginning, middle, and end of the church. See somewhere along the way, this awesome **church became just a part of history**...they **faded away** and **ceased to exist**. **And if that happened to them, couldn't that happen to us?**

- So we've been looking at the life of this church – the middle of it – in our Ephesians series. Today I want us to look at the **end** and the **beginning** to see what the birth and death looked like...with the ultimate hope that the Holy Spirit will **guide** and **correct** us so as to not make the same mistakes they did.

Last weekend Pastor J.D. preached on Satan and demons, so I wanted to try and be a little bit more encouraging this week...so I chose to start in the most encouraging book there is: Revelation. What I want to do is flash-forward to the end of this church, then we'll come back to the beginning (kind of like watching an old LOST episode...but hopefully this sermon has a better ending).

Walkthrough

Revelation 2:2-5 (NIV),

²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Again, seems like a phenomenal church, right? Great theology. Endures well. Doesn't deal with evil people. *Sign me up!*

⁴Yet I hold this against you: **you have forsaken the love you had at first.** (Ever had a conversation like this? "*Oh yeah, you're amazing. But...*") ⁵Remember how far you have fallen! **Repent and do the things you did at first.** If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Let me translate that for you from the original Greek: *you have fallen out of love with Jesus! You have forsaken the love you had at first, Ephesus.*

The beginning was AMAZING. They were obsessively in love with God because they had just realized for the first time how much he truly loved them. They were on fire!

- But over time that newness faded. **Maybe you've felt this...**relationship (on fire); job (exciting start); *spiritually...*
- ...over time it became not as exciting to read your bible anymore. Not as easy to pray. Worship music doesn't stir you like it used to...sermons aren't as intoxicating. And now you find yourself stuck in spiritual neutral, even though you may be *doing* all the right things (coming to church, you're part of a SG, you're serving on the weekends). There's just not that

same passion you had at the beginning. **How many of you have ever felt this way?**

Think about it...you used to come in and love Pastor JD's sermons **no matter what** he was preaching (or how long!) ...now you're just like, "Nicolas Cage *again?!?*"

Somewhere along the way what you fell in love with suddenly became not enough. And this is exactly what happened to this church at Ephesus...**it's how it died!** It didn't have some big theological heresy creep in...it just slowly fell out of love with Jesus.

But while God may find you in a mess, he'll never leaves you in one...so he gives them instruction on how to fall back in love: (v5) **"Remember how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."**

Now I want to be crystal clear here: what he's saying is that there are some things that we **can and should do** to maintain a burning passion and love for Jesus; not to get Jesus to fall back in love with us.

- Very important: God's love for you is built solely on the work of Jesus Christ, **not on anything you have done**, are doing, or will ever do. So he tells them that **if they'll just go back to doing what they did at the beginning, that their love and desire for him will be restored.** His love hasn't gone anywhere, because His love is not predicated upon your performance in the first place!
- See the main thing about Christianity is not the work we do for God, but the relationship we maintain¹ *with* God ... and **there's certain things we can do that help us maintain that relationship.**

If the beauty of Jesus is enough to satisfy the infinite God for eternity... yet we find ourselves **not satisfied, not pleased, and not**

¹ Oswald Chambers

in love with him...that's not an issue with Jesus, that's blindness on our part! The problem is with our **blindness**, not Jesus's **beauty!**

*So what were they doing at first that made their relationship so intimate? What were they doing that made them obsessively in love with Jesus? If you've grown bored with Jesus, what should **you** be returning to? And what are the things we can do to make sure our love and affection for Jesus doesn't fade and The Summit Church ultimately disappear?*

Let's go look back at the beginning, the birth of this church in Acts 19, to get a sense of *where* they fell from.

- Paul has arrived in Ephesus and finds a few believers...and the Holy Spirit is just getting started doing work on these folks...

Acts 19:8-20 (ESV)

⁸And he [Paul] entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

⁹But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

So Paul is in Ephesus to preach the gospel and plant a church. Initially he's speaking in the Jewish synagogue (their version of a big church building), but they get tired of him there, so he moves his preaching to the "lecture hall of Tyrannus," which is basically a classroom.

- Now this may seem like a huge bummer, but in the synagogue he could only preach on the Sabbath day – one day a week. By moving to the lecture hall, he can now preach the gospel **every single day** and be strategic about what times he taught.

¹⁰This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Think about how easy it would've been for Paul to get discouraged about not having the perfect platform to speak in the synagogue with the religious elite. But he leaves there, rents this lecture hall, and ultimately **what started in the hall ended up in all of Asia**.

