

Series: **The Original Church Planter**

Today's Title: **"A Confused Riot"**

July 9, 2023 – Acts 19:21-41

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**Objective:** To encourage Christians to minister intentionally and not be surprised at negative reactions to the gospel.

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### ***Opening Prayer***

Riots are not foreign to us.

Over the past several years, we've witnessed many riots in our nation.

This past week, riots have broken out throughout France, protesting a police shooting in which a young man died, Nahel, 17, of North African descent – his mother from Algeria, his father from Morocco.

### ***This is from Reuters:***

"He was known to police for previous incidents in which he failed to comply with traffic stops, the local prosecutor...said.

The morning of the fatal shooting, police spotted a Mercedes driving in a bus lane at 7:55 a.m. in the district of Nanterre on the western outskirts of Paris. Police attempted to pull him over at a red-light using sirens and lights.

But Nahel disobeyed and committed several traffic offences, endangering the lives of a pedestrian and a cyclist.

The officers caught up with the Mercedes in a traffic jam.

Both officers at one point used guns to deter him from starting off again and asked him to turn off the ignition.

When the car made to get away, one officer fired at close range through the driver's window.”

(<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/riots-shake-france-after-police-shoot-teenager-2023-06-29/>)

Since racial tensions have been high in France, this incident sparked the angry response from those who believe police have been too violent – and who believe there is systemic racism inside law enforcement.

### **Turn to Acts 19:21-41**

In our passage today, Luke records a riot in Ephesus. A riot that likely involved thousands of people – angry at... Well angry at something / someone – who was the cause behind a drop in business – or at least that’s what some of them thought.

The nature of riots – of a mob-mentality – is that they are started by those who have a specific complaint – justified or not – but they are die-hard in their belief – all-in for the cause.

But as the riot or mob grows – many people join in – who don’t know what it’s about.

They’re simply the type of people who love to cause problems – love to usurp the normal order of things – love to disrupt the peace.

Before Luke gets to the riot, he gives us some insight into Paul’s thinking and planning regarding ministry.

This is an interesting passage, because Paul really isn't the focus of our text today – except for the first few verses.

The text certainly has Paul involved – but he is not the focus – or the primary subject of the passage.

Luke is detailing the fallout of the spread of the gospel in Ephesus – and in Asia Minor.

He is recording this event to show us the kind of impact the gospel was having.

But first...a focus on Paul's ministry.

**Ministry involves strategic planning.** vs. 21-22

It may seem to us as haphazard or random, but Paul had a strategy regarding the cities he was visiting and planting churches in.

He was hitting the primary cities in the Roman provinces – and his expectation was that Christians from those cities would then move outward and proclaim the gospel of Christ in the surrounding towns and villages.

Paul would hit the major cities – and the Christians in those cities would evangelize the surrounding areas.

**Read vs. 21-22**

Paul is being led by the Holy Spirit – and this aligns with Paul's heart also.

His plan is to visit the churches again – across the Aegean Sea – in Macedonia and Achaia (modern-day Greece).

**He would visit them for 2 reasons.**

- 1) To encourage them in the faith and see how they were doing.
- 2) To collect money for the Jerusalem church – which was really struggling under persecution and famine.

Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the church in Corinth – which he wrote while he was in Ephesus – and later in his letter to those in Rome.

**1 Corinthians 16:1-9**

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

5 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia,

6 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go.

7 For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost,

9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

We’re not sure if this last verse – and the reference to “many adversaries” was related to the riot we’ll read about in a moment.

**Romans 15:23-26**

“But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.

26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.”

So, we can see from these passages, that Paul’s plan was to finish his work in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9).

Then he would travel to the churches in Macedonia (Philippi & Thessalonica) – and then Achaia (Athens & Corinth) – to collect the donations for those in Jerusalem.

He would then travel to Jerusalem – with those entrusted with delivering the money.

***Then his plan was to travel to Rome – and then on to Spain.***

There was already a church in Rome – but he longed to visit those believers and to help them.

Then he wanted to reach Spain with the gospel.

Spain was a Roman province and was home to some very influential Romans – one of which was the great Roman philosopher, Seneca.

(<https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Romanization>)

**The point:** Gospel ministry is not just a *'fly by the seat of your pants'* (or by the seat of your toga – 1<sup>st</sup> century) kind of thing.

