



Sunday, June 30, 2024

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 19:11-41

Sermon Title: Our God is above all gods.

Transcribed by: Liza Perry

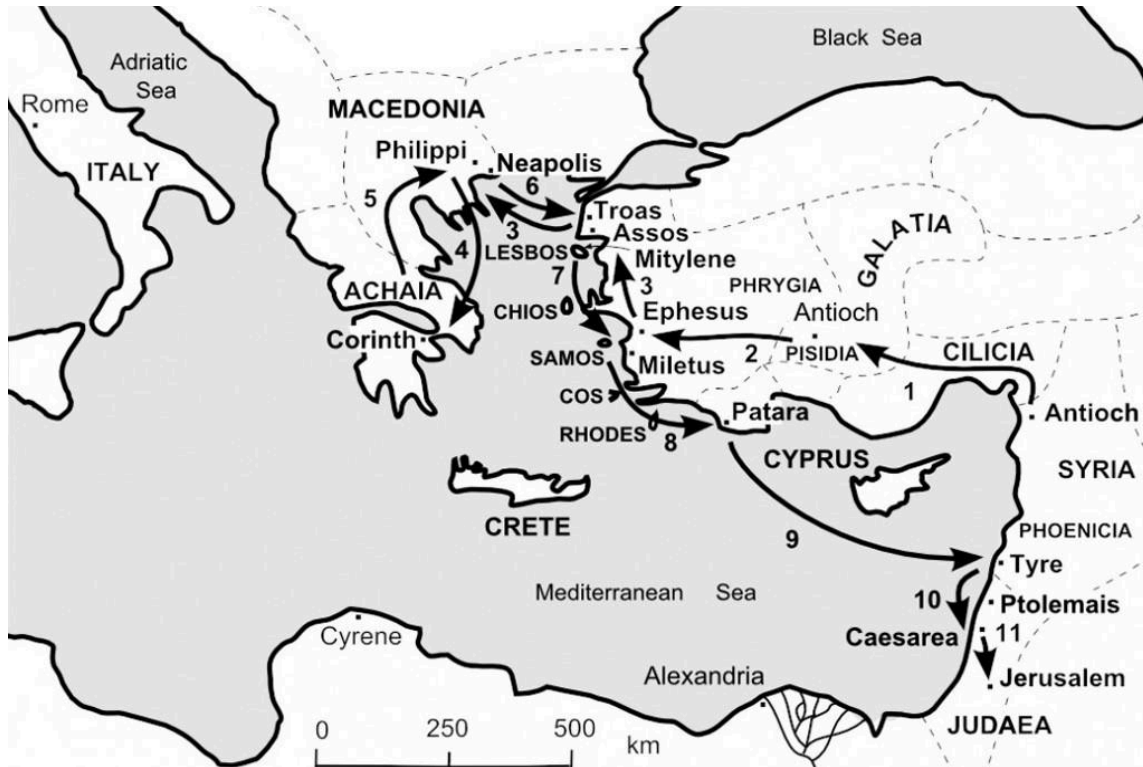


Kaes (Vanderkooy) entered his prayer with, "Let us be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit." I don't know if you knew this but I thought this morning that it would be good to light a candle. [Pastor John lights a candle.]

We've been following Paul on his journeys. One of the things which we have noted throughout is the power of the Holy Spirit that has been working in Paul's life throughout. So today, I thought I would bring a flame with us. In Acts 2, it talks about how the Holy Spirit descended on the people as a flame.

So I'm going to use that image as we talk about the power of the Holy Spirit in the life that Paul is preaching while he is in Ephesus. For those of you who were here last week, or who watched last week's message online, you'll remember that we were in Acts 20 and we had skipped a significant portion of Acts 19. So today, we are going back to Acts 19.

So I invite you to open your Bibles and turn to Acts 19. We are going to begin reading at verse 11. And just to put us in perspective as to where we are going, if we could pull up the map again, last week we were in Miletus.



We kind of skipped around because we saw a few weeks ago that Paul had walked from Antioch all the way to Ephesus, which is about 1,600 kilometers or to Charlottetown PEI (equivalent distance.) So Paul had taken some time to walk there. And today, we are going to be in Ephesus. While he is in Ephesus, there are a few verses where he sends Timothy and Erastus into the area of Macedonia and Achaia again, to the church in Corinth. Paul is also going to go there and do a bit of visitation refreshing and encouraging the churches where he was and has been. And we'll see that at the end of today's message where it talks about him leaving again.