- Unlike Paul, we tend to think that if we can just get our lost friends and family to come to church (the Christian synagogue) that God will save them – and sure, he absolutely uses the church to do that every single week. But what if God really wanted **you** to go meet people where they're at **in the hall**? What if God intends for **you** to be the vehicle by which he saved your brother/sister, mom/dad, friends?
- You may think the synagogue is the place for salvation, but God actually has the Spirit ready to use you in the hall!
 - **And you have no idea how God is using you.** Even when it may seem like nothing is happening and no fruit is coming forth and no one is getting saved...**God is still using you...**
 - The question is **are you willing to follow the Spirit to the hall, even when the synagogue seems like the better place?**
 - Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in conversations at work? In the gym? In your neighborhood? To the mission field?

Because Paul was allowing the Holy Spirit to work through him...¹¹And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul (God was doing the miracles, Paul was just the instrument), ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists (I love that this is a job) undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."

Think about it – this is amazing. Paul has shown that his God – this **Jesus** – is so powerful, that people are like, "I want in on some of that

power!” Don’t you want people to look at you like that? Don’t you want people to say, “I may not believe in her God, but I sure know that whenever life throws **unbelievable circumstances** her way, there’s something in her that’s **unshakeable**.”

These “Jewish exorcists” are trying to cast out demons **in the name of Jesus**...which is great logic, but terrible execution. Because what they’ve failed to realize is that for Jesus’ power to work **through** them, it first has to be **in** them.

“Christlikeness is not produced by **imitation**, but by **inhabitation**.”² – Rick Warren

- The power to cast out demons doesn’t come by imitation; it comes by surrendering to Christ as Lord and having the Holy Spirit inhabit your heart and work **through you**.
- 1 John 4:4, “**Greater is he that is in you, than he who is in the world!**”
- Colossians 1:27, “**Christ in you is the hope of glory!**”

See there’s a lie that Satan wants you to believe...and it’s that you can have all of the **privileges** of Jesus, without actually **possessing** Jesus. But you can’t have the **power** if you don’t want the **person**. Because Jesus does not come to us as **Savior** unless we also accept him as **Lord** – which means living life his way; doing w/e he tells us to do; going wherever he tells us to go.

¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.

¹⁵But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?”

Now this might be the **most embarrassing dis in all of history**. A demon is so **unthreatened** and **uninterested** in you that he asks, “Who are you?” Makes me think of: **Lion King scene where baby Simba roars at the hyenas**.

- ...because left to ourselves in the face of our enemy, we’re just squeaking out roars into a laughing face. But when the Lion of Judah, King Jesus, roars behind you, Satan flees in an instant.
 - Left to our own flesh, demons laugh in our face. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, demons flee.

Listen carefully, it just keeps getting better...

¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

If you’ve ever watched a fight – boxing, UFC, street fight, w/e – there’s usually a pretty big debate on who **actually** won and who **actually** lost the fight.

- Let me just throw this out there: as a general rule, if when the fight started you had pants on, and when the fight was over you were **no longer wearing pants**...you lost that fight.
- No one is arguing you won that fight. ~~They’re saying, “He came in with clothes, and he literally got those clothes beat off of him.” That’s what happened here.~~ **You can’t make this stuff up. Stories like this are why I really believe the bible.**

So the Holy Spirit is moving, miracles are happening, false teachers are getting beaten naked...**Jesus is flexing/roaring over Ephesus**, God is doing **miracles** in their midst, and people are getting **saved**!

- But we know what’s coming...*Remember how far they’ve fallen...remember they fall out of love with Jesus*. And he tells them that to fall back in love they should go back and do *what you were doing at the beginning*. So here it is:

¹⁷And this (these extraordinary miracles) became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸Also many of those

² http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/full-post/god's-spirit-is-working-in-you_929

who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

What were they (and we) doing at the beginning?

In the Beginning They...

1) **...Worshiped God Freely** (v17)

¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and **the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.**

“Extol” means to praise, glorify, and to worship *enthusiastically*. Now this is not to say that this praise will always manifest itself in a raucous type of worship...after all, **sometimes the hottest fires aren’t the ones with the largest flames.** For some people, being overcome with the love of Jesus will manifest itself in jumping, shouting, and raising hands...and for others it will make them fall to their knees with tears and weep quietly. The point is, when you really see Jesus in all his beauty, **you will be moved to extol him.**

I think Charles Spurgeon said it best when he said, **“It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about him.”** – Spurgeon

- What he’s saying is that you don’t have to be an **extrovert** to be an **extoller!**
- Some of you say you are a Christian, and you’ve been coming to church your entire life, yet you’ve never truly known what it’s like to worship God freely and passionately. You’ve never been swept up in him and found yourself deeply, intensely, entirely in love with Jesus. You’ve never even had a

conversation with someone else about your faith. If you truly have a *high appreciation* of Jesus then there’s no way you’ll be totally silent about him.

