

MBC – 8/2/2020 – Pastor Doug Thompson
“Jesus vs. \$ in Ephesus”
 Acts 19:21–41

Paul was in Ephesus for almost 3 years – one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, and one of the most dark, idolatrous, and debauched. But as the Gospel of Jesus transformed sinners, one by one, it soon transformed the entire city and all of Asia. Jesus was building His kingdom, but Satan fought back, and that’s what we’re going to see this morning. (Pray)

Luke begins by showing us Paul’s itinerary—

I. Paul makes his plans.

- ²¹Now after these events (with the Jewish exorcists, and overcoming magic through the Gospel) Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

He wanted to go to Jerusalem, by way of Macedonia and Achaia – the largest cities would have been Philippi and then Corinth. But those places are in the opposite direction of Jerusalem, and he had just been through Macedonia and Achaia, so what is it up? Paul had a very definite plan, and it had everything to do with his passion for the unity of the church, and for racial harmony (not between black and white, but between Jew and Gentile)—

The church in Jerusalem – the first church, mother church – was in great financial need. The Jewish-Christians there needed help desperately, so Paul wanted to take up a love offering specifically from Gentile churches to unite the church. Listen to this in Paul’s letter to the Romans—

- Romans 15:25–27 ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

It wasn’t about money to Paul, it was about love and unity. He wrote this to the Corinthians while he was in Ephesus—

- 1 Corinthians 16:1–3 ¹Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ²On 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. ³And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

I hope you see that Paul was a compassionate, caring man. He was a people-driven person. But he was also a purpose-driven person—

- “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

That was the capital city of the world at that time, and Paul longed to preach the Gospel there. If he could reach Rome for Christ, he would reach the whole world. And as we’re going to see in Acts, he got there – not as a missionary, but as a prisoner! But even that wouldn’t satisfy him—

- Romans 15:23–24 ²³But 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, ²⁴I 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.

Spain was even west of Rome – That was like the end of the world back then, you go any further west, and you fall off the map! Paul dreamed *big* for the sake of the Gospel. How about you? Do you have plans for the Gospel in your life? How can you leave your mark for eternity?

- People talk about their “bucket lists” – dumb things they want to do before they die. We ought to have “Gospel bucket lists” – how we want God to use us for the Gospel before we go. “I want to leave \$1 million dollars for missions.” “I want to take one missions trip before I go.” Myself, I want to share the Gospel with Steven Tyler from Aerosmith.

But Paul wasn’t just a dreamer, he was as strategic and thoughtful, and he made specific plans, then left them up to God. Sometimes I think his life verse was: Proverbs 16:9 “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” So he wanted to go through Macedonia, then Achaia, then to Jerusalem, then on to Spain . . . but he didn’t—

- ²²And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

“But Paul, what happened to your plans?” Well, we know, because from Ephesus, he wrote to the Corinthians and said this—

- 1 Corinthians 16:8–9 ⁸But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Ah! God had opened up the door for more ministry there! You gotta keep your eye on what God is doing right? And we know when and where God leads, because we just follow the smoothest path, right? Wrong! “There are many adversaries!” Many adversaries! Most of would see that as God closing the door, but not Paul. It just went with the territory. He must have figured that if Satan was turning up the heat, that he was on to something. And we read about those adversaries in the next verses—

II. Demetrius starts a riot.

A. *The Gospel hits the wallet.*

- ²³About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶And 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. ²⁷And 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.”

So here is what is happening: The Gospel is hitting Ephesus in the wallet. It’s one thing if these people of “the Way” want to talk about their Jesus in the Hall of Tyrannus, but it’s another thing when their idol sales take a dive.

- Ephesus was saturated with false religions, magic, occult, and all the immorality associated with those religions, but it was world famous for its magnificent Temple of Artemis, or Diana – I described that Temple last week. There were at least 33 shrines to Artemis in the world at that time, but the Temple in Ephesus was the world center for the worship of the mother of all goddesses. Ephesus was to Artemis worshipers what Mecca is to Muslims.

