



# Belpres Church

## When Revival Gets Messy

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Great to see you guys here. Those of you in the room, those of you who are watching online, thank you for joining us. Happy Mother's Day. To those of you who are mothers, those of you who are a mother figure to someone, or those of you who have had a mother, Happy Mother's Day.

We're doing a sermon series on what happens when people and churches give the Holy Spirit free reign in their lives. And the Holy Spirit is—we don't always talk a lot about the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is important.

The Bible says that God comes to us in the person of Jesus, who is God in the flesh, and he leaves us his Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of God living inside of us.

And the Holy Spirit is like the gas that we put in our cars. It's the power that propels us forward, except way less expensive. In fact, it's actually free. All you have to do is ask for it.

And you may want to take a picture of the screen because the Holy Spirit does a lot of things in our lives. The Holy Spirit gives us power, changes us to be more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps us recognize our sin that hurts ourselves and hurts other people. Holy Spirit guides us. Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible. Never read the Bible without asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate it for you. The Holy Spirit teaches us, encourages us, comforts us. And that's just a few of the things the Holy Spirit—that list could have been a lot longer.

So the question I wanna ask you is, where do you see the Spirit doing these things in your life? Because our job is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Whatever the Spirit is doing, the Bible says, do not quench the Spirit. When we don't cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives, in our churches, in our world, we quench the Spirit.

But when we give the Holy Spirit free reign in our lives, do the things that he nudges us to do and those thoughts that he puts in our heads—when we give the Spirit free, free reign in our lives, there's power, there's healing, there's transformation. And also, just to be honest, a little bit of chaos. It can get a little messy and it can get a little scary. Because the Holy Spirit is not tame and will not be tamed.

Years ago, I was preaching in another church, and at one of their services, man, I was bringing it, and they were laughing, they were crying. It was awesome. And at one point, I made a dramatic gesture with my hands and I knocked the podium off the stage into the congregation. And my notes went flying everywhere and people had to scramble to give me my notes back. And I spent the rest of the sermon trying to put them back in order while continuing to preach.

That's why I have an iPad today, by the way. I preached three different services at that church that day. Guess which service they put on their webpage? Uh huh, that one. Right. So my excuse was the Spirit was moving so powerfully that the podium was slain in the Spirit.

It was messy, it was chaotic. And when we give the Holy Spirit free reign in our lives and in our churches, there's healing and transformation and it can get a little bit messy, chaotic, scary, at least from our perspective.

And when lots of people give the Spirit free reign and lots of churches give the Spirit free reign, that's called revival. And when sometimes those revivals last for years and they become transformational revivals that change cultures for the better.

The first Christians transformed the Roman Empire to be a less violent and a more humane place. Second Great Awakening greatly accelerated the cause of the abolition of slavery. Without the Second Great Awakening, abolition would have taken a lot longer.

As we are revived, the Spirit works through us to heal us, give us hope, and then bring hope to a hurting world, bring hope to a hurting country and change it for the better. I think there's some things that need to change in our culture, right? There's some things that need healed in our culture, right? Revival does that.

And that's why what this sermon series is actually about is hope. Because we are in desperate need of hope. And when we cooperate with the Spirit, there is hope for ourselves, for our families, our schools, our workplaces, our regions, our world.

So if you have a Bible, turn to Acts, chapter 19. It's in the New Testament. Always feel free. Use the table of contents to find, to find where we are. Acts, chapter 19. Or you can just follow along on the screens.

And the context is that the Apostle Paul is in the city of Ephesus, which is in what is today Turkey. And revival breaks out and it gets a little chaotic and it gets a little messy, but it also changes things for the better in Ephesus.

So Acts chapter 19, starting with verse 8: Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. So the first thing Paul does is he goes to the religious building to talk to the religious people about Jesus. Makes sense.

Paul, verse 9: But some of them became obstinate. And in the original Greek, that this is written in, the word that's used there for obstinate literally means to dry up or to become parched. So literally it says they became dry hardened, as religious people so frequently do.

Have you ever known someone who's gone to church their whole life but every year just got meaner and meaner and meaner? Sort of dried up like spiritual beef jerky. That's religion without the power of the Holy Spirit. Dry hardened.

They became dry hardened. Sorry, I lost my place. Dry hardened. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way.

The Jesus movement was also often called the Way because people who followed Jesus lived in such a radically different way. They lived such a radically different way of life that eventually changed the Roman Empire for the better.

That's why we have practicing the Way groups here in this church, to practice living that different way that heals us and heals our world.

So these religious people, right? The spiritual beef jerky people, they don't like what's going on. So into verse nine: So Paul left them, he took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

So because the religious people don't want to talk about it, they reject him. He goes to the non religious people. He leaves the religious building, goes to the secular building, a lecture hall, to start talking to the non religious people.