But today, we are going to be in Ephesus for the reading of God's Word. So we start in Acts 19, beginning at verse 11, where it says...

Acts 19:11-41

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, **12** 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. **13** 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. **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. **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. **21** After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” **22** He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

The Riot in Ephesus

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. **24** A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. **25** 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. **26** 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.

27 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.” **28** When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **29** Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. **30** Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.

31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. **32** The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. **33** The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. **34** But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **35** The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Fellow Ephesians, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?”

36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. **37** You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. **38** If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. **39** If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. **40** As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." **41** After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we come to You this morning. Lord, we long to hear from You. Lord, we know that You are present and that Your Holy Spirit burns within us, Lord. May it cleanse us. Lord, we pray that You will open our ears and our hearts. that the Spirit may move freely among us, that we may hear Your Word. Lord, I pray that nothing I say may be of me, but that Your Word may be proclaimed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So Paul is in Ephesus. In today's reading, we get some snapshots of what happened while he was there. Paul was there for some two and a half plus years. Throughout that time, we don't have everything written down that happened. We just kind of get glimpses of significant events for us to recall. While he was there, just like John at the end of his gospel, said, "Jesus did a lot more and wrote a lot more. If I were to write it all, the world would not be big enough to hold all the books of what he did or said." So Luke here too, gives us glimpses of what Paul has done.

Today, we're going to look at some of these glimpses. We're going to look at some of the events that happened in which Paul was a part of. And we're going to see how the Spirit moves. We'll see how the Spirit moves both in a cleansing way and in a powerful way of proclaiming the gospel.

Let's begin with this first little synopsis that we get in **Acts 19:11-12**, where it says that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. It's interesting that Luke notes very clearly here that these events are extraordinary miracles. Not that a miracle in itself isn't extraordinary. Right? We know that miracles are things that can't be explained by science or natural circumstances. And so they, in themselves, are not the norm. But Luke is saying here when he writes this, that you've gotta realize that God has been doing miracles and some miracles go way beyond what other miracles were. And these are some of them.

So it talks about how Paul would use a handkerchief or what other people would call a sweat rag. You can imagine. Remember, we talked about how he taught in the school of Tyrannus in the heat of the day. They didn't have air conditioning. So you can imagine, as Paul is preaching, he's got a little do rag with him that you know, it's like, "Oh, I gotta wipe my forehead now and then as I preach because I'm sweating to death." Right? Some of us have experienced that. And so at the end of the day, he's got this handkerchief that's covered in his sweat. And people would take that and people would be healed from it. That was an extraordinary way in which the Holy Spirit worked.

Miracles still happen today. We have people who have been healed miraculously. We also have little things within our lives where we don't even notice. Sometimes we need to be reminded that miracles happen in our lives all the time. That God prevents something from happening which would have normally happened and we don't even realize it. Right? God makes a light turn green so that we are going forward and we don't get hit from behind as a car comes through. God works miracles. And that is evidence of the Holy Spirit working today, as he did back then.

But Luke goes quickly from the miracles to the demonic. In the Western world, we don't deal a whole lot with the demonic. I think that's part of Satan's ploy. If we pretend that it doesn't exist, we can get away with a whole lot and people won't even notice. There is a spiritual realm in which is constantly attacking those who are believers. For some of us, we have realized that the closer we get to Christ, the more we are tempted. Or the closer we get to Christ, the more we are challenged with either physical things or spiritual things, or I'm distracted by other things. That is all part of spiritual warfare and we need to acknowledge that within the world today. There is a demonic presence.

Now, that also means that we don't need to become over obsessed with the demonic but we need to acknowledge its presence. We also need to acknowledge places in our community where it exists. I checked out this week for the next psychic fair that's in Peterborough. There are already two scheduled for this year. Places in which the demonic is gaining footholds within other people. And we should be praying against those time periods and those places.

But here's one thing in which Luke clearly directs us and helps us understand. Because he goes from Paul chasing out evil spirits to what happens next with the seven sons of Sceva.

