

Engaging Your Culture

Acts 19:21-41

I am so glad that you're joining me today as we continue to get into God's Word. We're getting God's Word into our lives so we can get it out of our lives, into the world around us, and we're walking through the book of Acts. You may see in your Bible it says Acts of the Apostles, but that's fine. That's a good description it also could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit because it's all about God's power moving through his people and really beginning to infiltrate that the world to change the world. And as we look today at Acts chapter 19, finishing it out from verse 21 to verse 41, we're going to see how people react to the message of the gospel. And at this point, it's called The Way. It wasn't originally called The Way. They were called Christians, but another name for the early church was just, or the movement of following Jesus. It was the way. And that's significant because Jesus said, I am the way. And following Jesus, living for Jesus is the way to life, to fulfillment, to forgiveness, to hope. All the things that God has for you is walk his way. And as we look at Acts chapter 19, verse 21, and the rest of it, we see that the reality is if you're living for Jesus, that persecution is going to be a part of the package. We know that that's just part of it. Not everybody is going to understand. Not everybody's going to just happily receive and respond. And so, we're going to see this. We're going to see what does it mean to live on mission for Jesus? How do we do that? Because whether or not you have a specific call to be a missionary, to go to some foreign country around the world, you are, if you're a follower of the way, if you're a follower of Jesus, then you are... on mission and it could be just as simple as walking across the street to your neighbor walking across the aisle, walking just wherever you find yourself, walking to the next office next to you. You are on mission. And so, we see how do we do this? How are we going to do this? And we're going to have some fun as we look at this today. Just setting the stage, we're going to begin to see Paul's engagement with the people in the city of Ephesus. So, verse 21 says afterward, Paul felt compelled by the spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. And after that, he said, I must go to Rome. He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia while he stayed a while longer in the province of Asia. So, for us as followers of Jesus, it's just so important that we understand wherever we go, wherever we are sent or we find ourselves, God has a purpose for us there. God wants to use you there. We're

going to think about some principles of living on mission. And whenever you go to a different place, maybe you make a move, you're going to find there's a bit of a different culture, different people groups, different geographical areas have a unique culture. And so, the great news of the gospel is it applies to people in every walk of life, in every culture. It's transferable. The principles and the truths do not change. But the way we understand the culture, we have to understand and diagnose the culture, get to know the culture so that we can speak truth into people. that particular culture. And so, the first principle here of engaging the culture is simply to understand the culture that you are attempting to reach, that you're called to reach, the culture that's around you. Look at what happens in verse 23 of Acts 19. It says, "*...about that time serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the way.*" Okay, that's followers of Jesus. It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. And so... You know, this is bad business. He kept many craftsmen busy. He called them together along with others employed in similar trades and addressed them as follows. He's not liking the way, okay? Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business, but as you've seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't really gods at all. Of course. And he's done this not only here in Ephesus, but throughout the entire province. This is cutting into our bottom line. Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis, this magnificent goddess worshipped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world, will be robbed of her great prestige. You think about these crooks, right? They're making these handmade gods, and then they're calling them gods. They either were really dumb, believing that they could make a god with their own hands, or they were crooked, which is more likely. They were concerned about their own bank account, their own financial situation. That was their focus, and this was cutting into their bottom line. We see this a lot today. People who make money off of the vices, the addictions of others, just the base desires that people have, and people will leverage that in a very evil way in order to make money for themselves. And they don't like it when people of God stand up and say, hey, this is not the way. This is not the way you should go. And so, they will attack, but they will do it. They'll put up a front and they'll say, oh, well, we have the freedom to do that. Whatever it is they want to come up with. The fact is they don't want people coming to Christ Because that will set them free. So here we see Paul's strategy for reaching the world. Paul had launched his mission there in