And this is true throughout history. Revival often happens when the Holy Spirit does an end run around religious people and churches that refuse to cooperate with the Spirit. He will just do an end run around all that and go straight to the people that don't know Jesus. So he does that here, right? They go to the hall of Tyrannus and Paul lectures there.

This went on for two years because sometimes revival takes a long time, sometimes it takes years to get revival going. Two years.

So that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord and God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.

One of the features of transformational revival is signs, wonders and miracles which we're going to talk about in a couple of weeks. Skip over to verse 20. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. So in other words, revival, right? Yay. Right. No, not so yea. Go to verse 23.

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius who made silver shrines of Artemis—so Artemis was a Roman goddess and he's making these little silver images of Artemis for people to worship—he made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

Uh oh, do you sense trouble brewing? Like, what's going to happen if a lot of people start following Jesus? What's going to happen to his little Artemis idol jewelry store, right? Like, revival is awesome until it messes with your business model, right? Then it's not so awesome. So go to verse 25. Sorry. He called them together along with the workers in related trades and said, "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business." We're making a lot of money here, guys, okay?

"And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all." Well, duh. Like, if you make it with your own hands, it is by definition, right, not a God. Right? So thanks, Captain Obvious.

"There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and the goddess

herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

So Artemis was a Roman goddess, right? An idol. And there was a famous temple to Artemis in the city of Ephesus. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And people from all over the Roman Empire would come to Ephesus to go to this temple, which brought in lots and lots and lots of money into the Ephesian economy. Maybe a little bit like Seattle during the World Cup.

And this is why revival gets messy. The reason revival gets messy—transformational revival gets messy—is because it challenges idols and vested interests. In this case, financial interests, as well as their image, their reputation.

Ephesus was thought of as this sophisticated tourist destination, right? A lot of prestige. And they're worried that if people start following Jesus, they're going to lose some of their prestige, some of their image that they work so hard to keep up. Because as more people follow Jesus, that's going to be a threat to them.

So they resist what the Spirit is doing. Verse 28. When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.”

Okay, not just Artemis—Artemis of the Ephesians. So it's not just financial interests that are being threatened here. It's civic pride. It's about who we are, our reputation, our image.

And one of the downsides of the cult of Artemis was that it became a measure of civic pride. And people who didn't participate in it, like the early Christians, were targets of a lot of social hostility. Sometimes they were even killed because they didn't have enough enthusiasm for Artemis.

So a riot breaks out in Ephesus because revival is sometimes messy, because it challenges idols and vested interests. So question: what idols and vested interests in our lives cause us to resist cooperating with the Holy Spirit?

Maybe it's money worries. Ooh, if I do that thing the Spirit's nudging me to do, I might lose some money. Or maybe it's our image, or “Ooh, what will people think of me?”

Maybe it's our political lenses that keep us from even hearing what the Holy Spirit wants us to do.

Or our busy schedules. “Ooh, Spirit, love to do that thing you’re nudging me to do, but I’m really busy. But I could pencil you in for lunch on Wednesday. Will that work?”

If the Holy Spirit nudges us in those thoughts that come from him—maybe to tutor kids who need help or tell people at work or school about Jesus or serve the poor in some way that’s outside our comfort zone—do we follow that nudge or not?

Cause when we don’t cooperate with the Spirit, when we don’t follow those nudges, we quench the Spirit. It blocks hope. It blocks revival. Our non cooperation with the Spirit is the reason we can’t have nice things. Because it’s blocking what the Spirit is trying to do and the hope the Spirit’s trying to bring.

So there’s this riot in Ephesus. They start rioting and all the people rush into the giant open air theater that was in Ephesus.

Skip over to verse 32. They’re in this theater rioting. The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not know why they were even there. I love that, right? “I’m so mad.” “What are we mad about?”

“I don’t know. Everyone else is mad, so I’m so mad. We’re all mad together.” It was an early version of social media, right? Everyone’s mad, so they’re doing this. And eventually a city official comes to deal with the crowd. So skip down to verse 37.

He’s saying to this crowd, the city official:

“You’ve brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. Guys, they respected us and our cultures. They didn’t do anything wrong. If then Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there’s anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.”

And from there, he dismisses the crowd and they all go home.

So over the course of two years, the Holy Spirit working through Paul had drawn a lot of people to Jesus. It was a revival. So many people coming to Jesus, the idol trade was starting to collapse, which was a good thing.

Like any cult, like the cult of Artemis that will kill someone because they're not enthusiastic enough—that's not a good thing. That needs to change, right?

Not only that, this temple and the money that it attracted created massive amounts of consumerism in Ephesus and huge disparities between the rich and the poor. That's not a good thing either.