We need to backtrack for just a moment. Ephesus, a city in which there were a number of significant places. One is the Temple of Artemis, and we'll talk about that later. Secondly, is the theater which we'll talk about later. But thirdly, Ephesus was known as a place dealing with the spiritual realm. They had many people within that place which would frequently give out spells or incantations for either putting curses on people or trying to release curses from people. It was known throughout the world as a place where you would go to deal with the spiritual realm. It was that center in which there were lots of people dealing with this.

If we look at the world today, we still see how people are dealing with the spiritual realm. There are many psychics, palm readers, and the like, who will tell you that they can tell you your future, who will give you the option of giving you insight from the spiritual realm that people are longing to hear. But we need to realize that it's not the Holy Spirit that they're talking to. It is the spirit of a different drummer. And where do we go in that? And so you know that there are people who do this regularly within the world.

When I was in California, I was introduced to a lady who was being trained to be the next high priestess in a wicca in Texas. Then she found the Lord and left Texas so that she could grow in her faith. I learned a lot about the demonic from her. One of the key pieces which I learned, and which is what Luke talks about in here, is that we have no power over the demonic. It is all in the name of Jesus.

When these sons of Sceva go and they say to this demon possessed man, "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches," (I love the response,) "I know Jesus. I've heard about Paul. But who are you? You have no right to speak over me." Now, I ask this question for you. They knew about Paul because Paul knew Christ. And Paul lived with Christ within him. Paul often says, "It is Christ who lives in me. Not me on my own." We've sung before, "It is not I but Christ within me."

So here's the first question for today. Is Christ in you enough that the spiritual realm would know who you are? Some of us might be thinking, "Actually, pastor, I'm okay that the spiritual realm doesn't know who I am. I'm pretty happy with this right now."

But let me ask that again. Within the spiritual realm, do they know that you are a child of God? Are we living our lives as if we are children of God? Or are we living our lives kind of like everybody else? When the spiritual realm looks at us, do they say, "We don't need to worry about them because they ain't going to spread the Gospel." Or does the spiritual realm say, "We need to keep an eye on this guy because he's planting seeds for the Lord."

Now, you need to know that there's a second part of the spiritual realm. Here it talks about the demonic. But the demonic is only a small part of the spiritual realm. There are also angels that walk by our side every day. And when the spiritual realm is attacking us, angels are standing up for us and fighting. You need to know that so you don't need to live in fear of the spiritual realm. We need to say to the Lord, "Lord, we ask for your protection in the spiritual realm." But we also need to be aware that the spiritual realm exists because - notice what happens to the people of Ephesus in **Acts 19:17**, "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."

This is not a fear of, "I'm scared." This is a fear of the name of Jesus going, "His name is above all other names." As we read in Philippians 2, "His name is more powerful than any deity that we have." As they learn this and as they discover this, it says in Acts 19:18, "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."

I know you're curious. How much is 50,000 drachmas? I mean, a drachma was about a day's day's wage. So if you do the math, that's like your wage for about 137 years. Or if you want to do it a different way, you say, "Okay, if I get 137 people here and we add up their wage that's for a year, that's how much it is." It's a lot of money. And they burn their scrolls, which says something as well. Right? The burning of books throughout history has often been seen as a horrible thing. And it has been because it is imposing on people. "Here's what you can believe."

But this is one case in which the burning of it was a good thing. These people were thinking, "Here are my incantations. Here are my potions. Here are my other things which I've used to call the spirits. I am going to burn them. I'm not going to put them on eBay and see how much I can make."

Because if I put them on eBay, I'm just giving them to somebody else." That's not what they want. They want to burn it. Because they know that for this to happen, they need to be cleansed, but they don't want to tempt anybody else as well.

I want you to think about that for just a moment. These people were so convicted about the power of the name of Jesus that they took things within their lives and they burned them. Even though they were costly, even though they were what was familiar, they burned them because they knew they had to totally rid themselves of it. The Holy Spirit is often seen as a flame. The flame shows power to cleanse things.

As I was preparing this week, I kept thinking to myself, "What do I need to renounce in my life? What do I need to bring to the Holy Spirit to purify, to burn, to totally rid myself of things that are not of God, and things that keep me from being pure." People who work with metal know that fire and heat purifies. And the Holy Spirit invites us today as well to be purified by Him. What is it that is within my life that God is bringing to my attention that I need to say, "Lord, this is not of you. I need You to cleanse me. Not just lay it on the side. But Lord, I need you to burn it up so that it is no longer part of who I am. I need to be cleansed by the fire of the Holy Spirit."

