

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
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Acts 19:1-10 “What’s Missing?”

Intro. As Paul continued his third missionary journey, he returned to the city of Ephesus. Whereas his first visit there was brief, this time he would stay three years to help build one of the greatest churches of the New Testament period. I believe he stayed so long because of the importance of the city. Ephesus was one of the largest cities of the ancient world. One indication of the size of the city is the fact that a theater has been discovered in the ruins there which could seat 25,000 people! It was the religious center for the worship of the goddess Artemis, or Diana, who was a fertility goddess. It was also a center for the practice of sorcery and every form of black magic and satanic activity. Even though Ephesus was a religious city, Paul knew that they needed Jesus Christ. So he came to them as a missionary. He knew that from that city he could reach the entire province of Asia (v.10).

Now to capture this great city for Christ, Paul would need a special anointing from God and some spirit-filled helpers. Shortly after arriving in Ephesus, Paul found a group of about 12 men who were religious disciples of some sort (v.1). They probably had been disciples of Apollos (18:25), and Paul could have found them in attendance at the Jewish synagogue (v.8). No doubt Paul hoped that they would become a nucleus for a new Christian Church. But were they *Christian* disciples, or just disciples of Judaism?¹ Paul sensed that they were not yet Christians. They evidently were lacking signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives, so the question in v.2 is given, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”² Paul expected that faith in the Lord Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand (cf. Rom. 8:9). The signs of the Spirit’s presence were sadly absent from these men. This question also suggests that people can really know when they receive the Holy Spirit.

The problem of these men is a common problem today in our churches. The reason the church often has so little impact on a community is because its members either do not have the Holy Spirit or they are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Too often churches rely on worldly methods and techniques to reach people for Christ, but we really need is a great moving of the Holy Spirit!

Some Baptists have been afraid of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, largely because of some incorrect teaching on this subject. But correct teaching on the subject of the Holy Spirit is desperately needed. The only way we will have an impact upon our community will be through the filling of the Holy Spirit. So I hope today’s message will be beneficial to us all, both to our personal lives, and in our witness in the community.

Now the first truth I want to share from our Scripture text is this, we should:

I. AVOID SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS

There are several that I see illustrated in our text:

A. A Lack of Spiritual Knowledge – These disciples said in v.2, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” They were ignorant of something very important. Hos. 4:6

¹ The religious leaders of Israel said they were disciples of Moses (Jn. 9:28).

² The KJV is incorrect in translating it was “since you believed.”

says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” This is why Paul said in 1 Thess. 4:13 and five other occasions (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8), “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren....” These 12 disciples were lacking in basic Christian knowledge and understanding. This may not have been their fault. Rom. 10:14 says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” And since they were far removed from Palestine, and probably Gentile converts, we can excuse their ignorance. So note with me what they did not know much about:

1. Concerning the Holy Spirit – They said in v.2, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” A Greek word was left untranslated here in answer to Paul’s question. It is *alla*, which here means “no.” Or, according to Dana & Mantey³ it has an emphatic force “No, in fact....” Many believe that they only did not know that the Holy Spirit had already been given on the day of Pentecost. They must have heard about John from some of John’s disciples, probably Apollos, for John taught about the Holy Spirit, and you would think that anyone who heard his preaching would know of the existence of the Holy Spirit. But the Greek is plain on this point. They evidently had never even heard that the Holy Spirit even exists. That being likely, I would conclude that they were God-fearing Gentiles who had been converted to becoming disciples of John. Most Jews would have known about the Holy Spirit.

Do you realize that you don’t have to live life on your own? Do you know of the many benefits of the presence and filling of the Holy Spirit?

They also lacked knowledge:

2. Concerning Jesus – Look with me at vv.3-4, “And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’” It is quite possible that somebody had baptized them by using only the words: “I baptize you upon your repentance of sin.” Followers of John were scattered about and probably baptized some. They failed to tell these disciples the most important part of John’s message, that Jesus is the One God promised. So they knew about John, but not Jesus. But knowing Jesus as our personal Savior is the only way to God (John 14:6).