And the highlight of all Artemis worship was the weeklong festival in Ephesus, in the spring called *Artemision*. The image of Artemis was paraded through the main street of Ephesus between the Temple and the huge theater (where the riot is about to take place). There were ritual plays and dances. Thousands of pilgrims would flood the city, which meant big business: for restaurants, inns, spas, brothels – you get the picture. No different than when a city today hosts the Olympics, or Mardi Gras, or some big political convention.

- And this was like Black Friday for the souvenir vendors of the Temple. Biggest week of their fiscal year. People would visit the temple and buy these little silver shrines to Artemis – either a replica of the Temple, or the image of Artemis. They would take these home, or they could even offer them up as worship to the priestesses of Artemis – who would melt them down and keep the silver!

So as this Festival approaches, and the merchants see that the Gospel is going to wreck their biggest week of the year if they don’t do something. Demetrius seemed to be the head of the silversmith guild – like a trade union – and he gathers together the other idol-makers and merchants to figure out how to stop to these Christians. Notice that he gets right to the point—

V.25: “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth!”

At least he’s honest: “We’ve got a good thing going here. We’re making a living off our goddess, and these Christians are wrecking it. You’ve seen what happened to the magic business here!! We’ve got to stop them.”

- So what are the Christians doing? They are just preaching Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And when a person believes the Gospel they are *changed!* Jesus takes the place of the idols that used to be there. Now think about this: So many people were believing the Gospel of Jesus, and tossing their idols, that it devastated the idol business in that city – amazing! Amazing! Isn’t that what the Gospel should do – make a difference?

70 years after this incident, when Trajan was the Roman Emperor, a local governor wrote to the Emperor asking what he should do: It had to do with these followers of Jesus. They weren’t breaking any laws, they weren’t subversive to the government, but he said, “They are having this effect: people have stopped going to the shrines, so the vendors there are struggling. The butchers are going out of business because so many of these Christians won’t buy meat that has been offered to idols in the temples.”

He asked what he should do, should they arrest the Christians? The emperor said, “Just ignore them, their movement won’t last!” Well the polls were wrong on that one.

So this is exactly what Demetrius was upset about. It was all about money, but that sounded too crass, so he pulled the religion card to make his appeal sound spiritual—

- Acts 19:26 ²⁶And 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.

He was right! That’s what Paul said to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens—

- Acts 17:29 . . . we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

He wrote to the Corinthians while he was in Ephesus—

- 1 Corinthians 8:4 . . . we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”

Paul was so bold. He just flat out said, “The gods you worship are no gods at all – so your little statues of your gods are meaningless and worthless.” Beloved, in our witnessing to our friends, sooner or later we have to tell them: Jesus isn’t just another god to add to the collection. He

must remove and replace all other idols in your heart and your life. He must be Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all! So now Demetrius really turns it on. He plays the religion card—

- Acts 19:27 ²⁷And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute (that was the real issue) 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.”

What baloney. You wonder if he shed a fake tear or two: “What about our dear Artemis?” “It’s about the children. . .” But it worked—

B. Out of control in Ephesus.

- ²⁸When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. ³⁰But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. ³¹And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. ³²Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

Well this sounds like the 6:00 news to me. Mob mentality had taken over, they were pumped on emotion and adrenalin, and most of them didn’t even know what it was about! “Hey is this about that new tax on our chariots. . .?” People don’t change, do they? The crowd all rushed into the huge theater in town that held 25,000 people.

They grabbed two of Paul’s travelling buddies, Gaius and Aristarchus – they didn’t seem to know exactly why, but I’m sure these guys were terrified. But look at v.30: “*Paul wished to go in among the crowd!*” Paul wasn’t afraid, he saw this massive crowd and thought: “Wow, what a great evangelistic opportunity!” Jesus would protect him, and the Holy Spirit would give him the words to say! But the other Christians had to hold him back. Look at—

- ³¹And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.

Let me tell you why Luke included this: Asiarchs were wealthy, noble Roman officials who promoted the reputation and honor of the Emperor in major cities. They were his PR people, Roman patriots – flag-wavers for the Emperor. *Now notice that some of these people were Paul’s good friends*, they cared about Paul, and tried to talk him out of going into the theater. What does that say about Paul? That as bold and uncompromising as he was, he tried to *win* people, not *offend* people! He had friends in high places because he loved all people, and wanted to reach even these people for Christ. That’s really something.