And that's what these people did. These people, who heard and saw and witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit through what Paul was doing, said, "This is the God that I want to serve because this is the God who is above all gods." So anything that was not of God, they knew they had to burn.

Now, Paul takes a bit of a break here in **Acts 19:21**. And I'm going to jump ahead because we'll come back to that later. Let's jump to **Acts 19:23** because in verse 23, there's the reaction of Demetrius due to what is happening within the city of Ephesus. These people, who used to be in the demonic, who used to be all out for Artemis, have turned to the Lord and suddenly Demetrius is going, "Hold on! This is hurting my pocketbook."

So we need to talk a little bit about Artemis. Artemis is the goddess of the hunt. Artemis is also known as the goddess of fertility, and there was a huge sex life and sexual activities which went on along with the temple worship. But part of this is that we had people from all over the world who would come to Ephesus and worship at this temple set to Artemis. This temple in itself had 270 columns. Each column was 60 feet high and 4 feet in diameter. This temple was known as one of the seven wonders of the world. People would come from all over and go visit.

For those of you who have been to Niagara Falls, how many of you left Niagara Falls with a souvenir? I won't make you raise your hand. One of the main things that happens in Niagara Falls is that you've got all these souvenir shops and it is a big business for them. Demetrius has one of the souvenir shops in Ephesus. He's got people from all over the world who are coming. They are buying little statues of Artemis to take home with them so they can continue to worship this deity while they are at home. And Demetrius notices that sales are down because of all these people who are seeing that God is the God of all. So Demetrius gathers the other people who do souvenirs with him and he says, "Guys, we got a bit of a problem. This Paul is preaching that a god made by hands is not really God. Well, that's a problem, guys, because that's our business. We make, by hand, images of this god."

So he's gathered this group and within this group, they are thinking, "Oh no, we need to do something!" So they begin shouting, "Great is Artemis, the goddess of Ephesians." As they begin to shout, notice what happens. The crowd begins to gather. Right? There's noise. People see things happening and suddenly you've got people gathered. And they keep going. Then Demetrius thinks, "We've got to make sure that it's not just about our pocketbook. If we tell these people, 'Yeah, we're just mad because we're not making enough money,' they'd be like, 'Hold on guys. You guys are wealthy already. Like, chill, will you?' But what we need to do is we need to tell them that these people, these Jews, these Christians, are putting in peril the goddess Artemis and our city. Let's get them to think it's about something else."

So this crowd builds and they make their way to the theater. Just so you know, this theater held about 25,000 people. This is not a small crowd. So here they are in this theater. And it says, which I find really interesting in **Acts 19:32**, "**32** The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there." So they're thinking, "Let's get people emotionally involved and get them to think, 'Yeah! This has got to be a good thing because there's so many people here!'"

How many of you have ever experienced someone coming to you and saying, "I need to get this (object) because everybody has one!" Right? That is the language which Demetrius uses as well. Like, "Everybody knows." And even the town clerk, which is like the town mayor, in **Acts 19:35** says, "**35** The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: 'Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?' Like, 'Everybody knows this! It's a known fact.'"

We just talked about the demonic. One of the demonic schemes is to convince people that everybody has this or everybody agrees with this, or everybody is doing this. But we know that not everybody was.

In fact, we know that so many people were not worshiping Artemis that it was creating an economic change within the city of Ephesus. But there's this mentality of, "Well, everybody's doing this. This is what everybody thinks." So when we look at these things, we need to look at them and go, "Is this really what everybody thinks?" Or is this a movement which is going across that maybe the majority are thinking this?

But let's get to the second point. This is an emotional thing for Demetrius and his workers because their livelihoods are at stake. Right? There's emotion involved in this now, and it's like, "We've got to do something." And when you look at the crowd that was screaming, it's an emotional thing. I mean, it says right there that most of them had no clue as to why they were there. But, "Hey, there's a rally going on so let's go."

We've seen this at sporting events. Right? You get behind the team and you hear the noise and the shouting that goes on. But we also have seen at sporting events, certain ones more than others, in which the crowd gets so worked up that there ends up being fights within the crowds. And fights afterwards. There's this whole aspect of, "We are going to make sure that everybody agrees with us." This is what is happening in the city of Ephesus. These people are so worked up.