So friend, don’t be ignorant about God and the teachings of the Bible. Your eternal life depends on it! The quality of your present life (Jn. 10:10) depends on it! Today, we have no excuse for remaining in spiritual ignorance. You and I can read the Bible! We can attend a Bible teaching church. Don’t be among the spiritually ignorant. Knowing God’s Word will really make a difference in your life both now and for eternity.

Now because they did not know about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they had another problem:

B. Belief without True Salvation - Just because these men were called “disciples” in v.1 does not mean that they were Christians.⁴ The word itself simply refers to people who, in a disciplined manner, follow a body of teachings, and/or follow a teacher. They were probably religious disciples who believed that John the Baptist was a prophet. Though some commentators

³ H. E. Dana & Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955).

⁴ Longenecker says, “Luke’s practice is to portray the spiritual condition of his characters by their actions without always evaluating it.” He gives the examples of Simon of Samaria as having “believed” (cf. 8:13), of the Judaizers as “believers” (cf. 15:5), of the seven sons of Sceva as exorcising demons “in the name of Jesus,” and of Sceva their father as “a Jewish chief priest” (cf. 19:13-14).

(Bruce) believe they were saved, at least in the Old Testament sense of the word, they were probably not yet true believers. I say that because they acknowledge in the last of v.2, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” That would not be true of a New Testament believer. Furthermore, they knew John, but not Jesus. Finally, their “re-baptism” in v.5 confirms that they are not yet saved. True Christian baptism should occur only once, and that to a proper subject (believer) being baptized in a proper manner (immersion), with proper purpose (to symbolize salvation and not to bring about or even consummate salvation).

So they illustrate the fact that a person’s faith must be in the right object. You can sincerely believe that some pills in a bottle will heal you, but if they are the wrong pills, your faith will not do you any good. Faith is very important, but your faith must be in Jesus Christ and Him alone!

Is your belief just head belief? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, or is your faith in something else? Do you believe in the reality of God’s Holy Spirit?

We see another problem with these men that we should avoid:

C. Lack of Spiritual Power – Why had Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit? I believe they appeared to lack the power and other manifestations of the Spirit in their lives. It reminds me of what Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:5, they were “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” The power of the Lord within us is a marvelous blessing. But these 12 disciples were not the only ones that lacked spiritual power. Sampson lost his strength after he disclosed the secret of his strength. The Lord’s disciples lacked the spiritual power they needed to cast out the demon from the boy at the foot of the mountain of transfiguration.

Why is this? Some have been to Calvary and found out that God is *for* us, but we have not been to Pentecost and found out that God can be *in* us.

Do you have any of these problems in your life? Do you lack spiritual knowledge? Do you lack true saving faith? Do you lack the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? Well there are certainly many outside of our church who lack true salvation, and probably some within our church who lack true salvation. So I want to share my second point, and that is that we should:

II. PROCLAIM SALVATION AS GOD’S ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEMS

That is what Paul did. He proclaimed the gospel to these men because people need the Lord. Like many people today, these people were religious, but not yet true believers in Christ. Paul could sense that something was missing from their lives. Notice that Paul first shared:

A. The Provision of Salvation Is in Christ – Notice what Paul said in v.4, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” Paul indicated to them that John’s ministry, including his baptizing activity, had pointed to One who was coming after him, namely, Jesus. Note also that Paul called Him *Christ* Jesus. That’s a reference to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, whom God promised to send in fulfillment of prophecy. He did all that was necessary to save us from our sins. He suffered and died as an atonement for our sin. Salvation does not come through your good works. Salvation from sin only comes through Jesus, the Savior.

God has done all that was necessary to provide for our salvation. But that provision must be appropriated by each individual. So we must also let people know that they must:

B. Fulfill the Requirements of Salvation – The two requirements of salvation are both mentioned here in v.4:

1. You Must Repent of Sin - One requirement for salvation that we see here is repentance. Paul said in v.4, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance....” Repentance is an inner change of mind and heart which issues in an outer change of conduct, from sin to godly righteousness. You can’t have forgiveness of sins until you repent of your sins. I believe that these men were willing to repent and turn from the sins of the pagan world. Jesus said, “Except you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

Repentance is not enough. There is another requirement:

2. You Must Believe in Jesus – In v.4 we see that John the Baptist said that the people “should believe on Him who would come after him,” and then Paul said, “that is, on Christ Jesus.” As we have already discussed, these men were believers of some sort, but they did not yet believe in Jesus Christ. But we cannot be saved apart from placing our faith in Jesus. Paul said in Eph. 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith....” Peter said in Acts 4:12, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” We must come to the place in our lives when we decide we will not trust in our own works to save us, but trust only in Christ, who died for our sins.