Plus, they placed their hope in this idol and the money the idol brought. But anything we place our hope in other than Jesus is gonna let us down.

And as this revival happens, people are being unleashed from their fears of losing their idol because they're following Jesus and Jesus is always there, and Jesus will always provide. So revival is changing a lot of things for the better. And notice how the Holy Spirit is working through Paul and how they did it by bringing people to Jesus one by one by one, which is what the city official is pointing out.

"Guys, they respected our laws, they respected our culture, they respected our customs, right? They didn't picket the idol shops. They didn't demand that all the Ephesians do everything their way. They didn't try to pass laws outlawing Artemis."

Paul allowed the Holy Spirit to work through him. And as large numbers of people started to live the radically different way of life of Jesus, the idol trade started to just collapse on its own.

And as the Jesus movement spread throughout the Roman Empire over the next 300 years, a lot of stuff changed. As more and more people started to follow Jesus, their values shifted, changed the values of the empire.

Female infanticide, which was rampant, disappeared because Christians valued women. Caring for the poor, which Romans had always viewed as weakness, became a strength. As one by one by one, people's values shifted because they were following the Jesus way of life. That's how you change a culture.

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying as Christians, we should never advocate for certain laws to be passed or repealed. No, sometimes we have to do that.

We needed the 13th amendment to outlaw slavery, but before those laws changed, hearts had to change first. We have the 13th amendment in large part because the Second Great Awakening brought so many people to Jesus, who convinced them that slavery was evil.

What really changes a culture is not when laws change. Sometimes that's necessary. But what really changes a culture is changed hearts.

The 13th Amendment banned slavery, but racism still continued through the sharecropping system, Jim Crow laws, all the way down to our own day, mass incarceration and things like that. What's really going to change culture is when hearts change.

In the early 1900s, there was a revival in Wales in the United Kingdom. Tens of thousands of people became Jesus followers in just a few years, and it created huge amounts of social change. Taverns went out of business because folks weren't getting drunk every night anymore because they were following Jesus. So it definitely threatened the business interests of the taverns.

There was such a drastic reduction in crime, the courts were literally empty and the police had nothing to do because nobody was committing crimes. So on their shifts, all they could do was do crowd control for the revival meetings.

People who had previously stolen money or failed to pay debts started repaying what they owed as a sign of repentance. The revival saw unprecedented numbers of women in leadership, which helped the cause of women getting the vote because they'd seen women lead through this revival.

One of the most interesting things that happened during this revival was called the pit pony phenomenon, where coal miners who usually gave commands to the ponies in the mines—you know, the commands were usually angry commands, profanity laced commands—they stopped doing that and the ponies got confused because they no longer recognized commands that were given to them nicely.

So, like, the pony is like, "Why are you being nice to me? Right? What's wrong with you? Where's Fred? What did you do with him?" Right.

Truly transformational revivals have both an inward and an outward component. If it's just people becoming Christians, if it's just people experiencing Jesus, which is a good thing, but if it stops there, it can become self absorbed.

Truly transformational revivals are about an inward experience that has an outward expression that brings hope to homes and families and schools and workplaces and entire countries. So action steps for this week.

First, sign up for the first One Roof gathering on May 22, where all of our communities that are part of this church—East African, Chinese, Modern, Sanctuary—we're going to come together, we're going to share really good food together, really good meal together, to be a community.

We're going to get some Bible teaching from different cultural perspectives, which expands our understanding of the Bible. We're going to pray. There are going to be activities for kids, so you can bring your kids.

And the reason this is so important is revival never starts in a strategic planning meeting. Every revival is always birthed in prayer meetings.

And as we become more of a community and learn from each other and pray together, I believe the power of the Holy Spirit will be more unleashed in our lives and in our church than it already is, to bring us hope and then through us, hope to our world.

And then second action step. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what vested interests and idols keep you from giving the Holy Spirit free reign in your life. For the Ephesians, it was financial interests and their reputation. What is it for you? What is it for me?

When the Spirit nudges you to do something, where do you have that gut reaction where you go, "I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna do that. That's scary and that's outside my comfort zone. That may cost me money, that may cost me time."

Maybe you worry about what will others think of me, what will people think if I really give the Holy Spirit free reign in my life.

I cannot count the number of times someone has said to me, "I felt the Holy Spirit so powerfully today in worship. I almost said amen out loud." Whoa, go crazy. Presbyterians like, wow, that is really crazy stuff. And the reason they always give is, "But I didn't. Cause I was afraid of what people would think."

Next time the Holy Spirit nudges you to say amen out loud, say amen out loud. Okay, there you go. Right? And no one's gonna judge you for that.

Or if someone does judge you for that, bring them to me and we'll have a pastoral conversation with that person. Be such a good experience for that person.