- So if you’re here and you’re an **unbeliever**, and you know someone that claims “Christian,” but their life doesn’t at all line up with that confession, I’d like to apologize on their behalf.

And what I hope we’ll all see is that there’s a difference between **taking up Jesus** and being **taken up by Jesus**. You can have an *appreciation* of Jesus w/o having an *affection* for him. But God is not after mere appreciation.

- That’s why in Matthew 15:8–9, Jesus says, *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me.”*

ILLUSTRATION: For so long, this was me...I would’ve told you I was a Christian and was even in church every weekend... *Testimony...*

- I was trying to honor God with my lips, but my heart was SO far away from him.

One of the main reasons I never wanted to fully commit to this whole Jesus thing was because I thought I’d be giving up everything FUN.

- I bought into the stereotype of what “holy people” are like: lifeless, monotonous, dull, bland, anemic, boring and so spiritual that it often looks painful.
- Yet the way the Bible describes loving Jesus is like going to a wedding, where Jesus and his disciples are like the wedding-party. Jesus is the groom whose joy overflows into the hearts of his friends...the kind of joy that turns **fasting** into **feasting**. A joy that we get to share in, not just for a day, but for eternity.
 - Psalm 16:11, *Path of life...fullness of joy...pleasure forevermore.*
 - If you’re here and you’ve been seeking after pleasure...it’s only found in Jesus.

This is why the **Psalmist** couldn't help but shout about the glory of God, saying:

(34:1) *I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.*

(68:4) *Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him – his name is the Lord.*

(109:30) *With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great multitude of worshipers I will praise him.*

(115:18) *It is we who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore. Praise the Lord.*

(117:1) *Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.*

(118:28) *You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.*

(145:1) *I will extol you, my God and my King, and bless your name forever and ever.*

(145:2) *Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.*

(145:10) *All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you.*

If you've ever been weirded-out by Christians who are **so happy that it almost seems fake**...and you **wonder why** they are how they are...maybe it's because **they just have more Jesus than you do**...they've found **joy** and **pleasure**...and they can't help but worship him freely!

Let's not let anything keep us from worshiping God freely, church. The second we stop **worshiping** is the second our hearts will start **wandering**.

So how do we keep from wandering? Let's keep reading...

¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, **confessing and divulging their practices.**

The second thing they did in the beginning was they...

2) ...Confessed Sin Regularly (v18)

The verb tenses here indicate that the people "kept coming ... kept confessing ... kept divulging."³

- See in the beginning they **hadn't learned how to play church** yet.
 - **They hadn't learned** that when someone asks you how you're doing, you're not supposed to **actually** tell them you're jacked up...you're supposed to tell them you're "Beyond blessed, brother! How are you?"
 - **They hadn't learned** how when you start feeling uncomfortable during a sermon, that you're supposed to make sure to think of **someone else** that needs to hear this sermon...because it most certainly couldn't be the Holy Spirit convicting *you* of anything.
 - **They hadn't learned** that prayer requests should **actually** be *a time of gossiping about someone else's sin*...because God forbid I talk about something I'm struggling with.
- They hadn't learned these things – how to play church – so **when they heard something that wasn't lining up with how they were living**, they only knew to do one thing: CONFESS IT!

Some of you think you're hiding your sin from God – **you're not!** He sees everything.

- Hebrews 4:13 (NIV), **"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."**
- Psalm 139:1-4 (NIV), **"¹You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive**

³ BEC, Acts

my thoughts from afar.³ **You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.** ⁴**Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.**"

- He knows everything – even your thoughts – how terrifying is that? So why not just confess them and allow the blood of Jesus to cleanse them? Kept to yourself, your sin **condemns** you; given to Jesus your sin is **covered**.
 - 1 John 1:9, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us those sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

I know this is hard...I know it. But it's so worth it. The **lie that the enemy will try to tell you** is that if you confess your sin then **people will be ashamed** of you...or that **nobody will respect** or look at you the same...or that **God won't approve** of you...or that there would be a **ton of fallout**.

There is nothing that Satan would rather have you do than keep your sin to yourself, because **if he can keep you accused, then he can keep you unused**.