Part of leadership is planning – strategic planning.

Thinking through the ministry – what is next – what's the next challenge or stage of growth.

- This is why we're moving toward planting a church.
- This is why we started the pre-school – BBOV – to connect with young families.
- This is why we're looking to hire an Associate Pastor.
- This is why we're looking for ways to increase our outreach to the community around us.
- This is why we partner with Impact Food Bank of Southern AZ.
- This is why we rent Chapel Hall on Sunday afternoons to King's Cross Anglican Church – because it's a Kingdom thing!

We are trying to plan and strategize how to strengthen our existing ministry – and how to expand and reach others for Christ – and help them grow in the faith!

**The threat of Christianity.** vs. 23-27

Biblical Christianity will turn your world upside-down.  
Biblical Christianity will challenge your values – your priorities.

It will change your heart.

It will reshape your passions.

It will tear down the foundations of your life and build new foundations that are stronger and deeper – built on the bedrock of truth and grace.

This is what Christianity had done in Ephesus – and throughout a large part of Asia / modern-day Turkey.

The new Christians in Ephesus were being changed – transformed by the truth and love of Christ.

Their change was not just internal – but external.

They were changing their behavior – and they were having an impact with others – to the point that the status-quo was being upset.

### **Read vs. 23-25**

“Demetrius” seems to have been a leader of the guild / labor union of the silversmiths in Ephesus.

He sees a problem – a big dip in their business – and he’s worried – fearful – that if they don’t do something, they’re going to lose it all.

Ephesus was an amazing city, (called) the marketplace of Asia Minor.

It was (also) called the Treasury of Asia.

It was a commercial center...a center of Roman pageantry.

The Roman governor of that region would travel to Ephesus to try big court cases. And so, they knew all about the pomp and the color and the pageantry of Rome.

It was also the location of something like the Olympic Games.

It was the home of the Temple of Artemis, one of the major pagan goddesses.

The Temple was one of the 7 wonders of the world – it was the greatest temple of the ancient world.

It was made entirely of marble.

It was originally built in 550 B.C.

Took 120 years to build.

It was destroyed by fire in 356 B.C. – then rebuilt.

(<https://www.timetravelrome.com/2019/04/29/artemis-shrine-ephesus-greatest-temple-antiquity/> - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Temple-of-Artemis-temple-Ephesus-Turkey>)

It was the largest structure of the ancient world – measuring wider and longer than a football field.

The Temple of Artemis (Diana) was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high, had 127 pillars, each pillar given by a king, and 36 of them were inlaid with gold.

**It was 4x the size of the Parthenon in Athens.**

Unbelievable place.



Artemis – the Temple – was big business in Ephesus. Much like today – you travel to NYC – you buy a small replica of the Empire State building – or of the Statue of Liberty.

Those who traveled to Ephesus would buy little replicas of the Temple – or of Artemis.

These would be more than tokens from a trip – they had religious significance – they were small idols that might be the center piece of a shrine in their home.

But the followers of Jesus were gaining spiritual ground. They were not involved any longer in this ceremony and idol worship – and it seems they were convincing others also.

vs. 26 - “And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.”

Paul – and the other Christians – were talking about the truth – the reality of Christ – and in these discussions the reality of idols was discussed – that they were not really gods – they were items made with human hands – and they had no inherent power.

This is not good...if you pay for your house and put food on the table by selling these little idols!!!

“Demetrius” continued:

vs. 27 – “And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

**The danger of Christianity – is the world’s system is undercut – destroyed – by truth!**

The way of the world is turned upside down when Christ becomes the center.

“Demetrius” understood what was at stake.

Their trade was being destroyed – because it was being revealed to be false – built on shifting sand.

When this happens – when Christians begin to impact a culture – a community – it’s often met with hostility.

**Enraged – but not sure why.** vs. 28-34

“Demetrius” gets his fellow silversmiths all riled up.

**Read vs. 28-31**

Chants are always part of riots and protesters.

They usually try to rhyme something – but it usually ends up being the same chant as virtually every other group of protesters.

“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Not the most creative lyric – nobody stayed up late writing this one.

But it does the job – everyone gets riled up – but “the city is filled with the confusion...”

The crowd wasn't sure what they were rioting about. They weren't even sure who they were supposed to be mad at.