C. Fulfill the First Requirement of Discipleship – In v.5 we see one of the first things we should do once we become a Christian. There we read, “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” To be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus means by His authority as an expression of obedience to His Lordship. There is something wrong with a person who says that they are a Christian, and yet they refuse to be baptized. Jesus was baptized, and He commands that we be baptized (Mt. 28:19). You see, baptism pictures and proclaims what Christ did to save us: He died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again from the dead. It also pictures that we have died to the old way of life, and been raised to live a new life of following Christ.

Have you been baptized? If you are a true believer, you should be. So why not present yourself for baptism this morning? I don’t see how you can have assurance of salvation apart from being obedient to Christ in regard to baptism.

Finally, we see from our text that we should:

III. PREPARE NEW BELIEVERS FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Salvation is not just a ticket to heaven. When you are converted and believe in Christ, that is only the beginning of a life of serving the Lord and doing good works. But the good thing is that God will change you from within, and He will give you both the desire and the power to do these things.

Because of the unusual nature of this situation, these disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believed. Instead, according to v.6, it was only when Paul laid his hands upon them. Through this means:

A. Our Spiritual Leaders Will Be Confirmed - God gave Paul the privilege of imparting the Spirit to these men, thus proving his authority as God’s messenger, and his equality with Peter and John and the other apostles. Vv. 11-12 show further confirmation of God that Paul was sent by Him. The laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit was one of the “signs of an apostle” that

Paul spoke of in 2 Cor. 12:12 (cf. Acts 2:43; 5:12; Heb. 2:3-4). So God wanted to turn the devotion of these men from John the Baptist to Paul the Apostle, and follow him as their new leader to establish a great church in Ephesus.

The same thing is true today in a different way. I believe that God will generally give some evidence of His anointing upon His chosen pastors, evangelists, and missionaries (cf. Acts 6:3; Num. 11:17). If I were on a pastor search committee, I wouldn't recommend a man to a church if I did not see evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in that man's ministry.

B. The Spirit Will Be Given - Their ignorance of the Holy Spirit changed rather quickly! We read in v.6 that "the Holy Spirit came upon them." We must be careful not to get our doctrine from this one passage, as if it's normative. In Acts 10:44-48 the Holy Spirit clearly fell the moment they believed and before they were baptized. Receiving the Holy Spirit is not conditioned upon baptism.

We know from this and other Scriptures why the Holy Spirit is given to us. In Jn. 16:13 Jesus says, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...." The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth. He will help you understand the truth of God's Word. I John 2:27 indicates this as well.

Another reason the Holy Spirit is given is to help us serve the Lord effectively. Notice in the last of v.6 that they were able to speak in tongues and prophesy after the Holy Spirit came upon them. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has given you a spiritual gift, a divine enablement for service. You can serve the Lord with extra ordinary strength and giftedness. Acts 1:8 indicates that the Holy Spirit will give us power to witness for Christ.

Not only do we need to receive the Holy Spirit, but furthermore:

C. We Need the Filling of the Holy Spirit – We need more than to be simply indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We need to be *filled* with His manifest presence, including His power. Our text doesn't specifically say these men were filled with the Spirit, but the fact that they spoke in tongues and prophesied is certainly an indication that they were filled with the Spirit. I want to share with you several truths about the filling of the Holy Spirit:

1. There Will Be Manifestations of that Filling - The filling of the Spirit will be manifested in some way. You can't see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind. So it is with the Spirit. And the fact that they were able to speak with tongues and to prophesy left no doubt about the presence and filling of the Holy Spirit in their lives (cf. Acts 10:46).

On several occasions in the book of Acts we read that the filling of the Holy Spirit was manifested by the gift of tongues. The word "tongues" refer to human languages. Ephesus was the major city at the crossroads between the West and the East. There were many languages known and spoken there. It could be that the gift of tongues aided them in their ministry to the people there. This also was a dramatic message to these 12 men to assure them that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and God wanted them to help Paul with a great work.