I'm not going to say that confession isn't messy...but to think that hiding your sin is better than confessing it is a **lie from the pit of hell**...and, in Jesus name, you need to confess that sin.

- **Jesus will only cover what you choose to confess!**

In the beginning they worshiped God freely, they confessed sin regularly, and they...

3) ...Abandoned Idols Fully (v19)

An idol is anything you prioritize above God...it's w/e you couldn't live without. Here's how Ephesus dealt with idols in the beginning...

¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts **brought their books together and burned them** in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.
²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

These books were worth around \$8M; they were the magician's livelihood. *How would these guys make their living? What would their community think?* On top of that, Ephesus was notorious for its use of these dark magic arts – so **to the world** it would've been "just fine" to keep the books. This is why it's **so easy** to justify our idols...

- "Oh, I know there's a little nudity, but everyone's watching this show!"
- "Oh, I know *it seems* like I neglect my family for work, but really I'm just making sure we're provided for."
- "Man, it's not that big of a deal, everybody's doing it...and God is forgiving anyways."
- I can even hear Judas saying, "Don't burn the books! Sell them and give the money to the poor!"

AW Tozer: **"Much of our difficulty in life...stems from our unwillingness to take God as he is and adjust our lives accordingly."**⁴

These folks took God as he is and realized that their practices didn't line up, so they adjusted their lives and got rid of everything that wasn't glorifying to God.

- Because it's impossible to embrace the **future** God has for you until you walk away from your **past**.
- See, if it's not Jesus, get rid of it. If it's not Jesus, you must turn your back on it. If it's not Jesus, have nothing to do with it.
- They didn't bother thinking, "Well if I repent that'll mean I have to give ___ up." **NO!** They just said, "I don't care what I have to give that up because Jesus is better than ____!"

⁴ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 58.

- And when you truly repent of sin, you will keep yourself as far as possible from the occasions of it. By burning their books, they made sure they could never go back to that way of life again. As Pastor J.D. has said before: **where God's presence becomes real, sin becomes intolerable.**

(VAMP)

Once you have been freed from the bondage of sin, you have a freedom unlike anything you've ever experienced before. Which is why they burned the books "in the sight of all" ...they wanted everyone to know about this Jesus!

- It was a declaration that Jesus is worth giving up everything for → careers, reputations, EVERYTHING.

Conclusion: REMEMBER

These were the things they were doing at the beginning...but there was one more thing they were told back in Revelation... *Revelation 2:5*, "Remember how far you have fallen!"

Scripture says, "We love God because he first loved us!" Nothing will make you fall in love with Jesus again as quick as **remembering** what he's done for you.

So when you think about how bad you've messed up...**remember** that still God loves you. When you were fallen...**remember** how God picked you up. When you were dead in the water...**remember** how he resuscitated you. When you had a heart of stone...**remember** how he gave you a heart of flesh. When you had no eyes to see...**remember** how he gave you sight.

Remember how Jesus picked you up and he sat you in the heavenly places...he put you at the right hand of the throne of God, to reign as

a co-heir with Christ. **Remember** that you are a conqueror, a brother or sister of the Most High, and how you are united with him in his righteousness...just **remember** how much he loves you!

Go back to the beginning: Remember how beautiful he was the first time you saw him. **Remember** how he saved you. **Remember** that we were dead in our trespasses and sins – separated from Christ...*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he has loved us, made us alive together in Christ – it is by grace you have been saved – not of your own works, so that no one may boast.*

REMEMBER: God saved you...redeemed you...restored you...brought you back to him. **Remember** his love toward you. You **remember** how grateful you were because of where he brought you from, and you **remember** the depth of his love toward you displayed on the cross.

And so when you worship, you can't help but put your **hands in the air**, or **fall on your face in tears**. When you praise you can't help but shout, whether out **loudly** or **silently** unto him...it just comes out of you as natural as breathing.

You worship God when you remember. You'll confess sin when you remember. And you'll abandon all of your false idols when you remember.

What's keeping this from happening to us, Summit Church? We have incredible leadership. We have biblical theology. We have endured the attacks of Satan. The Holy Spirit is doing more than we ever could've asked or imagined...all just like Ephesus. Yet, for them, somewhere along the way, Jesus became not enough.

Let's let the Holy Spirit correct us and redirect our affections to **worship** God freely, **confess** sin regularly, and **abandon** idols fully.

Bow Heads

You have to make a choice:

- 1) BELIEVERS
- 2) UNBELIEVERS