*But Luke put this in here for another reason: he wants to show that Christians were not known as anti-establishment trouble-makers. *Paul didn't make enemies where he didn't need to.* He always taught that Christians should be law-abiding, respectful citizens; they should honor the Emperor, pay their taxes, and submit to his laws (as far as they could). We're going to see this through the rest of Acts, Paul's enemies might accuse him of many things, but they couldn't accuse him of being some agitator or lawbreaking revolutionary. That charge wouldn't stick, because it wasn't true.

- Now within 100 years this would change: when Caesar demanded that Christians worship him Lord, they drew the line, said no, and they paid with their lives. Let's keep reading—

C. Alexander and the Jews.

- ³³Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. ³⁴But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Most likely, this Alexander was Jewish leader and Luke says that he wanted to make a defense to the crowd. He wanted to tell them that it wasn't the Jews who were hurting their business, it was those weirdo Christians, the "people of the Way!" But to this crowd, Jews and Christians were all the same, and they didn't like Jews much either, so they shouted him down and started chanting, for 2 hours – "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" But when the town clerk arrived, they quieted down immediately—

III. A clerk calms the crowd.

- ³⁵And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, (stop there)

This man presided over the city council, and was the liaison between Ephesus and Rome. He was like the mayor, and his #1 job was to keep the peace with Rome. So when he stepped up, the crowd knew they had to listen—

- . . . he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? ³⁶Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since

there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.”⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Isn't it nice to read about law and order actually prevailing over mob rule? Let's take up a love offering to send this guy up to Portland! Seriously. And at least these people had some common sense and civility. Look at how this civil servant calmed the crowd. First he said that —

1.) Nothing was going to stop people from worshipping their dear goddess: “*who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?*” There actually was a sacred stone in the Temple, that was probably a meteorite that people started worshipping as a sign from heaven. The whole world knows this, so this upstart Jesus cult is no threat to the worship of their great Artemis—

- Boy was he wrong: 2,000 years late, no one worships Artemis, millions worship the Lord Jesus!

2.) They need to go through the established legal channels if there is a real problem. — which there wasn't: They hadn't broken any laws. He said that they hadn't blasphemed their goddess. Think about that: Paul's evangelistic approach was mostly positive: he *majored* on preaching Christ and Him crucified, not trashing Artemis and the other false gods in Ephesus.

- Now there is a time and place to get to the point about false teaching — Jesus and Paul both named *names* of false teachers. But Paul majored on preaching Christ — that's what he was known for. The Gospel transformed His people, and the result was that they burned their magic books, stopped worshipping Artemis and buying her holy hardware.

So this wise, prudent town clerk, talked the crowd down. There was a justice system in place if they had a legitimate legal issue — which they didn't — but there was no place for this *anarchy*. Preach it, brother! Paul preached this—

- Romans 13:1–2 ¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

This man's third argument was that if they didn't calm down and obey the law—

3.) They could face reprisals from Rome.

Ephesus was classified as a free city which gave the people many privileges and freedoms, granted by Rome, as long as they behaved themselves. The word “commotion” at the end of v. 40, means “conspiracy,” or “sedition,” if Rome got wind of this riot, they could punish the whole city, and that was the last thing they wanted.

So it worked. The crowd was convinced and they dispersed. We don't read anything else about this Demetrius hassling the Christians. And the church at Ephesus was one of the most influential churches in the world for several centuries. God took care of His church, didn't He? He even moved in the hearts of unbelievers to come to their defense.

And beloved, this will be the story until Jesus returns: Satan will attack the church relentlessly, and God will defend and protect her faithfully. What is our part? Follow Christ, and don't give the devil ammo to use against us! Two points to take away from this passage—

****Two lessons from this passage—***

1.) We should be known for the Gospel, not for being lawbreakers or troublemakers. Amen?

We should be known for what we are for, not what we are against. As we finish Acts, Luke makes a point to show that Paul's accusers had a hard time making any of their charges *stick* because he *stuck* with the Gospel.

- And you all know that I say this at a time when every day, pastors and church leaders wake up and pray, "Lord, has Caesar finally gone too far? Do we obey this new mandate, or do we disobey?" And believe me, every pastor I know is struggling with these questions.