The crowd “rushed together into the theater” – which is said to be the best preserved of the Ephesian ruins.

- *Pics of theater*

The theater could hold up to 25,000 people!

Along the way they “...drag<sup>(ging)</sup> with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.”

We don't know much about these guys – except what Luke tells us here. They were part of the church planting team – and the crowd drags them into this – because they were there – they were convenient targets for their anger – and the crowd saw them as part of the problem.

vs. 30 - Paul hears about all this – and Luke says “Paul wished to go in among the crowd...”

*Absolutely!!!* He's thinking he has thousands of non-believers – in a theatre – he has a captive audience to preach the gospel to!!!

But “...the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.”

Paul is not afraid of what might happen – he sees the opportunity!

He is trusting God – in the power of God who has been working through him in extraordinary ways – to deliver / protect him from danger.

But one pastor said it this way:

*“It is faith...to be in danger and believe God will deliver you. It is presumption to put yourself in danger and then expect God to deliver you.”*

(<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1773/the-riot-at-ephesus>)

“Asiarchs” – these are probably not Christians – but they are politicians – high ranking ones.

These guys were sent there by the emperor – to this Roman province – to keep order and promote Roman policies.

Paul, a Roman citizen, had become friends with these guys.

*This says something about Paul and how he worked with people – even those who were pagan / secular.*

They know what is happening and they see the danger – and they “...urged him not to venture into the theater...”

**Paul follows the wise counsel from others.**

This crowd is confused.

**Read vs. 32**

Why are they rioting – protesting?

Because there was nothing else to do.

Besides...this was more fun than working!!!

Then we're introduced to a guy named Alexander.

### **Read vs. 33-34**

We're back to the chanting again...but this time for 2 hours!!!!

Poor "Alexander"!! He finally has his chance...but the mob never lets him speak!!!

**In evangelism, the gospel may offend, but make sure you don't offend.** vs. 35-41

A pagan, unbelieving politician, gives a defense for the 2 Christians (Gaius and Aristarchus) the mob has dragged into the theatre.

The town clerk – a wise politician – has a clear picture and a clear solution.

“A town clerk is (was) a keeper of records, registrar, and accountant for temple funds. He is the highest civic official in the city, operating much like a powerful city manager, and serves as the city's liaison to Roman authorities.”

(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Acts, by Darrell L. Bock, p. 612)

He was elected and was likely from those in vs. 31 referred to as the Asiarchs.

This is the guy – the town clerk – who God uses to quell the riot.

### **Read vs. 35-41**

vs. 35 - “the sacred stone that fell from the sky?”

Apparently, there was a meteorite that crashed in / near Ephesus – and it was believed to be a sign of Artemis.

The clerk understood that if word got back to Rome of a big disturbance – and the emperor sent some authorities to Ephesus – and they found no worthy cause for the riot – then Ephesus would likely lose some of the freedoms they enjoyed as the capital of the province.

His argument is in 4 parts:

1. Artemis is great – and everyone knows it. Stop worrying about our goddess – she’s fine.
2. These men (Gaius & Aristarchus) have done nothing wrong – didn’t blaspheme or disrespect our goddess – and they have not done anything to the Temple.
3. If Demetrius thinks a crime has been committed – let him take it to the courts – the legal process.
4. Go home – before you’re charged with a crime!

His testimony is a clear statement of how the Christians were not ‘Anti’ Artemis – they weren’t pointing out everything they were against or the things that were wrong with the culture in Ephesians.

They were preaching Christ – and as people put their faith in Christ and started to live for Christ.

There was no campaign against stuff – just an effort to tell people about Jesus – and then to live as a follower of Jesus.

***Apply it...***

1. Our evangelism / telling people about Jesus – should be telling them about Jesus – not telling them everything we're against.

We have so much to share about what we believe – in a positive way.

We don't need to trash other stuff in order for the gospel to look good!

Trust that God – through His Word and Spirit – will work in someone's life when they come to Him in faith.

2. The world will hate Biblical Christians.

If you simply have the 'label' of Christian – but don't live your faith – the world will be just fine.

They will commend your spirituality.

But... if you live your faith – share your faith – the world will be against you.

It will push back – criticize – maybe even persecute you and harm you.

Will you trust the Lord – put your faith in Jesus as your Savior  
– and live for Christ?

*Close in prayer*