South Galatia. Then he wanted to reach Ephesus, the link between the east and the west. But God knew all those who were to come in the future. And he led Paul there. over into Europe. And after Europe, Paul went to Ephesus that was the gateway between the continents. And with this reaching of Ephesus, Paul said, I've got to also see Rome. And this was so important because Paul was called to reach all of those cities that were along the road on the way to Rome. And now there was a Christian base in every one of these cities. And so now they were able, he was able to reach the capital of the world. there his prayer for so many years was to reach the people of Rome and now he saw that this prayer could be fulfilled and he also wanted to reach Spain so his purpose, his driving heart was to reach people for Jesus but he made sure also that he was ministering to the churches and sending raising up disciples and part of um living on mission is not just that you're doing all the, the reaching, but you're raising up disciples. You're, you're training others to do what you do and you're grounding these disciples in the faith. There's this call that all of us have to reach the people around us, to encourage each other, to raise up disciples. And Paul sets this example for us. But what was happening here with these greedy people? Well, the message of Jesus... just flew in the face of the greed of these evil industries. Demetrius and the silversmiths were engaged in this profession of making idols that really just kept people in captivity. And that's how they made their living. And Demetrius was very influential. He was worried about losing the respect that people had for him. But, you know, we see that God was changing lives. And when Jesus comes into someone's life, they reject God. all those false idols, and they commit their lives to following after Jesus. And so many people were coming to faith in Jesus that they could see it affect the economy. And, you know, so this is something that you do when you trust in Jesus. You begin, your life begins to change, and you begin to change your spending habits. You begin to put away all of those false idols. and deny any so-called little g god and trust and follow the living and the true god there are a lot of Demetrius-es in the world who are greedy they um they keep people in bondage and enslaved and we need to step out and we need to help people break free and turn to Jesus and put away their idols and in order to do that it's really important that that you understand the culture. And I thought we would do something a little fun here because for most of us watching, you live in the Austin area, the Hays County area. Some of you are watching from other places around the world. But I wanted to talk about how you understand a particular culture and looking specifically at the culture that I am in, and that is this culture of Central Texas. A lot of times you don't even think of it as a culture because it's

just all around you. It's the water that you swim in. But every area has its own culture. And you need to understand that culture if you want to engage and connect and share the good news of Jesus. So, this area includes cities like Austin and San Antonio. And it's known for its unique blend of cultural influences that include Texan, Mexican, German. When you look at the ethnicity here, there's this diverse heritage that includes Native American and Spanish, Mexican, German, Czech. other European influences. And you see that in our daily life. Austin, particularly, is known as the music capital of the world. It's the live music capital of the world. And so, we have a lot of festivals throughout the year. We got South by Southwest, Austin City Limits. In terms of music, we have country, Texas country, blues, rock, Tejano. food. Let's think about the food of the culture. Here in Central Texas, we are most famous for our barbecue and particularly brisket, beef brisket, okay? And so that's different than other areas of the country. But beef brisket is where it's at. You slow cook it in a smoker, delicious, falls apart. Awesome. Also, Tex-Mex. I went to New Mexico, and I was talking to someone about the kind of Mexican food. They said, what kind of Mexican food do you like? I said, I like Tex-Mex. You like that? She said. Absolutely. Absolutely. And so Tex-Mex combines Mexican and Texan flavors. Other foods that we enjoy, chili, kolaches, which comes from the Czech background, and breakfast tacos. We love our breakfast tacos. We also have sort of a Western culture that includes rodeos. Western wear, cowboy lifestyle, cowboy hats, all of that. We love the outdoors because we have sort of a mild climate. We have a varied landscape. So, we like to do things outdoors like hiking and biking and water sports on our lakes. There are many festivals and events in New Braunfels. We have Wursthfest. We have Fiesta San Antonio. We also, when it comes to politics, we know in the Austin area that, and this bleeds down into Hayes County, there's more of a... progressive, liberal politic here that really in many ways the Christian faith has to stand and speak into and challenge and call out because of the progressive politics of this area. Austin is also a center of technology and innovation. Sometimes it's called Silicon Hills because of the startup tech companies. We've got the Tesla factory here. We also, let's see, when it comes to faith, when it comes to faith, this area is known as the Bible Belt, but I call Austin in particular, the hole in the buckle of the Bible Belt, because it is... It is more unchurched than it is churchd. And so, we've got to understand when we meet someone. Now, people don't fall into just exactly that specific. You can't identify when you meet a particular person, where they're coming from, all of the things that they think and enjoy. But you can get an idea of the general attitudes of people by just understanding the demographics.