What keeps you from giving the Holy Spirit free reign in your life to change you and through you change a whole lot of other stuff?

I read a story a while back about a neighborhood in Chicago that was just terrorized by gang activity, a lot of drug related violence. And everyone in that neighborhood was too afraid to do anything about it. And they had no hope that it would ever change. It had been that way for a number of years and they had no hope.

But then some people from the local Baptist church decided to have some prayer meetings about it. So when the Baptists start praying, you know something's gonna happen, right? So they start praying. And after praying these prayer meetings over the course of several months, the Holy Spirit really convicted them of their sin of passivity and just allowing that brokenness to happen. They started to feel that in their hearts and repent of that.

The Holy Spirit also gave them courage by reminding them that God is bigger than gangs. And the Holy Spirit nudged them—you know, through those thoughts that weren't their thoughts, that came from the Holy Spirit—to create what they called the Baptist Prayer Patrol, which I think is kind of a cool name.

And maybe we should have that, like the Presbyterian Prayer Patrol, except that's super hard to say, so I don't know, we might have to.

And normally, you know, when a gang is hanging out on a certain corner, nobody goes near that gang. That's their turf. And the only adults that ever spoke to these gang members were the police. So this Baptist Prayer Patrol would roam the streets and do the unheard of.

The two leaders of the prayer group would walk up to the gang and they'd say, "Hi, my name is Al and this is Moses."

Which I love those names, right? Like, Al is just a good—you trust someone named Al, right? And then Moses. What did Moses do in the Bible? He set his people free.

"So, hi, I'm Al, this is Moses. We're the Baptist Prayer Patrol. How are you doing? Is there anything we can pray about with you? Is your mom sick? Is your brother in jail? Can we pray for you?"

And then they put their hands on the shoulders of these gang members and they prayed for them. And they'd do this a couple of times every single week.

And after a few months, the gang got to know and respect the prayer people. Some of the young men in that gang had never had an older man in their life to guide them or show them anything resembling anything close to love. So to have an older man put his hand on their shoulder and pray for them was transformational for them.

The women in that prayer group became sort of stand in moms for some of the people in the gang who didn't have good relationships with their own mothers.

That gang had called that corner their headquarters for 20 years. But after a year of the Baptist Prayer Patrol, the gang was gone because most of the gang members had left the gang.

And in fact, a bunch of them had started going to the church and they were bringing their friends. And so the church grew, and that neighborhood was completely transformed. It was safe. No gangs. Kids playing in the streets again because they could.

Now, that didn't address some of the root causes of why they were in the gangs in the first place and the poverty, why they were in those places in the first place. It didn't address those root causes. Those matter, and we're gonna talk about those later in this series.

But the Holy Spirit gave those Baptist prayer people courage and nudged them to just start praying for people. And because they did not resist the Spirit and did the scary thing, the neighborhood was transformed, and they brought hope and healing to a lot of people.

When you see the news and you feel scared or discouraged, remember this: it is not hopeless. It's never hopeless with Jesus. It can be done. It's happened before. It's happening right now all over the world.

So don't let the forces of cynicism and hopelessness and rage that emanates from radios and televisions and social media steal our hope, steal our joy, steal our families, our youth, our nation.

For 2000 years, when people give the Holy Spirit free reign in their lives and in their churches and cooperate with what the Spirit is doing, all heaven breaks loose as Jesus brings his healing. And yes, it can be a little scary, and yes, it can be a little bit messy because it challenges idols and vested interests.

But when the Holy Spirit is unleashed heart by heart, home by home, block by block, city by city, his kingdom comes and his will gets done, and this earth begins to look a little bit more like his heaven. Amen. Amen.

Holy Spirit, unleash us from the things that hold us back from giving it all to you. Unleash us from our fears, our idols, our vested interests, our opinions, our politics, our worries, our fears. Whatever it is, Holy Spirit, that keeps us from giving you free reign in our lives, unleash us from those things. Show them to us and set us free. And then call us to the places that you want to call us to, to heal your world. Call us, Lord. Make us scared. Make us uncomfortable. Call us out of our comfort zones into your big world to bring your healing to a world that desperately needs it.

And we're gonna give Jesus all the glory because he's the one that's doing it. And we pray this in his name. Amen.

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**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What kinds of spiritual darkness do you see in this chapter?
- What does this passage teach us about the power of the gospel over spiritual darkness?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What idols is the gospel challenging most right now in your life? Explain.
- The scripture shows that revival can get messy. The Holy Spirit gives us power, changes us to be more like Jesus, helps us recognize our sin that hurts us and others, guides us, helps us understand the Bible, teaches us, encourages us, and comforts us. And yet...what "mess" do you fear might happen if you gave the Holy Spirit greater reign over your life? What would help you give the Holy Spirit greater reign over your life?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging

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parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.