So Paul says, "Please, let me go in there." And notice who tells him not to. It says there in **Acts 19:30-31**, "**30** Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. **31** Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater." This second group, this group of officials, they understood. They may not have believed what Paul was preaching, but they understood that Paul was not doing anything wrong. There are people within society today who may not believe what Christians believe, but they understand that Christians are a benefit to society, and they will defend them and tell them not to go into circumstances in which their life is at peril.

So Paul doesn't go in. Then the Jews push forth this guy by the name of Alexander. Alexander gets up and he tries to quiet the crowd. But they find out he's a Jew so they yell all the more. In the commentaries, which I read about this, some of them thought that one of the things that Alexander wanted to do was to begin this separation between Judaism and Christianity because at that time, Jews and Christians were lumped up into one group. So if there were problems being caused, "It must be the Jews and Christians." And Alexander's like, "Hold on. That's just the Christians. We're not part of that."

But they didn't let him go. And they yelled for almost two hours. Can you imagine that? Two hours of simply saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Imagine two hours of yelling the same thing. After a while, you begin to believe it. "Yeah, Artemis must be great." And you get drawn in. And the mayor of the town is the one who causes them to quiet down. He says two things about Paul.

He says #1... he hasn't robbed any temples. To help understand this, you have to understand that the temple was often the bank of the city as well. So temple robbery was robbing the bank, basically of the city. And #2... he hasn't blasphemed our goddess. Well, he has to say that because if he is going to believe that Artemis is the ultimate deity, then nobody can say that she isn't.

But I want you to notice something else. Notice what Paul has been doing this whole time while he is there. He has not been condemning everything that goes on. He has been standing for truth but he has simply been preaching the light and allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work. And for us, as people within the cities in which we live, are we spending most of our time going against something or are we spending our time shedding light from the Holy Spirit? What are we doing? Are we living our lives in such a way that the Holy Spirit is evident in everything that we do? Or are we trying to create a ruckus about things that we don't like?

We can't change the spiritual realm but the Holy Spirit works throughout it all the time. So God is calling us to live each day as we should to live out of that space of the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to do the work because as we read in **Acts 19:20**, "In this way, the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." It's simply by doing the right thing. And we also have to admit that this riot in Ephesus went down pretty quick. It doesn't always. And there are people who are killed for their faith, but even in that, God is there with them.

In **Acts 19:21-22**, just to wrap things up, Paul simply says, "I've got to go and visit and encourage these churches. Then I want to go to Rome (because Rome was the central portion of that world at that time) and if I get to Rome, then I can preach the gospel to anyone." Little did he know that he would get a first class trip paid by the government as a member of the prison and end up in Rome. But Paul, throughout all of this, lived each day knowing that it is the Holy Spirit that works within me and through me.

So today, as we are reminded of this and as we were reminded in the commissioning of our youth, "To fill your cup with the fruit of the Spirit," when we do that, we will live each day with the Spirit. James Montgomery Boice says this, "It takes a lot of courage (and sound thinking) to stand firm when the majority are going the other way... the world is changed by a minority who "hear a different drummer." Christians listen to a different Spirit and in the Holy Spirit's way. That is the drummer that they listen to."

Psalms 119:130 says, "**130** The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." So the question is, do we want to, just like Paul, make an impact on the world. If we do, then it begins within our own lives. Being close to Christ, asking him to fill us with His Holy Spirit, and to cleanse us in all that we do. As the musicians come forward, let me just remind you that in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, it was not large groups that upset the world. It was the minority. It was small groups that got together and said, "We are going to stand for what God has given us in His Word." And we will quietly do His work throughout the world.

Next week, there's going to be a group of students who are going to be in Barrie, quietly (while maybe not quite so quietly) working for the Lord in different places and shining the light of the Holy Spirit in ways in which they connect and meet people to say, "Here's what it means to be filled with the Spirit and to live for Him."

Each of us has that opportunity each day to be filled with the Spirit because it is only in the strength of God that we are able to do this. And when we are cleansed by the Spirit and filled by the Spirit, then we too can make an impact in the world.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your grace. We thank You, Lord, that You fill us with Your Spirit. And Lord, we ask for a cleansing of our hearts, a cleansing to purify us so that we too may be used by You, to shine for You in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.