Lest we seek to reproduce this sign, we need to study Heb. 2:3-4; Acts 5:12; 2 Cor. 12:12. All of these verses refer to the fact that the apostles were especially endowed with signs and wonders to confirm their apostleship, and thus their message (the word "apostle" refers to someone sent with a message.) This is the last time in the book of Acts that we read of speaking in tongues. And none of the later epistles even mention speaking in tongues.

I consider the fact that they were able to prophesy an even more important manifestation of the Spirit. That refers to a supernatural ability to speak the Word of God. Prophesying heads the list

of charismatic gifts in 1 Cor. 12-14, while glossolalia was at the bottom of the list. In Acts 4:31 we see another example of speaking the Word of God boldly as a result of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is said there about speaking in tongues.

In addition to what I have already mentioned, Eph. 5:19-21 mentions other manifestations of the filling and presence of the Spirit. The Spirit will cause you to sing unto the Lord with a joyful spirit. He will lead you to be thankful. He will give you a submissive spirit. Furthermore, if you are filled with the *Holy Spirit*, then you should be more holy in your personal life. Gal. 5:16 says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." I wouldn't give 2 cents for a religion which causes someone to speak in tongues and yet outside of church they live a life of sin. And finally, another manifestation would be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), including love, joy, peace and gentleness.

Do you and others see such manifestations of the filling of the Spirit in your life?

2. There Will Be Evangelistic Results of that Filling - In spite of their smallness in numbers, there were great results. Look at v.10, where we read that "all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." The unusual giving of the Holy Spirit to these twelve could have been a special provision by the Holy Spirit Himself for the unusual activity which would find the gospel changing the city of Ephesus radically. Perhaps 12 Spirit-filled men were enough to contribute to such a great success. Through the witness of Paul, these men and others, churches sprang up throughout Asia, not only at Colossae but at Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col. 4:13). In I Cor. 16:7-9 Paul wrote of a great door of opportunity for the gospel there in Ephesus. Ephesus became a very important center of Christian and missionary activity.

Oh, how important it is that we be filled with the Holy Spirit! I want to challenge everyone of you to be filled with the Spirit, and serve the Lord in the power and ability of the Spirit. How then can we be filled with the Spirit? Of course, the first step is salvation. In the case of these men, they did not need a special course on the Holy Spirit. They simply needed the facts of the gospel and a faith in Christ. It was only after they were saved that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This is one thing that is common in all cases of those receiving the Holy Spirit. There is no consistency as to water baptism or the laying on of hands.

I believe that there is more to it than just becoming a Christian. You must also die to self and sin. Eph. 5:18 says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." This gives another clue concerning how to be filled by the Spirit. You cannot be filled with wine and filled with the Spirit at the same time. You cannot be full of self and sin and be filled with the Spirit. You have to empty a glass of water before it can be filled with something else. So you need to die to sin. Yield your life fully to the Holy Spirit, and you should be filled with the Spirit!

Another thing important is to ask to be filled by the Holy Spirit. James 4:2 says, "you do not have because you do not ask." So seek the Lord in prayer, and ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, if you want to be filled by the Holy Spirit, then step out on faith and do something you cannot do in your own strength, like sharing the Word of God with someone boldly (Acts 1:8).

I remember the first time I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I was 17 years old, and I was attending a Youth Camp at Hargis Christian Retreat in Alabama. After several days of powerful preaching and teaching, and Christian fellowship and prayer, I went to a miniature chapel in the woods. As I knelt to pray, I looked through the window and saw a cross on the mountain. As I prayed, repenting of sin, and as I surrendered fully to Christ, I was filled with the Spirit. I have never been the same. The direction of my life changed.

Conclusion: Are you saved? You must settle that first. If you lack the Holy Spirit in your life, why not respond to the invitation, repent of your sin, and ask the Lord to save you today. And if you are saved, my question for you is this: Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? If not, why not? Is your life full of something else? Perhaps you need to come to the prayer altar today, confess your sins, and ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You could be amazed at the difference the filling of the Holy Spirit will make in your Christian walk!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 3 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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