So, it's not enough just to understand the culture. We also need to challenge the culture. As I was saying, what Paul did in verse 28 of Acts 19, At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And soon the whole city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. Paul wanted to go in too, but the believers wouldn't let him in. Some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him begging him not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater. Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander forward and told him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for about two hours. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. So, this was a riot that was taking place. And the Christians there were being falsely accused. They were being attacked. And so, we see this. We see this today with businesses that involve things like drugs, alcohol, porn. gambling and jobs and livelihoods are at stake. And when that's the case, people get very emotional. And so, Demetrius, he stirred up these silversmiths to incite a riot and they dragged two of the Christians into the theater. They were going wild. They were like just going off on them. Listen, Christianity is, does preach revolution but not world revolution it's spiritual revolution okay um so the charge was false the Ephesians didn't need to fear the Christians and the temple as idolatrous as it was not going to be destroyed by the Christians And no one was being forced to follow after Jesus. People were given a choice. There was no force involved. But Christians do want to proclaim and use free speech to tell people that God has shown his love through Jesus Christ and that he invites people to respond, to receive love. and to put away every evil thing that is destructive, not only to yourself, but to the people around you. And we know that when Christianity is a vital part of a culture, then that culture thrives. Righteousness and love and justice thrives. don't tear down cultures. They build up cultures. And, um, so there's, there's, you know, strength and health, especially when those evil industries are shut down, um, because then people are set free. But think of the courage that it took Paul and wisdom to face this. And when he heard that his friends, when Paul heard his friends were in the middle of that arena, he was courageous, and he rushed in to try to save them. But some of those local officials held Paul back. And they were, we don't know if they were Christians or not, but they were friends of Paul

and they came in to help. But as believers, listen, there's two, you see these videos where people are being attacked and there's everybody standing around and they're just filming and they're not doing anything about it. I think the people that are just filming attacks are, on other people, they are complicit. They should be charged as well with whatever happens because they're not doing anything to help or to make a difference. And listen, we need to put down our phones and we need to get in there and run to people who are being attacked, not sit quietly, not worry about what people are going to think about us. But we've got to stand, especially with those who are being attacked for their faith in Jesus. And so, as we think about this riot, you see it went on for two hours. People, when they get into that mob mentality, they're so easily manipulated and they're angry. We see that's what happened. in this. People were not thinking. They were just acting out of sheer anger and emotion. But even in the middle of such a riot like that, listen, we've got to keep our heads. We've got to keep our faith. We've got to stand firm in our faith, even in the middle of a culture that may not welcome us with open arms. So how do we respond? We respond with wisdom and with peace. Let's read the rest of our passage here. So, in verse 35, it says, at least the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. Citizens of Ephesus, he said, everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. Everyone knows this ridiculousness. Okay, since this is an undeniable fact, you should stay calm and do not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, but they've stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess. If Demetrius and his craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session. The officials can hear the case at once." Let them make formal charges. And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. I'm afraid we're in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government since there's no cause for all this commotion. If Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say. Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed. So, I would just say that miraculously, those believers were saved in a way that you would never expect. Sometimes you feel like you're in a situation and you don't see any way out, but God can use any kind of miraculous way to bring about a resolution and help you and show you a way out. And so, these believers were miraculously protected by God. God overruled even the riots of the crowd. And, and whenever you're facing persecution and, we know that's not God's ultimate plan that he can deliver you, that he can work in the middle of that situation and even overrule the thoughts and the hearts of those who are attacking you. And so always trust, always

remember God. that God provides a way. He provides a way through. And so as we are engaging with our culture, it's just very important that we understand the culture that we're in, that we, um, that we engage with it, that we interact with it, and we do it with wisdom, but in a way that challenges the cultural norms, because many of the norms that are found in culture, they're not godly, and they're not things that we should just mindlessly go along with. We've got to take a stand for Jesus. We've got to show people that there is a way. And that way is to turn from sin, to turn from our greed, to turn from just our base desires and turn to follow Jesus. And so, I want to encourage you with that, how you can engage with the people around you, even this week. Even as we are approaching Easter weekend, we know this is a great opportunity for believers to reach out and to invite others to come to understand what this is all about. That is about the fact that we serve a risen Lord and Savior. who can bring change to our lives individually and even change the world around us. So, I want to encourage you with that. I hope that you will take that into, really think about that this week and that God will use you in a powerful way and even his hand of protection is on you as you seek to live on mission for him. So, thank you so much and have a great rest of the week.