

Acts 19:1–8; Psalm 68:2–7; John 16:29–33

Opener

Friends, I want to begin honestly today.

I do not want to bring you cheap hope.

Cheap hope says, “Everything is fine,” when everything is not fine.

Cheap hope says, “Don’t worry about it,” when there are real consequences, real court dates, real regrets, real wounds, real family situations, real addictions, real fear, and real things that still have to be faced.

Jesus does not give cheap hope. Jesus tells the truth.

Jesus says, “*In this world you will have trouble*” (John 16:33, NIV).

That is not Jesus being negative. That is Jesus being honest. He knows the world we live in. He knows what pressure feels like. He knows what betrayal feels like. He knows what abandonment feels like. He knows what it is to be arrested, accused, mocked, and treated like a criminal.

So Jesus does not deny our trouble.

But He does not let trouble have the final word either.

He says, “*But take heart! I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33, NIV).

So here is the message today:

Jesus does not deny your trouble, but He gives you His Spirit and His victory in the middle of it.

- That does not mean every door opens today.
- That does not mean every consequence disappears.
- That does not mean every relationship is fixed by tomorrow morning.

But it does mean this:

You are not forgotten. You are not beyond grace. You are not outside the reach of Jesus Christ.

The cell may be locked, but Jesus is not.

Introduction

I want to take you to a place called Ephesus.

Years ago, I had the chance to stand in the ruins of that ancient city. I stood near the old market area, the kind of place where people bought and sold, argued and traded, worked and worried, tried to make a living, and tried to survive.

And as I stood there, I thought about Paul.

Now, I want to be honest. I cannot point to one stone and say, "Paul stood on this exact stone." But Acts tells us Paul spent a long time in Ephesus. It tells us he ministered there, taught there, and later reminded the Ephesian elders that his own hands had supplied his needs. So, I do not have to stretch my imagination very far to picture Paul moving through that city.

Not as a stained-glass saint floating above real life.

But as a man in a real city:

A man who worked.

A man who needed food.

A man who needed shelter.

A man who met people in the ordinary places of life.

A man who carried the gospel into the marketplace, into conversations, into pressure, into trouble.

And in Acts 19, Paul meets some disciples in Ephesus. They have some faith. They have heard something. They know part of the story. But Paul asks them a deeper question:

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2, NIV).

That question matters. It matters because it is possible to know some things about God and still need the living presence of God to fill you, strengthen you, forgive you, cleanse you, and make you new.

Take Away 1

These disciples were not mocked. Paul did not shame them. He did not say, "How could you not know this by now?" He helped them take the next faithful step toward Jesus.

That matters here.

Because some of you may know some things about God.

- Some of you may have grown up around church.
- Some of you may remember Bible verses from childhood.
- Some of you may have prayed before.
- Some of you may have been baptized.
- Some of you may feel like you walked away so many times that God must be tired of hearing your name.

But Acts 19 reminds us: God is not finished with people who are still learning. God is not finished with people who are still incomplete. God is not finished with people who need to begin again.

Paul points them to Jesus, and Scripture says, “*On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 19:5, NIV).

Then Paul places his hands on them, and “*the Holy Spirit came on them*” (Acts 19:6, NIV).

That is not cheap hope. That is the living God meeting real people in a real city with real need. And that is still what Jesus does.

Take Away 2

Psalms 68 tells us something beautiful about the heart of God. It says, “*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling*” (Psalm 68:5, NIV).

That means God comes near to people who are vulnerable. God comes near to people who do not have protection. God comes near to people others overlook.

Then the Psalm says, “*God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing*” (Psalm 68:6, NIV).

Now let me be careful here.

That does not mean everyone walks out of here today. That does not mean every sentence disappears. That does not mean God ignores truth, responsibility, or justice.

But it does mean God comes near to people others forget.

God comes near to the lonely, the ashamed, the guilty, and the wounded.

God comes near to the one who says, “I do not know if anybody sees me anymore.”

The gospel says God sees you: Not just the charge. Or the record.

God sees you: Not just the worst thing connected to your name or the addiction.

God sees you: Not just the anger or the failure.

God sees you.

And Jesus Christ came not to excuse sin, but to save sinners. He came not to pretend wounds are not real, but to heal what sin has broken. He came not to deny trouble, but to overcome the power of sin, shame, death, and despair.

That is why holiness matters.

Holiness is not pretending you have never done wrong. Holiness is letting Jesus tell the truth and make you new. Holiness is Christ by the Spirit forming a different kind of life in you: truthful, steady, humble, clean, courageous, and full of holy love.

Take Away 3

And then we come to John 16.

Jesus is talking to His disciples before the cross. They think they are stronger than they are. They think they understand more than they do. They think they are ready.

Jesus tells them the truth. He says, *“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home”* (John 16:32, NIV).

That is a hard word. Jesus is telling them, *“You are going to run. You are going to scatter. You are not going to be as strong as you think you are.”*

But listen to what He says next: *“Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me”* (John 16:32, NIV).

That is the center.

The disciples may scatter, but the Father does not abandon the Son. And because Jesus goes to the cross, rises from the grave, and pours out His Spirit, we can know this too:

Jesus is with you even when people scatter.

... when family does not know what to do with you.

... even when friends disappear.

... even when you are alone with your thoughts at night.

... even when shame tries to preach its own sermon in your head.

... even when you are facing consequences.

... even when you do not know what comes next.

... even when courage feels impossible.

That is why Jesus says, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace”* (John 16:33, NIV). Notice where peace is found:

- Not in perfect circumstances.
- Not in everyone understanding you.
- Not in the court system moving quickly.
- Not in your past being erased from people’s memory.

Jesus says peace is found *“in me”* (John 16:33, NIV). That means peace is not first a change around you. Peace begins with Christ within you.

Then Jesus says, *“In this world you will have trouble”* (John 16:33, NIV). That is honest.

But then He says, *“But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33, NIV). Take heart. That means courage is possible.

Not fake toughness or pretending you do not care or acting hard so nobody knows you are afraid.

That means courage is possible, real courage:

- The courage to tell the truth.
- courage to repent.
- courage to ask forgiveness.
- courage to stop blaming everybody else.
- courage to receive grace.
- courage to pray when you feel empty.
- courage to take the next faithful step.

That kind of courage does not come from hype

That kind of courage comes from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit makes courage possible.

Concluding

So today, I want to ask Paul's question in Ephesus again:

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2, NIV).

Not just, "Do you know religious words?"

Not just, "Have you been around church?"

Not just, "Do you believe God exists?"

But have you opened yourself to the living presence of Jesus Christ?

Do you want His Spirit to meet you here?

- To forgive what needs forgiven.
- To expose what needs healed.
- To cleanse what has become polluted.
- To strengthen what has grown weak.
- To make you truthful instead of defensive.
- To make you steady instead of reactive.
- To make you holy from the inside out.

Because Jesus is not waiting for you to get everything fixed before He comes near.

Jesus comes near in the trouble.

Jesus comes near in the cell.

Jesus comes near in the shame.

Jesus comes near in the uncertainty.

Jesus comes near and says, "Take heart."

Not because trouble is fake.

But because His victory is real.

Conclusion

So here is the word to carry with you:

Jesus does not deny your trouble, but He gives you His Spirit and His victory in the middle of it.

The cell may be locked, but Jesus is not.

Your future may be uncertain, but Jesus is not absent.

Your past may be painful, but Jesus is not finished.

Your courage may feel small, but the Holy Spirit is able.

Take heart.

Jesus is with you even when.

Amen.