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ACTS

Season 3

SEASON 3 — SPIRITUAL REALITY > SPIRITUAL PERFORMANCE.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, search us tonight. Show us the difference between knowing about You and actually knowing You — and give us the courage to let You close that gap. Amen.

OPENING QUESTION^(OPTIONAL)

What's something you learned to "fake it till you make it" at — a skill, a job, a hobby — before you actually knew what you were doing?

WORD

Acts 19:11-20

11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so 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. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists 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." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And 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. 17 And 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. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And 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. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Ephesus was a city where spiritual power was for sale to anyone willing to pay. Into that marketplace, Luke tells a story that's almost comic on the surface but cuts deep theologically. Paul's ministry, rooted in genuine surrender to Jesus, produced real power — even ordinary sweat-cloths from his trade became conduits of healing, not because the cloth was special, but because the man wearing it belonged entirely to Christ. God did the miracles; Paul was only the instrument.

Then Luke shows the counterfeit. Seven brothers, sons of a Jewish chief priest, had studied Paul closely enough to nearly perfect the wording — "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." They had the formula but not the relationship, and the evil spirit exposed the gap instantly: "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Even a demon could tell the difference between a name spoken in genuine relationship and one used as borrowed technique.

What follows is striking: the exposure didn't produce cynicism about Jesus' name — it produced reverence for it. Believers already in the church came forward and publicly confessed old spiritual shortcuts they'd quietly kept running alongside their faith, burning scrolls worth roughly fifty thousand days' wages rather than reselling them.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Luke is clear that it was this costly, public surrender — not the earlier miracles — that caused the word of the Lord to spread and grow in power. Once reality is clearly distinguished from performance, it doesn't need defending. It multiplies on its own.

Key Reflections:

- God did the miracles, not Paul. Power flows from submission to Jesus' Lordship, not proximity to spiritual objects, phrases, or reputations.
- The sons of Sceva had information, not relationship. They knew the vocabulary. They didn't know the Person the vocabulary was supposed to flow from.
- "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" This is the most convicting line in the passage — and it's a question worth asking ourselves before anything else does.
- Substance and performance can look identical for a season. They don't stay indistinguishable forever. Eventually the gap gets exposed.
- Exposure led to reverence, not cynicism. When the fake was unmasked, it didn't damage Jesus' name in Ephesus — it clarified it.
- Confession was public and costly, not private and partial. Fifty thousand drachmas burned, not quietly sold off. Real surrender doesn't manage the gap — it closes it.
- The word grew in power because of surrender, not spectacle. Multiplication followed confession, not the miracles that came before it.

Gospel Invitation:

- If you've been chasing spiritual power through shortcuts — horoscopes, manifesting, tarot, energy work, or a vague spirituality borrowed from wherever felt useful — Jesus isn't offering you another technique. He's offering you Himself. Surrender, not incantation.
- If you've walked with Jesus for years but have drifted into performing the language without the relationship, tonight is an invitation to come back to knowing Him directly, not just knowing about Him.

Missional Activation:

- This week, name one place you've substituted vocabulary for relationship, and spend focused time with Jesus there instead of just talking about Him.
- If there's something you've kept compartmentalised from your faith — old habits, borrowed practices — take one concrete step to bring it into the light with a Life Group member or leader.
- Watch for a conversation this week with someone chasing spiritual power through the wrong sources — offer them Jesus Himself, not just an argument about why their shortcut is wrong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has anyone ever "faked it" in a way that eventually got exposed? What happened?
2. Read Acts 19:11–12. What stands out to you about the way Luke phrases who's actually doing the miracles?
3. The demon says, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" What do you think it means that even a demon could tell the difference between relationship and performance?
4. Where have you learned to perform the vocabulary of faith — the right prayer language, the right social media caption, the right small group answer — without the relationship those words are meant to express?
5. Read Acts 19:17–20. Why do you think public, costly confession (not just a quiet internal decision) is what caused the word of the Lord to spread and grow in power?
6. What's your fifty-thousand-drachma pile — the thing you've been managing quietly instead of bringing into the light? What would it look like to actually burn it rather than keep it on a shelf?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, we don't want to just know about You — we want to know You. Strip away every shortcut, every borrowed vocabulary, every performance, and give us the real thing: surrendered relationship with You alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.