But even when we have to say, "Enough is enough" – we should do it regretfully, respectfully, humbly, and quietly! We want to be known for preaching and following Jesus, not for civil disobedience.

*Back in May, a document was going around the churches in California, hundreds of pastors were signing this declaration that was sent to the Governor saying, "You can't tell us what to do, the Bible tells us to gather, and we're gonna do it on May 24th" And I had pastors and people calling and emailing and texting: "Are you with us?" And Rudi, Erroll, and I were in complete unity – Absolutely not. We didn't disagree with the fact that it was time to meet again – we started meeting outside the following Sunday! But we disagreed with the tone of defiance and disrespect. We *shouldn't* be known for that. Let me tell you a story—

- Years ago we took a team to Central Mexico to visit Paul and Jenny Johnson who were missionaries we supported there. I remember asking them what was the hardest thing about living in Mexico. They said they could handle the cockroaches and the inconveniences, but their greatest struggle was the massive corruption in the government and the police. We were with them in a van driving in Mexico City, and Paul saw that the police had spotted us – they saw gringos in the van and were going to stop us and shake us down for money! So he stepped on the gas, and we zigged and zagged and lost them!
- But we were amazed at how meticulous they were to obey every law that was directed

against them as evangelical Christians. If the law said they had to have a permit for a meeting, they got the permit. If it said that they had to jump through a lot of ridiculous hoops to have a function, they did it. They bent over backwards to obey unfair laws from a corrupt govt. But they did it to show their faith in God who has established authority. And that was a witness for Christ to the Mexican people.

Beloved, as much as possible, we should be known for submission, not rebellion. And the only offense we should give is the offense of the Gospel.

- Justin Martyr, the great 2nd century theologian wrote to the Emperor of Rome, "Everywhere, we Christians, more readily than all men, endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus. Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment." (Martyr was later executed by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.)
- In the same century, during a time of severe persecution by Rome, Tertullian wrote: "Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged, for security to the empire, for protection to the imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish."

Well that's convicting. But isn't that exactly what Scripture commands us to do? Beloved, "though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh by have divine power!"

And that leads to the second point—

2.) The Gospel of Christ should transform society because it has transformed us.

I.e., Christians should make a difference where they live. It happened in Ephesus. So many people were following Jesus that it turned the city upside down: it put the magic stores out of business. Even the Temple of Artemis was in the red – because the Gospel had transformed idol-worshippers into Christ-followers!

Beloved, it's happened before in history. It happened in England under the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley. That revival led to the abolition of slavery in England. And it happened at the beginning of the last century in the great Welsh revival. This was a revival that was preceded by 11 years of God's people praying for the country of Wales. And when God brought revival in **1904**, it transformed His people so much that it transformed the country. Let me read the effect the Gospel had just a little over a century ago—

- “Political meetings were cancelled. Soccer matches had neither players on the field nor fans in the stands. Theatres closed down due to low attendance. Gambling and alcohol businesses lost their trade. Doctrinal barriers came tumbling down as Christians from all denominations worshipped together in the Spirit’s move. Some of the reporters themselves were converted at the meetings. Soon bars and movie houses closed. Former prostitutes started holding Bible studies. People began to pay their longstanding debts. And those who selfishly wasted their money on alcohol suddenly became a great joy and support to their families. . . As a result of the revival, local stores couldn’t keep Bibles in stock.
- The Welsh coal mining industry also took on a new look. (Get this) Their workhorses had previously been trained to respond to instructions that included profanity. But with the coal mining crew now born again, they found that their horses had to be re-trained because the animals didn’t know how to follow a normal command without a curse word in it.” Robert Liardon, *God’s Generals*
- “In a short while the whole of the country was aflame. The churches of Wales were crowded for more than two years; one hundred thousand outsiders were converted, drunkenness cut in half, and many taverns driven into bankruptcy. Crimes were so diminished that judges were presented with white gloves signifying there were no cases of murder, assault, rape, robbery, or the like to consider. The police became ‘unemployed’ in many districts.” J. Edwin Orr

Beloved, has the Gospel of Jesus Christ transformed your life? Has it made a difference that they people around you see? Is MBC making a difference here in Middletown and in our county? Shouldn’t we? Will you pray with me?